PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 396

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

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9 December 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 396**

THIRD VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Monday 9 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

NATO Capabilities

1. **Mr. Brian Jenkins** (Tamworth): What progress has been made to improve defence capabilities among NATO countries. [83956]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): NATO's defence capabilities initiative, launched at the Washington summit in 1999, has made good progress in a number of areas. To continue this progress, a new initiative—the Prague capabilities commitment, or PCC—was launched at the Prague summit on 21 and 22 November, focusing on improvements in chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence, information superiority, combat-effectiveness, and deployability and sustainability. Allies have made firm political commitments to improve their capabilities in each of those areas.

Mr. Jenkins: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer, particularly the part about the expansion of the capabilities of our NATO allies, but we have heard all of it before. We heard it at the end of the Washington summit. What is the vital difference between the Washington proposals and the Prague proposals, and can my right hon. Friend assure us that the capabilities and capacities of our NATO allies will match our record?

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Hoon: I am pleased to see my hon. Friend receiving so much support.

The Washington defence capabilities initiative was an important step in the transformation of NATO, but I agree that, with hindsight, it could be considered too broad a programme. In the run-up to Prague, therefore, the United Kingdom argued consistently that any successor initiative should have a narrow focus with clear objectives, backed by high-level ownership. The Prague capabilities commitment is a good package that will focus nations on providing the capabilities necessary for the alliance to perform the full range of its missions.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Given that Germany's Social Democratic Government have completely lost control of the economy, what message does the Secretary of State have for his counterpart in that Government about the defence cuts that they have just announced?

Mr. Hoon: I have had some excellent conversations with my German counterpart. No doubt the Ministry of Defence was able to draw on its experience under Conservative control, when defence budgets were cut successively. Given the healthy economic circumstances enjoyed in the United Kingdom, I was able to make it clear to my German counterpart that extra resources were available for defence in the UK, and he looked forward to the day when that would be the case in Germany as well.

Mr. Jim Marshall (Leicester, South): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the conditions imposed by the

economic stability pact may make it more difficult for NATO countries that are also members of the European Union's single currency to increase their defence expenditure and thus improve their defence capability?

Mr. Hoon: I am sure my hon. Friend will have an opportunity to ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer that question at Treasury questions, but I think it would be much more sensible of me to avoid answering it.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex): After an entertaining start, may I press the Secretary of State on the subject of one capability that all NATO countries need to improve—preparedness for a major terrorist attack at home? There is clear evidence of a threat, and leaked documents from the Government seem to admit that civil defence "effectively no longer exists". What has the Secretary of State achieved in his Department in regard to civil defence since 11 September last year?

Mr. Hoon: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is aware that civil defence is primarily the responsibility of the United Kingdom's civil authorities, certainly in respect of protection of its territory and jurisdiction on land. He and other Members will know of the significant changes proposed by the Ministry of Defence in the new chapter—the policy document supplement—to the existing strategic defence review. As for threats from the air and at sea, the Ministry of Defence remains responsible. We have ensured that our defences are commensurate with the nature of the threat that we face, particularly since the appalling events of 11 September.

Mr. Jenkin: I presume that the Secretary of State is referring to the document that I have here, "The Role of the Reserves in Home Defence and Security", which was produced nine months after 11 September. Is he aware of the answers that his right hon. Friend the Minister of State has been giving about the civil contingency reaction forces? On 25 November, he stated

"The training plans for the Civil Contingency Reaction Forces are still being developed . . . We expect that the 14 Civil Contingency Reaction Forces will be fully effective by the end of 2003"—[*Official Report*, 25 November 2002; Vol. 395, c. 3-4W.]

Is the issue being treated with the urgency that it seriously deserves?

Mr. Hoon: I am sure the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that no civil contingency plans existed before the appalling events of 11 September. Clearly there were such plans. What we seek to do is upgrade and improve those preparations, specifically in the light of what took place on that date.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): What has been done in the past couple of months to deal with talcum-like sand penetrating into the sophisticated mechanical systems and instrumentation of Challenger 2 tanks?

Mr. Hoon: As I said to the House a couple of weeks ago, a contract has been let for the desertification of the Challenger 2 tank and that work is proceeding at some speed.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): On the subject of capabilities, will the Secretary of State confirm that, even after the various financial changes that he has mentioned, the percentage of GDP that this country will spend on defence next year will be significantly lower than it was when the Government took office, despite 11 September?

Mr. Hoon: Thanks to questions asked by the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), who speaks for the Conservative party on the Front Bench, I examined carefully a number of statistics relating to the amount of expenditure. There were periods during the Conservatives' control of defence when the percentage was higher, but equally there were periods when it was lower.

BAE Systems

2. **Mr. Gordon Marsden** (Blackpool, South): What discussions his Department has had with BAE Systems about the maintenance of (a) aerostructure and (b) other manufacturing business in the UK. [83925]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): BAE Systems is the Ministry of Defence's single largest supplier. Both the MOD and the Department of Trade and Industry have frequent dialogue with the company concerning existing and future programmes as well as the company's strategic plans.

Mr. Marsden: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he understand the concern of my constituents and others who work for BAE Systems in the north-west that its proposed sell-off of the aerostructures division will mean the loss of a pool of some 400 skilled workers, who are potentially key to the defence business in terms of flexibility and extra capacity? Does he recognise that a company that has benefited from some hundreds of millions of pounds of taxpayers' money for orders needs to have a clearer focus on what its future core structure of business will be and what its strategy is? Many of us believe that it is becoming rather woolly.

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of the change in the company's strategy. Its aerostructures business is successful and viable; it has a substantial order book. To divest the aerostructures business was a commercial decision for the company to make, and it has said that there are no current plans to fragment the business. Any discussions with interested parties will consider the business as a whole. I assure my hon. Friend that we will be keeping a very close eye on what is happening.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): In the light of the current uncertainties in BAE, the biggest employer in my constituency, can the Minister confirm that, notwithstanding the sad loss of DA6, one of the pre-production prototypes of Eurofighter, the Government remain utterly, totally and completely committed to what is a vital source of manufacturing work, and that they will buy all 232 of those aircraft? What work is he doing to ensure that BAE benefits from further export orders for the Hawk aircraft?

Dr. Moonie: On the latter point, I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that, we are working hard, as we have

done continuously, to try to help the company to secure orders for Hawk abroad. We are also working with it on the development of a new variant of the aircraft, potentially for our own future training requirement. With regard to Typhoon, I repeat the assurances that have been repeatedly given in the House. The order currently stands at the number that the right hon. Gentleman has quoted and will remain so. The crash of the prototype was most unfortunate, but the aircraft remains on course to come into service when we expect it to.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): The Minister is rightly spelling out commitments to BAE Systems and to the north-west. Within that, can we ensure that the advanced jet trainer will come on stream and that that contract will be let to BAE Systems? Obviously, the aerostructures business is very important. Will the hon. Gentleman ensure that he continues the dialogue to ensure that those jobs remain in the north-west and are not transferred?

Dr. Moonie: I can assure my hon. Friend that we are continuing to discuss our future training requirements closely with British Aerospace. The contract will have to be competed for but we hope that the company will carry on doing sterling work for us. Again, we will be keeping a very close eye on what is going on in the business to ensure that our interests in the north-west are not adversely affected.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Can the Minister tell the House whether he has had a discussion with British Aerospace, as a partner in the Airbus consortium, on the effect of the German Government's announcement that they are to reduce their intended order from 73 airframes to 60? Will that significantly increase the price to the Royal Air Force, which Her Majesty's Government have decided should order some 25 airframes?

Dr. Moonie: We are continuing to discuss the implications of the German decision on the contract, but our current expectation is that there will be no major changes in the unit price for us.

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): My hon. Friend mentioned the new arrangements for the Hawk, which his Department and BAE Systems are discussing. There will be 450 redundancies on the north and south banks of the Humber as a result of dithering in the swapping of information, either by his Department or by BAE Systems management. Can he tell the House when he hopes those discussions will conclude; whether he will maintain the Government's intention to purchase this aircraft, and in the numbers that he said; and what steps he and his Department will take to try to alleviate the Christmas misery of 450 families on Humberside?

Dr. Moonie: I have to say to my hon. Friend that it is for BAE Systems to determine its staffing levels. The job losses that he describes result from its failure to secure a number of orders—not just from the MOD—in what is a highly competitive market. I know that the claim has been made that the MOD is taking too long to reach a decision on the Hawk 128. Choosing an advanced jet training aircraft that will probably remain in service for at least 25 years is not a simple matter. The decision will be made at the earliest practicable moment, but it should not—and will not—be taken lightly. We need to be sure that the aircraft that we choose is the best available platform on which to train the pilots of a highly sophisticated new generation of combat aircraft that has yet to come into service.

Nuclear Security

3. **Mr. David Rendel** (Newbury): What steps he has taken since 11 September 2001 to secure from air attack sites at which (a) research into and (b) maintenance of nuclear weapons takes place. [83957]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): In the interests of maintaining effective protection, it would be inappropriate to go into too much detail, although I can assure the House that a number of protective measures have been taken. For example, the number of aircraft on immediate stand-by for quick reaction alert—QRA—duties has been doubled from two to four. Also, measures have been taken to enhance our air defence radar detection capability and command-and-control processes, and to provide facilities for QRA aircraft at alternative air stations to increase operational flexibility.

Mr. Rendel: I understand that after 11 September, the French decided to introduce anti-aircraft missiles around at least one of their sites, but have since decided to reverse that policy. Have the British Government considered any such policy, and if so why have they decided against it? Would they reconsider that policy if there were a specific threat to a specific site?

Mr. Ingram: We considered the French's actions and their change of posture at the time, and decided that it was not appropriate for us for a number of reasons, but primarily because once such weapons are deployed, one has to consider when to remove them. We will keep this issue under review at all times, and if a specific threat arose, appropriate action would clearly be taken.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): The Minister has rightly emphasised the seriousness of this situation and the potential threat. Can he tell the House how many sites are concerned with research into nuclear matters, and in how many such sites nuclear weapons are in place? Secondly, is the Minister saying that the air defence system has been activated and is sufficient to deal with an immediate air attack on one or other of the many sites, or that it will be up and running within the next three to six months?

Mr. Ingram: I missed the latter part of that question, but I should point out that a number of such sites exist, according to the different types of priority that could be allocated. However, that could change over time. Although a particular number might exist today, if a specific threat were posed to another site—if we received information that it had been designated for terrorist action—it would be added to that number. However, it is not a numbers game; it is question of the quality of our response at all times. We have put in place very good

protective measures in terms of the QRA response covering the wider country. Over time, more airfields will be made available—the three other airfields will be modified to be able to take those aircraft so that we can give a quicker response time and aircraft can be moved accordingly.

These are very sensitive and difficult issues to balance because of the nature of the threat. It can be specific but it can also be general, and it can change. Therefore, we must at all times keep all these matters under constant review based on the best intelligence, always remembering that intelligence is never perfect.

Missile Defence

4. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): When he last discussed strategic missile defence with his NATO counterparts. [83958]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): NATO Defence Ministers last discussed missile defence formally in June 2002. At the recent NATO summit in Prague on 21 November, NATO Heads of Government agreed to examine options for addressing the increasing missile threat to alliance territory, forces and population centres through an appropriate mix of political and defence efforts.

As I promised the House on 17 October, I have today placed further analytical and discussion material in the Library of the House which I hope will contribute to the debate on the role that active missile defence might play within a comprehensive strategy for tackling the potential threat from ballistic missiles. The paper will also be distributed widely and will be available on the Ministry of Defence website.

Hugh Bayley: Many of my constituents and other people in Yorkshire are concerned about the potential implications of missile defence. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that, unlike the Conservatives, who seem willing to embrace missile defence almost without question, the Government will make sure that their discussion document is widely circulated so that they can proceed with a thorough and careful consideration of the arguments for and against in the light of views expressed by members of the public?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his observations and delighted to give him that assurance on behalf of the Government. As I told the House on 17 October, if there is a United States request for the use for missile defence purposes of Fylingdales or any other United Kingdom facility, we will consider it seriously. The Government would agree to such a request only if the security of the United Kingdom and the alliance would ultimately be enhanced.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): I welcome the document that the Secretary of State has produced today and thank him for the advance notice of it. However, I should like to press him on the principles to which he has just alluded. Can he assure the House that the UK will not participate in any missile defence scheme or allow facilities to be used on UK soil unless it enhances the security of the United Kingdom and, moreover, enhances the security of all the alliance, not just specific members of it?

Mr. Hoon: I have said this on a number of occasions, but it bears repetition, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me the opportunity of saying again that the Government would agree to such a request only if the security of the United Kingdom and the alliance would ultimately be enhanced. On the second part of his question, it is important to bear in mind what I said on 17 October. The United States is developing a test bed—the means whereby it can examine the appropriate kind of architecture that might ultimately be required. In those circumstances, it is not possible to give the hon. Gentleman precisely the assurance that he requires because the United States is not yet in a position to do that.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend will know from his geography lessons that my constituency is a quarter of a mile from RAF Fylingdales. I wrote to him welcoming his statement on 17 October and also invited him to participate at the earliest possible opportunity in a local public debate with people in Whitby and the Esk valley. In the light of the welcome publication of his document today, could he offer that facility to my constituents so that they can understand what is affecting this important issue? In that way, we can ensure that our part of the world, along with our colleagues in NATO, is included in the debate.

Mr. Hoon: I have had the opportunity of visiting both RAF Fylingdales and my hon. Friend's constituency, and I look forward to the opportunity of doing so again.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): As missile defence is not a priority according to the MOD's previous White Paper, to the present and previous Chiefs of the Defence Staff and to the national intelligence estimates of the US Congress post-11 September, can my right hon. Friend reassure us that the document that has just been made available is not evidence that Government policy is being dictated less by intelligence and British interests than by the ideological obsessions of the Bush Administration, with Opposition Front-Bench Members seeking to be more servilely subservient?

Mr. Hoon: I can certainly assure my hon. Friend that Opposition Front-Bench Members are not influencing the nature of the Government's policy in this area. It is none the less important, on the occasions when my hon. Friend and I have the opportunity to debate these matters, that he consider the current evidence rather than some of the historical evidence.

Future Aircraft Carrier

5. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the future aircraft carrier project. [83959]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The future aircraft carrier—carrier vessel future—project is progressing well. The second stage of assessment ended on

20 November. By the end of January 2003, we plan to announce which, of BAE Systems or Thales Naval Ltd., is our preferred contractor for the programme.

Mr. Chapman: Although I of course congratulate the Government on the biggest shipbuilding programme since world war two, this project in particular has the potential for massive effects for decades to come. In selecting the prime contractor, will my hon. Friend tell me how he plans to weigh various factors, such as the effect on future warship exports, on the United Kingdom supply chain and UK subcontractors and on UK design capability and the extent of UK content and jobs?

Dr. Moonie: I suppose the short answer would be "very carefully," but my hon. Friend will want a bit more than that.

Whichever of the contractors is successful, it is clear that throughout its design and manufacture the programme will sustain and create about 10,000 jobs across the United Kingdom. There will be up to 1,000 white-collar engineering design and managerial jobs, about 2,000 to 3,000 blue-collar jobs and a significant number of jobs throughout the supply chain. At the end of the day, the decision will be made on the basis of the track record of the two companies concerned—on how successfully they have performed in the past and are performing during the initial stages of the contract.

Mr. Mike Hancock (Portsmouth, South): I am grateful to the Minister for his earlier response, but can he give a firm assurance that the Government will be able to write into the contract of the successful contender the insistence that all the yards currently in the bids will be given parts of the work for the two carriers? Can he also assure the House that the three aircraft currently designated to fly off the ships will be in service when the ships are in the water?

Dr. Moonie: We are actually quite a long way from the ships being in the water and I am always a wee bit sceptical when Ministers stand up and make confident predictions, but it would appear from the success on both projects to date that the planes will be ready when the ships are operational.

With regard to the yards bidding, it is difficult at present to say with certainty that everybody will get a share of the work. Obviously a certain amount of competition will be involved in deciding which part goes where. Furthermore, it does not take a genius to work out that if there are only three major sections and four yards are bidding, somebody will lose out at the end of the day. I can say, however, that I believe that all yards in this country that are capable of building those large modules will have a very good chance of securing work on the carriers.

Syd Rapson (Portsmouth, North): Although it is MOD policy that the design and build of all Royal Navy warships will be carried out in the UK, can my hon. Friend reassure the House by guaranteeing that the through-life support, which will last for 50 years, will also be carried out in the UK?

Dr. Moonie: In short, yes.

Typhoon

6. **Mr. Jonathan Djanogly** (Huntingdon): When the Typhoon will enter service. [83960]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As was made clear in the written statement last week, we do not now expect Typhoon to enter service until the end of June next year. This schedule takes account of the disruption to test flying following the unfortunate loss of a development aircraft in Spain last month, but, until the causes and implications of the crash are fully understood, we cannot rule out further delay. I can assure the House that we will do everything possible to prevent any delay to the aircraft's operational employment date scheduled for the second half of the decade.

Mr. Djanogly: I hear what the Minister has to say, but whereas the Eurofighter project will be delivered some four and a half years late, I read at the weekend that the German and Italian air forces are taking delivery of their planes in the next few weeks. Why is that the case? Is it another example of how the Government are undermining British forces' equipment?

Mr. Ingram: The best advice that I could give the hon. Gentleman is that he should not believe everything that he reads in *The Sunday Telegraph*, because the article in question was wholly inaccurate. The position was made clear in last Thursday's written ministerial statement. None of the four nations involved in the Typhoon programme can take delivery of the aircraft before the type acceptance and associated commercial process is complete. All four nations are unanimous in the view that the aircraft must meet the agreed specification before acceptance of the weapon system can take place. So the hon. Gentleman should not believe what appears in the press the day before Defence questions because it is usually spin from someone and, in this case, it was wholly wrong.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): What is the Government's policy towards the sale of such aircraft to countries in the middle east? Does the aerospace industry need bribery, corruption and excessive secrecy to sell such aircraft? What about the reports of the £7 million slush fund—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is far too wide.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): The fact is that the Government announced only in February this year that this aircraft would enter service in June this year, yet we are now told, "For June 2002, read June 2003." It looks as though the Government are losing their grip on this programme. Although we understand that there are some technical difficulties with the aircraft, I suspect that the Minister has not been entirely correct in what he

has just told the House about the crash influencing the programme, because his written statement on Thursday said:

"we have concluded with our international partners and with industry that the evidence required to permit contractual acceptance of the aircraft by the four partner nations will not be complete before the end of March 2003 . . . aircraft should then be ready for hand-over to Royal Air Force by the end of June 2003."

He went on to say:

"Further delay"—

that is to say beyond 2003—

"cannot be ruled out until the causes and implications of the crash are fully understood."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 84WS.]

Does the Minister not owe it to the House to tell us whether June 2003 is now a realistic prospect? Bearing in mind that 5 Squadron, with its Tornados, is about to be disbanded, we will not be prepared for the possible attacks on this country, about which the Government know only too well.

Mr. Ingram: Of course the hon. Gentleman indicated in his question his knowledge that technical matters are associated with the delay. They may well be minor, but, cumulatively, they still have to be resolved. We have a duty of care to those who will fly the aircraft and all four partner nations have to operate under the same strictures to ensure that what we have is fit for purpose. The unfortunate accident involving the loss of the development aircraft now has to be studied. With that in mind, based on the other reasons for slippage in some of the technical and design issues that have had to be resolved, we have said that by March the company has to give us indications, which then have to be verified, and we are working to June next year. That commitment is as firm as it can be given the complex nature of the platform.

Afghanistan

7. **Dr. Nick Palmer** (Broxtowe): If he will make a statement on military support for the Government of Afghanistan. [83962]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The international security assistance force, mandated by the United Nations, provides support to the transitional Administration of President Karzai in Kabul and the immediate surroundings. The United Kingdom was the initial lead ISAF nation, and continues to be a major troop contributor. The Germans and Dutch have offered to assume the joint role of lead nation after Turkey's successful time in command. The United Kingdom anticipates remaining a significant contributor to ISAF, at about the current levels, through the current mandate.

Dr. Palmer: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for that reply. During the intervention in Afghanistan, which I strongly supported, the Prime Minister stressed that we would not let Afghanistan down later. I am concerned to read reports that the writ of the Government in Afghanistan still does not reach much further than the area around Kabul, and that Mr. Karzai is forced to negotiate with warlords on quite small matters. Does the Minister feel that we are doing enough to reinforce the Government of Afghanistan in asserting their rule over the country?

Mr. Ingram: The UK has pledged some £200 million over the next five years to help rebuild a country that has been divided by conflict for a generation. We are only one of the contributor nations to that process. Clearly, in terms of expanding our areas of activity outside Kabul, those matters must be considered with other coalition partners to see what can reasonably be done and to give best effect. We are not unmindful of the issues that have been raised. As with everything relating to the initial deployment in that country, however, we must build that coalition of the willing. A change to any posture must be carefully balanced, and we must make sure that anything that is done has proper and full effect.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am grateful to the Minister for his earlier answer. There are 300 or so staff officers and specialists tied up in Afghanistan at the moment. May I congratulate the Minister on the deployment of 40 or so territorials? What further plans does he have to increase the territorial commitment to Afghanistan, thus easing our overstretched regulars, and, to paraphrase Sir Michael Boyce, helping not to get our hands stuck in the mangle any further?

Mr. Ingram: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman is asking for more activity in Afghanistan or less. I am not clear where he is coming from. I think that I said earlier that we have a firm commitment to help rebuild that country. Every rebuilding exercise, as I also explained, must be done in partnership with other nations to be fully effective. Our approach to those issues must be built over time with the right depth and breadth.

On the question of the Territorial Army, I do not accept that its deployment is for the reasons that the hon. Gentleman gave. It is appropriate to use the TA in circumstances in which that can be done. That is a useful development, and I know that the TA will seize the opportunity and perform magnificently in that area and in that theatre, as it would anywhere else.

Chris McCafferty (Calder Valley): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the numerous appeals from the President of the transitional Administration and key Ministers in Afghanistan for an expansion of ISAF. Certainly, when I went to Afghanistan recently on an International Development Committee visit, numerous representations were made to members of the Committee on this issue, particularly in relation to an expansion to key cities outside Kabul. It was suggested to us that if defence remains purely in the Kabul area, there was a danger that the President would be seen merely as the mayor of Kabul, which was the description given. That would not be helpful in terms of support for the new Administration in Afghanistan. Will the Minister assure the House that that will be given careful consideration?

Mr. Ingram: I can give that assurance, and I think that my earlier answer indicated that we are considering a number of ways of doing that. Ultimately, it is for the Government of Afghanistan to begin to address their

territorial issues. We can assist, but we cannot be the army of that nation for ever. That must come from the people of that country. We help in the training of the army there, too, so that it can take on an increasing role in relation to an ongoing problem that my hon. Friend was right to highlight.

Iraq

8. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What requests he has received from the United States Government for the use of British military facilities in respect of preparations for military action in Iraq. [83963]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): As I told the House on 25 November, the United States approached a number of countries, including the United Kingdom, seeking support in the event that military action against Iraq proves necessary. Although no decision has been taken to commit UK forces to military action, we have responded to this approach and discussions with the US will continue so that an appropriate British contribution can be identified should it prove necessary. As the House would expect, we will continue to prepare our forces so that they will be able to participate in military action should that be required.

Mr. Chaytor: Does my right hon. Friend agree that there is still an amount of uncertainty about both the objectives and the consequences of a war in Iraq? Is it solely about weapons of mass destruction? Is it about human rights? Is it about democracy in the middle east? Is it about regime change? Is it part of the war against terror and, if so, is it likely to increase or decrease the terrorist threat?

Mr. Hoon: I do not agree with my hon. Friend about uncertainty. The Government have made it absolutely clear over a long period that we want to ensure that the will of the United Nations is enforced and that UN Security Council resolution 1441 is implemented. That is the Government's position, and it is a very clear one.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Secretary of State has rightly acknowledged that, if there is military action against Iraq, British military facilities will be made available to our American allies. However, we have also heard in answer to questions by my hon. Friends on the Opposition Front Bench that the civil contingencies reaction force will not be available until the end of 2003 to deal with a terrorist attack on this country, that the Typhoon aircraft will not be available until well into 2003 to deal with, among other things, a terrorist attack on this country and that there appear to be no anti-missile defences around nuclear power stations to deal with a terrorist attack on this country. Will appropriate measures be taken at least to protect British military facilities, which may soon be in a state of war, against a terrorist attack against this country?

Mr. Hoon: I welcome the hon. Gentleman to his new responsibilities on the Opposition Front Bench. I cannot help but observe that the Opposition Front-Bench team requires more by way of numbers than the Government team. The Opposition obviously required reinforcements from the rear.

I assure the hon. Gentleman that the capabilities of the United Kingdom's armed forces will be prepared and available to deal with any military contingency however it should arise. It is not appropriate for me to go into the precise detail of confidential exchanges between Governments, but I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that appropriate protective measures will be in place should military action be decided on.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Does the Secretary of State not recognise that there is in this country enormous public opposition to the preparations for war against Iraq and to the use of British bases for it? The feeling is that a war against Iraq will result in a large number of civilian and military casualties in Iraq and in military casualties on all sides. It will do nothing to bring long-term peace to the region and do nothing to solve the Palestinian crisis but will ultimately work in the interests of American global and military power and American commercial power in the region. Does my right hon. Friend not think that it is time to stop and think a bit more about this?

Mr. Hoon: I assure my hon. Friend that the Government are very cautious and careful in their approach to these issues and that, notwithstanding what he says, my experience is that, after having travelled around the United Kingdom and participating in a number of meetings where the issue has arisen, there is absolute unanimity that it is necessary that the will of the United Nations should be enforced. That is the clarity of the Government's position as set out in my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), and it continues to be the position. It is crucial that Saddam Hussein should be left in no doubt that the international community is absolutely determined that he should comply with UN Security Council resolution 1441. I have not heard anyone argue against that position.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Are there any circumstances in which further American military action would not be accompanied by British forces?

Mr. Hoon: The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to give such an open-ended commitment. I can say that the United States is the closest ally of the United Kingdom, and we work extremely closely with it on the planning and preparation of all military operations.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): Do we have any special forces operating in Iraq at the moment? Is it true that some minesweepers are on their way to the Gulf? If so, for what purpose?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend is an experienced Member of the House and will know that no member of the Government ever comments on the deployment of special forces. I assure her that no military decisions whatsoever have been taken on military action against Iraq. That situation will be reported to the House should it change.

Missile Defence

9. **Mr. Robert Syms** (Poole): Which (a) current and (b) planned British military facilities and equipment could contribute to missile defence. [83964]

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): The United States Administration have yet to make specific decisions about the precise future architecture of a United States missile defence system. However, as I told the House on 17 October, the US missile defence programme is gathering momentum, and there are plans to develop and evaluate options for a basic missile defence system. In that context, the United States has indicated that one of the options it is considering would involve an upgrade of the early warning radar at Fylingdales. We will consider any such request seriously and will agree to it only if we are satisfied that the overall security of the United Kingdom and the alliance will ultimately be enhanced.

Mr. Syms: Why are we being so timid? There is no doubt that the US will make such a request. The Government seem more concerned about opinion on their Back Benches than with doing the right thing for Britain.

Mr. Hoon: Over many years I have found it fairly sensible to answer questions only once they have been asked.

Service Leavers

10. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): What steps his Department is taking to support personnel when they leave the armed forces. [83965]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The key elements of support for service personnel when they leave the armed forces are provided under the career transition partnership, which provides resettlement support for service leavers through nine regional resettlement centres within the United Kingdom, one in Germany, plus an office in Kathmandu specifically for the Gurkhas, and a resettlement training centre at Aldershot. It includes the job finding services of the regular forces employment association and the officers association as sub-contractors.

Shona McIsaac: Although it is some time since my father left the Royal Navy after 25 years service, I know that many people who leave the armed forces find it difficult to obtain housing. Indeed, there are press reports about some of them becoming rough sleepers. What assurances can my hon. Friend give that the projects he mentions take into account social issues as well as issues of employment?

Dr. Moonie: I am well aware of the sterling service that my hon. Friend's father gave to the armed forces when he served in the Royal Navy. On rough sleepers, she may be aware that we have taken a great deal of interest in, and spent a great deal of time, effort and money on that problem over the past couple of years. We have certainly had a major effect. We have developed living spaces and work closely with other Departments. Indeed, I was up in Richmond the week before last, opening a new facility that involves, I think, 13 bed spaces for people leaving our armed forces.

We must remember that 25,000 people a year pass out of the armed forces. The vast majority go into full-time employment and have no problems resettling into the community, as we would expect from such excellent individuals. It is imperative to ensure that the transition is properly managed so that all those who leave have the same advantages.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): Pension provision is obviously a major factor in retirement for personnel from the armed forces. Is the Minister aware that part-time members of the Royal Irish Regiment have no pension provision despite the fact that they are on constant active service as members of the home service battalions of that regiment? What plans does the Ministry of Defence have to make pension provision for them?

Dr. Moonie: This, of course, also applies to the Territorial Army. A review of pensions policy is being carried out, which we expect to report in the near future. I assure the hon. Gentleman that we shall keep a close eye on these matters. However, it is not that easy to make provision for part-timers.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): While most service personnel benefit enormously in terms of fitness and confidence from their time in the armed forces, a significant number need extra and significant support. Is the Minister aware that the record in the UK does not compare favourably with the record in the United States, where it is said that if it puts its boys and girls in harm's way, it will do anything to ensure that they are safeguarded after their service? Does the hon. Gentleman recognise that it is not good enough to leave the matter to charities? We would like to see a much more determined initiative from the Government.

Dr. Moonie: The situation in the United Kingdom, with the national health service, is very different from that which pertains in the United States of America. I would refute any suggestion that the care given to people in this country is in any way inferior to that given in any other country.

Having said that, we are always concerned to ensure that the services given to those leaving the armed forces are improved. I am working closely with colleagues in the Department of Health to ensure that that happens and that people get the treatment to which they are entitled.

Arctic Convoy Medal

11. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): What his policy is on the award of a medal to those who served on Arctic convoys during the second world war. [83966]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): Service on the Arctic

convoys during the second world war is covered by the Atlantic Star, which specifically included in its eligibility criteria service in Arctic waters.

Mr. Dismore: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware that there is a precedent for an award of a medal after such a long delay. The sailors of Nelson's navy had to wait up to 56 years for a decision over their medals. If the bureaucrats, after decades, could finally do their duty by the heroes of Trafalgar, why cannot the bureaucrats of today, after a similar delay, do their duty by the heroes of the Barents sea and the Arctic convoys.

Dr. Moonie: No one disputes the heroism of those who took part in the Arctic convoys. At the end of the second world war, the qualifying criteria for the range of medals instituted to recognise second world war service were drawn up by the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals, which is known usually as the HD Committee, which advises the sovereign on all matters relating to honours and awards. The Committee took great care with the qualifying criteria of all the campaign medals and stars before submitting them to the King for his approval. The King approved the proposals and ruled that no further medals should be instituted for second world war service. That ruling remains in force today and there are currently no plans to institute any new medals or to amend the qualifying criteria of any existing medals.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): I thank the Minister for his and his officials' assistance, which he will recall arose because one of my constituents had not previously been awarded a decoration because of ill health failing a claim being made earlier. The Minister was very helpful and an award has now been made. I agree entirely with what he has said about the heroism of those who served on the Arctic convoys and the appreciation given to those who, like the constituent to whom I have referred, served in supporting the forces in Russia by the work that they did on the Arctic convoys, which has been very much recognised by Russian authorities in recent years.

Dr. Moonie: Yes. I underscore again that the fact that there is not an individual medal for service on the Arctic convoys does not in any way lower the respect that we feel for those who served or gave their lives in the course of that action during the second world war.

Reservists

12. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): How many reservists are deployed on operations. [83967]

14. **Mr. Hugo Swire** (East Devon): How many reservists are deployed on operations. [83969]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): As at 1 November 2002, 605 reservists were called out and deployed on operations.

Mr. Goodman: As the Army and the Navy now train and mobilise their reservists at the centre and the Royal Air Force does not, will the Minister tell us when he will bring the RAF in with the other two services to co-ordinate their efforts fully and stop wasting taxpayers' money?

Mr. Ingram: I do not have a specific date for that. However, I am not so sure that there is a waste of money. There is an individual service approach, and over time harmonisation on a tri-service basis is constantly developed. Sometimes it is easy and sometimes it is not. I am sorry, but I do not have a precise date.

Mr. Swire: Many of the reservists who have been compulsorily mobilised recently are highly paid civilian specialists whose skills are much needed by the armed forces. Does the Minister accept that if he wants the help of such people he must compensate them properly? If so, will he tell the House why to date he has been reluctant to pay realistic sums from the reserve hardship award?

Mr. Ingram: We always keep those matters under review.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Will the Minister tell the House how many reservists are employed as doctors and nurses in the national health service, and what the effect on NHS personnel would be if we went to war with Iraq?

Mr. Ingram: I understand that about 420 doctors and 2,000 nurses are employed, but those are approximate figures. I shall get precise figures and write to the hon. Lady accordingly.

Territorial Army

15. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What changes there have been in the strength of the Territorial Army in the last six months. [83970]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I think that we have missed out question 13, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: No, we have not. It has been unstarred.

Dr. Moonie: My apologies, Mr. Speaker—some people can be too smart.

As at 1 November 2002, the strength of the Territorial Army stood at 39,370, and on 1 May 2002 it was 39,125.

Andrew Selous: Can the Minister tell the House what specific steps the Government are taking to recruit ex-regular personnel to the TA?

Dr. Moonie: I cannot think of any specific steps, but a great many ex-regulars go into the TA and, by and large, provided that they were honourably discharged, are welcome because of the experience that they bring with them. However, I am happy to look at that, to see if more encouragement can be given. As part of the developing work under the new chapter, we are looking

at increasing the number of people in the Territorial Army in particular—it would be useful to encourage as many people as possible to join.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. As far as I am aware, question 13, which I tabled, was not unstarred. Can you provide clarification?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may not have heard my statement on 19 November. When an hon. Member volunteers a question—I did not ask the hon. Gentleman to do anything, but his name was called—I automatically unstar his question on the Order Paper. The trick is therefore not to rise for an earlier question.

Defence Fire Service

16. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If he will make a statement on the defence fire service. [83971]

17. **Angus Robertson** (Moray): Whether the Government intend to continue with the privatisation of the defence fire service. [83972]

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The defence fire service continues to provide excellent support for the activities of the Ministry of Defence. Its responsibilities include the protection of defence assets, support for military operational capability, expert advice on fire-risk management and the provision of personnel for operations and exercises worldwide. Also at present it is providing vital support to those members of the armed forces engaged as emergency cover during the firefighters' dispute.

"Fire Study 2000", a major review of the defence fire service, has recently been completed and is expected to propose a number of initiatives for modernising the defence fire service. The result of "Fire Study 2000" will be used to inform the public sector comparator for the airfield support services project, which is a separate but complementary work stream that is seeking the most cost-effective and viable solution for the provision of airfield support services.

Mr. Grogan: Given that Mr. Ed Balls, no less, has said that there is a limit to the application of market principles to the delivery of public services, and given that the defence fire service trade unions have agreed a radical modernisation package that will reduce in-house costs by 20 per cent., does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time for the Government to abandon any privatisation proposals, which the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) has said cross the line of acceptable private sector involvement in public service delivery?

Mr. Ingram: I am not going to respond to the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), but I shall reply to my hon. Friend, who has been raising this issue for a number of months. Indeed, he secured an Adjournment debate on the matter in November last year, when the precise way in which the proposals are developing was set out. He is right that "Fire Study 2000" is an important in-depth analysis of the way in which we can make best use of existing resources, and I hope that he accepts that the Government should always look at best value in the delivery of the service overall. It would be wrong for any Minister, given the opportunities that may exist, to minimise the best value approach. As I told my hon. Friend during his Adjournment debate, we have to treat every penny as if it were a pound.

Angus Robertson: A few weeks ago a very senior RAF officer told me and a number of other Members of Parliament that he thought that there was a good chance that the airfield support services project might fail, although there could be an ASSP minus a privatised defence fire service. Does the Minister believe that the officer is misinformed or that the House is under-informed?

Mr. Ingram: I do not know who the officer was, but after Question Time, the hon. Gentleman will no doubt write and tell me precisely who he was. I will then reflect on the status of that advice and whence the officer was drawing his information and advice. I have given a detailed explanation of the fact that we continue to look for value for money, and it would be appropriate to examine the range of services provided across airfield services to see whether better use can be made of the taxpayers' money. That is the function of Government, but the hon. Gentleman is extremely unlikely ever to experience it.

Speaker's Statement

3.31 pm

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the Secretary of State to make his statement, I want to make a brief statement myself.

In the report that the House approved on 29 October, the Modernisation Committee recommended that the full text of a ministerial statement should be made available to Members in the Chamber as soon as the Minister sits down, or at the same time as the statement is given to the Press Gallery, whichever is the earlier.This is the first occasion on which that recommendation is to be implemented. I would ask Members to co-operate with the Doorkeepers in distributing copies of the Minister's statement around the Chamber. May I make it clear that I am treating this as an experiment? If it seems to me that the disturbance that results from the new arrangement outweighs the benefit, I will review the matter.

Education and Skills (Spending Plans)

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the Government's education and skills plans for the coming three-year period.

In July, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the outcome of the 2002 spending review. He stated that education spending will increase by an average of 6 per cent. a year in real terms over the three years beginning in April 2003. Following that announcement, my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), published our agenda for change, which was called "Investment for Reform". This set out how we would match those extra resources with sustained reform to achieve our objectives of a world-class education and training system that meets the needs of individuals and the economy. I now want to tell the House more about these investment and reform plans.

With the exception of higher education, which will be the subject of an announcement next January, I am today announcing the details of our three-year settlement for the whole education and skills sector. I begin with the early years. The Government remain of the view that a strong early start is vital to continued educational success, so, as the Chancellor announced in July, we will be continuing our substantial investment in the early years, including our sure start programme, and funding a further expansion of 250,000 child care places.

Working together with my colleagues in other Government Departments, particularly in the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions, we will continue to expand our sure start programme and to mainstream the approaches in those areas that we believe have been successful. As the Chancellor announced in July, expenditure on early years and child care will rise from about £1 billion this year to some £1.5 billion in 2005–06. Next year £300 million will be transferred to enable local authorities to provide universal nursery provision for three-year-olds.

I turn now to schools, which will form the subject of most of my statement today. The reforms that I am announcing will provide a simpler, fairer system. Alongside this, we are seeking a continued drive to raise standards in every school in the country. Last week my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced the outcome of the review of local authority funding. As he announced, the national average increase in overall funding for schools and local education authorities is 6.5 per cent. Moreover, every local authority will next year receive an increase in funding per pupil of at least 3.2 per cent. The new system provides every local authority with a basic entitlement per pupil, plus more money for authorities with significant deprivation or recruitment and retention difficulties. Our three-year funding announcement means that we are giving local authorities certainty about their budgets in future years, so they can give schools indicative three-year budgets—and we expect them to do so. That will enable head teachers and governing bodies to plan and implement longer-term reforms.

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions announced last Thursday, the Government are committed to allowing local authorities more freedom over the use of resources. Ring-fenced grants will form a reducing proportion of local spending, so on top of the £4.3 billion increase by 2005–06 in local authority general education spending, which we have already announced, substantial funds will be moved from central DFES spending to local authority spending. That will be an extra £500 million in 2003–04 and a further £800 million in 2005–06. That means that, by 2005–06, more than 92 per cent. of all schools funding will be allocated through local authorities in accordance with local priorities. That compares with 87 per cent. in the current year of 2002–03.

Thus we will end the ring-fenced grants from my Department for the following programmes in 2003–04: nursery education for three-year-olds, funding for infant class sizes, the school improvement grant, school inclusion-pupil support, performance management and induction for newly qualified teachers. In 2004–05, in addition to the above, we will do the same with grants for special educational needs, study support, golden hello payments, advanced skills teachers, school support staff, drugs education and teacher sabbaticals. We will also focus grants for the national literacy and numeracy strategies and the key stage 3 national strategy. The substantial increases in local authority funding that I have set out will enable authorities to take over the delivery of those important programmes in ways that meet local needs. Of course, we will closely monitor the effects of those changes.

From 2005–06, we will also reform the system for rewarding those good, experienced teachers who pass the performance threshold. The money for teachers who pass the threshold will be devolved to the schools budget in that year. In the new year, we shall announce further measures to strengthen performance management in schools and cut associated bureaucracy. We shall also discuss with all stakeholders measures to ensure that the allocation of money meets the cost of the threshold payments made by schools.

We will however continue with ring-fenced funding to provide national drive in some key areas. Three key grants will contribute to that aim. First, the leadership incentive grant will be £175 million a year for each of the next three years. We will provide £125,000 to each of 1,400 secondary schools in the inner cities and in challenging circumstances beyond. That money is being provided because it is clear that a good head teacher and leadership team are the key to raising expectations and achievement in schools. The grant is intended to support them.

That money will be used in a variety of ways, including strengthening poorly performing departments, helping strong departments to help other schools and buying in specialist advice on leadership or working together with other schools to provide leadership training. In the weakest schools in particular, the money can be used to change the school's leadership. One purpose of the money is to encourage local schools to behave in a more collaborative fashion. It will be for local schools to decide how best to use it to strengthen their leadership teams, but I will reserve powers to ensure that the weakest schools make effective use of it.

Secondly, the school standards grant, at £800 million in 2003–04 rising to £875 million by 2005–06, to be paid directly to schools, is intended to drive forward reform of the school work force. It will allow more and better trained teaching assistants to be employed to help the school team to work together more effectively. As we made clear in July, our substantial extra investment in the school standards grant must be matched by a commitment from unions and employers to a restructured teaching profession and a reformed school work force that is more flexible, diverse and focused on raising standards. We are making good progress towards agreement, but the extra resources will not be released until a satisfactory agreement is reached.

Thirdly, the standards fund—about £1.5 billion in each of the next three years—will enable schools to galvanise reform on standards, behaviour and choice. In 2003–04, that will allow us to support, for example, the following programmes: the key stage 3 strategy at £120 million, ethic minority achievement at £80 million, music services at £60 million, excellence in cities and excellence clusters at £290 million, and school support staff and training at £170 million.

As I announced a couple of weeks ago, we will provide sufficient funding for every school that fulfils the required standard to become a specialist school. The money will also provide support for primary literacy and numeracy. We are determined to build on the outstanding improvements that our primary schools have made since 1998. The national literacy and numeracy strategies have transformed standards but much remains to be done to achieve the ambitious targets that we set. We shall therefore continue to provide funding and support that is focused on schools which are under-performing by comparison with similar schools.

Schools will have the freedom to spend their standards fund budget on any purpose, provided that they deliver the improvements in standards, behaviour and choice that we seek. We have already given the details to local authorities and we want significant improvements in outcomes.

I am publishing today details of the capital funding that schools will receive to improve and modernise buildings. A typical secondary school will get £75,000 of devolved capital funding next year, increasing to £82,000 by 2005–06. That is part of a total investment in school buildings which, including private finance initiative credits, will increase from £3 billion in the current year to £3.8 billion in 2003–04, to £4.5 billion the following year, and to more than £5 billion by 2005–06. Although that represents a sevenfold increase in capital spending since 1996–97, too many school buildings have suffered decades of underinvestment. The extra amounts that I am announcing today include substantial extra resources to provide clean, modern and secure places for children to learn.

I have announced a real-terms increase in overall funding for schools of more than 7 per cent. from 2002–03 to 2003–04. That will be followed by annual real-terms increases of more than 4 per cent. and subsequently 5 per cent. That is a total of more than

17 per cent. in real terms over the three years of the spending review. It means an average real-terms increase in revenue funding per pupil of more than £1,000, from approximately £2,840 to £3,850 in the 10 years between 1996–97 and 2005–06.

I conclude with further education and skills. Its importance cannot be overstated. Developing our people's skills is critical to improving our productivity and hence to the country's economic and social future. We must transform the performance of the learning and skills sector and make it far more responsive to the needs of learners, employers and communities. We need to improve the quality of the sector and increase the achievement of those who study and learn in it.

The document that I published last month, "Success for All", sets out our work on the further education reform strategy and our challenge to the further education sector. We shall work closely with the Department of Trade and Industry to co-ordinate our Departments' work more effectively. We are investing to match our ambition. I have already announced, at the Association of Colleges conference on 19 November, £1.2 billion for reforms to further education. That forms part of the Learning and Skills Council's budget, which I announced last week. It will rise by £1.4 billion, reaching a total of £9.2 billion by 2005–06. That means an increase in total spending on skills from £8.6 billion in 2003–04 to more than £10 billion in 2005–06—a real-terms increase of almost 12 per cent. over the spending review period.

As the Chancellor made clear in his pre-Budget statement a fortnight ago, we face economic uncertainty and it is therefore more important than ever to continue to invest and reform to increase the skills of our people and improve our productivity as a nation. The substantial investment in education and skills funding that I announced today is a necessary but not sufficient condition for raising standards in our schools and colleges, thereby tackling the attainment gap and creating a world-class education and training system at all stages. That will be achieved only if, as well as investing, we reform our schools and colleges so that they genuinely fulfil every child's aspirations. That is the ultimate test of our success at the end of the spending review period. I am confident that, with the help of the millions of people throughout the country who are committed to our educational success, we will pass the test.

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): I am, as ever, grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. He knows that most of it was a series of re-announcements, including welcome news on early years and further education. I shall concentrate on the small amount of new material that he produced. It is clear that he wants to appear in a seasonally appropriate role as an early Father Christmas for schools. Sadly, the wrapping is more enticing than the contents of the package. Behind the rhetoric, the right hon. Gentleman is making artificially inflated claims for all areas of this country, and, in some areas, schools and pupils will rightly feel betrayed by the way in which he is fixing the distribution.

It is perhaps appropriate that the Secretary of State is making this statement on the day on which the Department has been forced to admit that it is missing more than half the targets that it has set itself on school standards. Even when the Government are in control of the figures, they fail to meet them. Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will understand, therefore, why today's announcement will be greeted with an appropriate degree of scepticism.

I want to ask the Secretary of State about some of the issues that affect every part of the country. The first concerns the extra costs that his Government have imposed on schools, but which did not feature in his statement. Will he confirm that, next April, schools will have to find another £79 million simply to meet the employers' element of the national insurance increase that the Chancellor announced in his last Budget? Will the Secretary of State also give the House some idea of the scale of the extra money that will be needed to make up the value of pension funds for teachers and other local education authority staff—pension funds whose value the Chancellor has done so much to erode?

Will the Secretary of State also confirm that there is an element of double counting in the increases that he is claiming? Specifically, has money been taken out of the standards fund—where it was already available for schools—transferred to the LEA budget line, and then claimed as an increase in the money available to schools through the LEA? Schools may well feel that this is an act not of generosity but of accountancy. While the Secretary of State is contemplating the standards fund, will he also confirm that, after the Government's most strenuous efforts at deregulation and cutting red tape, the number of funding streams within the standards fund has been cut from 71 all the way to 65? Today, he says:

> "Schools will have the freedom to spend their Standards Fund budget on any purpose—providing they deliver the improvements in standards, behaviour, choice we need . . . we are looking for significant improvements in outcomes."

It takes some cheek for the Department to talk about improvement in outcomes on the day when it has admitted that it is missing most of its own targets. Will the Secretary of State explain what will happen to schools that miss their targets? Nothing happens to Ministers who miss theirs. Will he claw back the standards fund money from such schools?

Why has the Secretary of State not responded more to the real desire both in schools and LEAs for more local control of spending? He made much of this in his statement, but, frankly, he protested too much. Does he agree that, in 1997, the central ring-fenced grants were just 4.5 per cent. of the schools budget? His predecessors increased that figure to 13 per cent., and he has done nothing like enough to bring it down. Centralised control is blighting our schools, and when he preaches about reform, he should start close to home, in his own Department. While he is doing so, perhaps he could answer a question that his colleague the Minister for Local Government and the Regions failed to answer on Thursday. Why has £250 million disappeared from the schools budget between the Chancellor's spending review and this statement?

On reforming the system of performance-related pay, the Secretary of State said that, from 2005–06, the money for teachers who pass the threshold would be devolved to the schools budget. Will he give schools an assurance that that money will be available to them

[Mr. Damian Green]

between now and 2005–06, particularly for the upper pay spine, which is causing severe problems in many schools?.

Every school in the country has reason to feel that the Secretary of State is trying to sell them a false prospectus, but some schools and pupils will find that they have been singled out for unfair treatment at the hands of the Government. Last Thursday, it became clear that the Government were declaring war on the shire counties, and those areas come out of today's statement particularly badly. There are a number of examples of this, but I will stick to one that is close to home for me: the treatment of Kent. On the Government's own figures, the increase per pupil is 3.2 per cent., but the effects of the teacher's pay settlement, the pensions problem, and the national insurance increase mean that schools will be facing a cost increase of 7 per cent. just to stand still. So pupils in Kent, including poor pupils, deprived pupils, and pupils from ethnic minorities, will lose out. So much for New Labour's ridiculous claim to be have become a one-nation party.

What we see today is a classic new Labour con trick—shouting about what they are giving with one hand, while staying silent about what they are taking away with the other. It is a con trick the Government have tried many times, but they will find that the House and the British people have seen it all too often before. The Government will be judged by what happens in our schools, and after five years, it is a test that they continue to fail.

Mr. Clarke: Talking of con tricks, the hon. Gentleman is trying to con the country with his suggestions about my announcement today of a real-terms increase in schools spending of more than 17 per cent.—7 per cent. next year, then 4 per cent., then 5 per cent. It is extraordinary that he should do so given that we all know that he is not prepared to commit himself to a single penny of those increases—indeed, interviews given by his party leader and others in this period imply further reductions in education spending rather than the increases that we have announced.

As for the shire counties, I, too, represent a shire county seat—Norwich, in the shire county of Norfolk. The response of Norfolk's Conservative leaders to the settlement was to say that it was a good deal better than they had expected after the propaganda put out earlier by Conservative Front Benchers. I hope that the hon. Gentleman notes and appreciates, as I do as a representative of Norwich, the various aspects of our agreement that encourage local authorities to focus resources on real educational need in their area.

The hon. Gentleman raised some specific points. Yes, the pensions amount is fully covered in the way that I indicated. As for the amounts from the standards fund, we are reducing the number of elements in that fund. I set out reductions in that area continuing during 2003–04, 2004–05 and 2005–06. That is being done because we accept the argument from head teachers that we need a less complicated system of school funding and the removal of some of the separate streams. We are carrying that through, but I make no apology for the process that we have followed, which is to put in money to galvanise the system—for example, the primary literacy and numeracy strategy has made a significant material difference to education standards compared with the position that we inherited. That is also true of the question of greater local control—I stated the figures on that and will not repeat them; and on performance-related pay, I give the hon. Gentleman the assurance he sought.

In short, I think that this is a profound and solid statement, which shows the continuing commitment, not only of the Government over the next three-year spending review period, but of every school in the country. Schools will have a three-year programme that they can develop to raise standards. Never before have they had a three-year commitment in advance. That is a tremendous achievement and I am proud of it, and I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman can only sneer, rather than join in trying to raise standards in our schools.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): We will not begin our response to the statement in so churlish a fashion. We welcome any additional spending on our schools, and it is rather sad that the Conservative spokesman cannot simply welcome those additional resources.

We welcome the capital resources, but how much—what percentage—of the grant announced today is PFI capital? We welcome, too, the 250,000 child care places, but will the Secretary of State confirm that they will be quality places and not summer play schemes, as was the case previously? We welcome the £1.2 billion increase in the FE budget, but will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that that money will not meet the 14-to-16 element of the new 14-to-19 proposals, but will be entirely for use within the traditional FE sector?

We welcome the three-year budget certainty, but that certainty rings rather hollow in the absence of advance knowledge of results from the School Teachers Review Body or the manual pay round. Will the Secretary of State make sure that the results of those pay rounds are announced before the traditional December settlement, not afterwards? We welcome the move away from ring-fenced grants to core budgets. We regard that as an admission that previous Secretaries of State have got it badly wrong by trying to dictate from the centre how everything is spent.

Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when the fog has lifted from today's statement, we will see a £400 million deficit on the figures announced in the comprehensive spending review in July, rising to £530 million next year? How much will be cut from the CSR amount in 2005–06?

Will the Secretary of State confirm that 9 per cent. of the 7 per cent. increase for schools will be met from council tax—[Hon. Members: "Churlish!"]—and that council tax payers will therefore finance a significant part of the settlement? Will he confirm that schools will have to meet the costs of the £600 million transfer of pensions liability from the Treasury? Will he confirm that local authorities will have to meet the entire cost of special educational needs statements for 2004–05—[Hon. Members: "Churlish!"]—and that the quantifiable resources agreed in the new code of practice simply mean the transfer of the budget to those authorities?

Where does the statement mention resources to meet the 100 per cent. pledge on specialist schools, which we welcome and the Secretary of State has guaranteed? Will he agree to drop the £50,000 entry fee for the specialist programme?

Finally, will the Secretary of State tell us why he has refused to accept the activity-led formula, which was agreed by all bodies from Ofsted to the teacher organisations, rather than returning to the historical base for the allocation of resources to primary and secondary schools?

Notwithstanding those few deficiencies, we welcome the statement. *[Laughter.]*

Mr. Clarke: It may seem uncharacteristic, but I welcome the welcome given by the hon. Gentleman. I do not think he was churlish; I think he asked fair questions, and in that general spirit I will do my best to answer them.

I cannot give details of the PFI proportion, but the overwhelming majority of schools' capital will continue to come directly from the usual sources. I will write to the hon. Gentleman giving him the exact proportion for each year. The 250,000 child-care places are "real places", in the hon. Gentleman's words; they are not manufactured in any way. There will be a genuine increase in the number of places in pre-school education. The £1.2 billion is extra money allocated through the learning and skills councils, which, as the hon. Gentleman will recall, will fund both sixth forms and further education colleges over the period. I hope that co-ordination will be possible. So the extra money will be provided for post-16 education, as indicated. As I have said, 14-to-16 education will be funded through the schools budget for key stage 4.

The hon. Gentleman is right: neither I nor anyone else can predict the outcomes of the review body's decisions. I can only say that, like other Ministers, we are trying to secure long-term agreements over two or three years, which we hope will help schools to plan effectively.

I cannot confirm the existence of the alleged £400 million deficit. As for council tax—I make a political point here—elected local authorities must decide what tax rates to set, and must make balanced judgments on services and on the taxes that they levy. Everyone will want to know what the various authorities decide, but I hope that they will make a proper commitment to funding services. It is not true that, as the hon. Gentleman implied, all the increases will be financed by extra council tax. They will be financed by mainline spending.

We are currently allocating £540 million to pensions directly. We are not asking others to provide the money.

The hon. Gentleman made a serious point about special educational needs. We decided, as a matter of principle and in the spirit of giving more money to local authorities, to allocate the 2004–05 SEN resources by means of the local authority grant settlement. That is because we believe that our mainstream approach is right. As the hon. Gentleman said, however, some people will have worries. Some authorities will take their responsibilities more seriously than others. We will monitor local authority decisions very closely, and report to the House in due course.

It is certainly our belief that dealing with special educational needs should be part of the mainstream function of any local education authority, and that it should take it up properly and carry it through. That is why we have made the funding change but issues could arise, as the hon. Gentleman suggests.

The funding for specialist schools is within the £1.5 billion for the standards fund that I have just announced but we have not put a figure on it because it is a demand-led programme, for the reasons that I indicated earlier. On the £50,000 entry fee, as the hon. Gentleman calls it, as I said in the House the other day, we are setting up a special fund to allow the £50,000 to be reduced in cases where a school demonstrates that it tried to build the relevant partnerships but simply did not have the cash. We will publish guidelines on that shortly.

The activity-led formula is an old chestnut and I am sure that we will keep going over it in the next few years in an entertaining fashion.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I very much welcome the great increases—the further increases—in education funding announced by the Secretary of State, but I am concerned about their distribution, particularly given the announcement last week. Sure start is welcomed in my constituency, where there is a detailed measure of rural deprivation—Dorset is 34th out of 34 shire counties—but that rigour is not applied in the new formula that was announced. I ask the Secretary of State to agree to meet a delegation from Dorset to discuss the effects of the settlement on our schools, which appear to be destined to continue to battle against an unfair funding formula.

Mr. Clarke: I am delighted that my hon. Friend, who I think I am right in saying—he will correct me if am wrong—is the first ever Labour Member of Parliament for Dorset, is arguing much more powerfully for his county than some of his Conservative colleagues in other parts of the county. The spirit of the Tolpuddle martyrs lives on and I commend him for that. I will be delighted to meet a delegation to discuss those questions. In all seriousness, we put in a floor on funding per student precisely for the reasons that he raises, and indeed for the reasons that I would raise as a Member of Parliament for another shire county, Norfolk. Whatever the issues of equity, it is important that there should be basic guaranteed minimum funding, and that was guaranteed last Thursday. I am happy to meet a delegation to discuss those issues in more detail.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): The Secretary of State's spending plans are of course welcome, but can he give an assurance that additional spending will be accompanied by major changes in the teaching methods and ethos of many of our state schools, which in aggregate are resulting in the United Kingdom education system coming 20th out of 40 in international league tables; a quarter of 11-year-olds not being able to read properly; a quarter of 15-year-olds saying that their lessons are blighted by noise and disorder; and half of 15-year-olds saying that they are bored by their lessons?

Mr. Clarke: I would not entirely accept what the hon. Gentleman says because, if we look at some of the

[Mr. Clarke]

international studies, British education does well, but I agree that change is necessary in a number of the areas that he has identified; that is precisely what I have been saying today. We need to move forward in order to generalise some of the changes that we have been developing—for example, advanced skills teachers. Therefore, we need change, but not in response to the pessimistic position that the hon. Gentleman is inaccurately describing.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Have not ring-fenced grants been used well by the Department for Education and Skills to iron out some of the injustices that inevitably arise from the Local Government Finance Act 1987? Perhaps we should hold on to them until we get the new legislation to see how fair it is, and so that that avenue can be used to improve matters in counties such as Derbyshire, where grants are still deficient.

Mr. Clarke: I agree with my hon. Friend that those ring-fenced grants have been used well in a number of cases, for example, the primary literacy and numeracy strategy, and I could cite others. The impulse that the standards fund gave helped schools not only in his constituency but more widely to make profound changes. However, I also believe—it is policy right across Government—that we should try to devolve more decisions to local government.

My hon. Friend will know from his own county council and from others that local authorities have not been able to engage with our programme as fully as they would like. That is why we have tried to make changes gradually over the period of the spending review. We have retained some central grants funds, for the reason that my hon. Friend rightly cited, and we have tried to ensure that others are mainstreamed by being passed to the local government settlements, so that the policies and achievements to which he rightly refers can be made part of general practice. I would be happy to discuss with him further any of the specific matters about which he is concerned, but I do not think that there is a contradiction in saying that we have done well in many respects, but that now we should try to generalise that good practice across the whole system.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the excellence in the cities scheme will be extended to the London borough of Hillingdon to help us sort out our crisis in teacher recruitment and retention?

Mr. Clarke: I cannot confirm that, but I can confirm that Hillingdon, like other London boroughs, has the admirable and tremendous services of the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Twigg), and of Mr. Tim Brighouse, in trying to transform the entire approach of education throughout London through the London challenge approach. I acknowledge the implication of the hon. Gentleman's remarks—that improvements in education in Hillingdon are needed—but the performance in Hillingdon is not as poor as in some other areas of London, in which we have prioritised the issues taken forward. However, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will be happy to discuss with him precisely what measures he thinks would help to improve the situation in Hillingdon.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in three primary schools in my constituency, 95 per cent. of the intake of children at reception level do not speak a word of English—in fact, some of them have never even heard English? I therefore welcome the expansion of the sure start programme, to which he refers. That will doubtless help a great deal; it is very popular—in fact, I think that it is wonderful. Combined with universal nursery provision for three-year-olds, that will certainly help to decrease the number of children entering school without any English. I should also mention that parents bear some responsibility in terms of using English in the home, so that we can avoid the trauma of little children going to school without a word of English.

Mr. Clarke: I agree profoundly with my hon. Friend on the issue of sure start schemes, which have been tremendously successful. I have one in my constituency, and like that in my hon. Friend's, it has made a real difference. The challenge that we have to accept is not only to increase the number of sure start programmes, but to generalise the practice and experience of sure start, so that it spreads throughout pre-school education in her constituency and in mine. That is what we are trying to do.

I also take my hon. Friend's point about the importance of relations with parents. That is at the core of the sure start approach, and needs to be at the core of all our pre-school education. On language, all that I can say is that I heard what she has to say, and she makes an important point. Children of that age are obviously growing up in a society in which English will be the dominant language, and they should focus on speaking English well. That is an important part of the job—a job that exists both in school and in the home.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Can the Secretary of State explain to the House whether he has reviewed the £50,000 barrier for specialist school status? It is an entrance hurdle that is proving a problem in many London boroughs, including my own of Bexley. On further education, which he touched on in his statement, can he assure us about the future of adult education colleges, many of which feel the squeeze? The issue concerns not just those who want to increase their skills for their working life, but the contribution to the community of those who have retired. Such people are increasingly feeling the squeeze because of the funding process for further education colleges such as Bexley college.

Mr. Clarke: For the third time, I am happy to confirm that we have looked again at the £50,000 figure, and in conjunction with the technology colleges trust we have set up a £3 million fund to help schools that want to be specialist schools. We have built the various partnership arrangements with a cash grant to reduce the £50,000 that they might have to pay, if they can demonstrate that they simply cannot raise the money by that means. We

have heard the comments of many Members from both sides of the House, and of many schools, and have tried to respond constructively.

On adult education, the increase in resources for the Learning and Skills Council is extremely large. We believe that adult education is tremendously important, particularly issues of adult literacy and numeracy. Some 7 million people in this country still do not have basic level 2 skills. That is a blight on our system. A large amount of money is going into further and adult education because of the fundamental truth that we need to work much harder to ensure that people at all ages and levels, and of all skills, have the talents to meet the needs of the modern economy. That is where the resources will be targeted. That still leaves a place for adult education colleges of type described, which do tremendous work—I have taught in one myself—but the overall mission must be to raise the level of education and skills across the country, and in all areas.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I call Mr. Dennis Skinner.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): I was having a very serious discussion with my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), Mr. Speaker.

I am not in the mood to be churlish because I went to see a consultant about 10 days ago and I got good news. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] However, the important thing is that Derbyshire authorities, including the authority in the constituency of the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), had a tremendous result of 12.5 per cent. in the local government settlement last Thursday. We hit the ceiling at 12.5 per cent. and Derbyshire county council got 8 per cent. There is no doubt that irrespective of any comments, the activity in education in the past three to four years has been tremendous, and we want to keep it going, especially in the coalfield areas that need rejuvenation. Keep up the good work—send the money to Bolsover.

Mr. Clarke: I am very grateful for my hon. Friend's remarks, and I am sure that the whole House will be pleased at his good news. He is right in what he said. We will keep the money coming, particularly to Bolsover.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Is it true that there will still be 65 separate avenues through which schools can claim money, even after the changes that the Secretary of State has made? Is he aware of the anxiety caused to many head teachers about the number of forms that they have to fill in? What is he doing to rationalise those forms and the system of grants?

Mr. Clarke: There are a couple of points to address. First, the vast bulk of money—about 99 per cent. of it—goes through six of those funding streams. It is true, as I announced in my statement, that we took six funding streams out this year, thus reducing the number from 71 to 65. I announced that we would take out another seven next year and further funding streams the year after. So we are steadily reducing the number of funding streams to reduce the complexity about which the hon. Gentleman and others have complained. He should not forget, however, that the overwhelming majority of resources are met through just six funding streams, and that is as it should be.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): My right hon. Friend will be aware that before last Thursday's announcement, every head teacher in Kent was briefed by Kent county council that they should be looking at 8 per cent. cuts in budget. Clearly, the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) was at one of those briefings. However, we now know that, overall, Kent will see a 6.6 per cent. increase in its education funding, which I welcome. In the context of increased devolution of education budgets, can my right hon. Friend reassure us that he will ensure that local education authorities get the funding through to the schools that need it? Will he also congratulate Kent county council on giving the news this weekend that Lawn primary school has made such improvements that the council is to keep it open?

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to congratulate Kent on its decision on Lawn primary school. I addressed Kent head teachers with the Conservative leader of Kent county council a couple of weeks ago and we discussed many of these points in a friendly and fraternal way. I am glad that some of the scaremongering that people engaged in before the local government settlement was announced last Thursday has been proved to be demonstrably false. The fact is that we have provided an increase for every school in Britain. Conservative Members should praise us for that rather than carping at us.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): The Secretary of State will recall that after five years of our pressing for it, the reform of the area cost adjustment has delivered a welcome substantial increase in the formula spending share for Cambridgeshire. However, the increase in the education formula spending share cannot be matched by grant because of the operation of the ceiling—only 70 per cent. of the notional increase is actually matched by grant. The Secretary of State referred to three-year indicative budgets. How is my local education authority to go about that process with the ceiling in place? Can it be lifted, for example, so that matters could be discharged in two years rather than three, or could we have indicative figures for the ceiling on grant changes in the two subsequent years?

Mr. Clarke: The reason that we have floors and ceilings—so-called—is that we want to ensure that none of the people who would lose most in any rejigging of the system lose as much as they might. However, that means that some of the people who might have gained most do not gain as much as they might. If we were to remove the ceilings for Cambridgeshire, we might have to remove the floors from some other counties, for example—

Mr. Damian Green: What about Kent?

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman brings Kent into the equation and that is indeed an example. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) would like to discuss between themselves whether they want to

[Mr. Clarke]

remove the ceiling for Cambridgeshire and the floor for Kent, or keep the floors and ceilings in place. I shall be interested to hear their conclusion.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will my right hon. Friend ensure that his officials discuss with Lancashire county council at an early date the reorganisation of secondary schools in Burnley to recognise the fact that, for several years, we have had an admissions problem and that, this year, some parents set up a do-it-yourself school? Difficult decisions have to be taken. The resources are there, so will my right hon. Friend ensure that his officials discuss the matter with Lancashire?

Mr. Clarke: I am happy to guarantee that my officials will look at the situation in Burnley and if my hon. Friend would like to bring a delegation to meet the Minister for School Standards or myself to discuss the matter, we should be delighted to do so. It is important to acknowledge the fact that the existing resources—especially on the capital front—allow the resolution of some difficult long-standing issues such as those described by my hon. Friend. I hope that we can help to do that.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): How all this impacts on local authorities depends on the relationship between the old system, with its large amount of grant, and the new formula. The purpose of a formula is to be redistributive, otherwise it would not exist. In Middlesbrough, for example, they appear to have gained on both the roundabout and the swings, yet a little further south in North Yorkshire there are serious concerns over medium-term funding, especially in relation to the diminishing standards fund and in particular the nursery grants for three-year-olds, which diminish after 18 months. Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that essential funding is maintained over that medium term, even in the less visible guise of the formula?

While we are on the subject of direct grants, will the Chancellor of the Exchequer renounce his annual habit of dishing out money to head teachers in the course of his Budget as a special headline-grabbing formula? After all, that is a direct grant.

Mr. Clarke: If the Chancellor decides to give a little bit of money to head teachers throughout the country in his Budget next year, I certainly shall not try to prevent it. In fact, the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) has given me an idea that I may pursue.

On the right hon. Gentleman's more serious point about nursery grants, I shall look into the comparisons that he gave. The mysteries of the local government grant funding system and the formulae that operate are designed to update the data based on the current situation in each part of the country. That is how the figures emerged. It might be helpful if the right hon. Gentleman dropped me a note about the detail of the particular points he raised. I should be happy to consider them.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): May I start by congratulating the Secretary of State on the great news about universal nursery education for three-year-olds? I did not expect to see that so quickly. It will make more difference to success in education than many of the other things that he has announced.

May I press my right hon. Friend on the leadership incentive grant? Will he ensure that he uses those resources extremely carefully in areas such as mine where there are separate grammar and secondary-modern schools. Langleywood school has got out of special measures by good leadership and is currently working with Langley grammar school, with some teachers holding appointments at both schools. If we can use initiatives such as that to create partnership, I am sure that children in Slough who do not pass the 11-plus will get a better deal from their secondary education.

Mr. Clarke: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. The example that she has given from Slough illustrates precisely the type of collaboration that we are trying to encourage. My hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards is carefully considering how we can use the grant in a way that ensures that schools both receive the money and work collaboratively to deal with particular leadership problems. The kind of scheme that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) mentioned is helpful in that regard.

We want to avoid the money merely being put into budgets where there is no real leadership outcome. We are convinced that when schools work together—especially at post-16, but also in the 14-16 age range—we can make a major difference in their performance. We hope to use the money to encourage that.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have notice of a point of order from Dr. Harris.

Points of Order

4.19 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): Thank you for calling this point of order, Mr. Speaker. You have previously commented on the importance of Ministers making policy announcements to the House to enable Opposition Members and Back Benchers to carry out our role of scrutiny. You will be aware that last Friday a policy announcement was made about civil partnerships and the recognition of same-sex couples in *The Independent* and on the "Today" programme by the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women, to whom I have given notice of this point of order. There was no sign of any Government announcement on that matter the day before, given that Friday was not a sitting day and, indeed, the answer to a parliamentary question tabled on 27 November gave no indication that an announcement was due. There have been allegations that that announcement was made to dominate the news agenda—[*Interruption*]—to conceal or displace other items in the news that day, but there was a great deal of interest in this important matter. I should be grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, if you could let me know whether you had any indication that the Government planned to make an announcement, whether any statement at the Dispatch Box or written statement is due, or whether the relevant Minister is willing to come to the House to apologise for the fact that, yet again, announcements have been made outside the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I reiterate what I have said many times before: the House should be the first to know of changes in Government policy. As for the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises, my understanding is that last Friday's announcement concerned an intention to consult on the proposals that he has described. It did not therefore constitute a policy announcement as such.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will have noted that, when Madam Deputy Speaker was in the Chair on Thursday at the conclusion of the statement on local government finance, I raised a concern, which many Opposition Members share, about the attitude of the Minister for Local Government and the Regions when responding to the concerns that were expressed. About an hour after the Minister finished answering questions, I received a message from the director of finance of my local authority to say that the Minister's announcement that my borough council would receive a 3.2 per cent. increase in local government spending was, in fact, based on fiddling the figures by adjusting the current year's spending and that the true figure was only 1.08 per cent. Can you give us guidance on how we may press in the House for Members to receive a proper, accurate statistical analysis, supported by the opinion of professional local government officers, rather than by fiddled figures announced by Ministers?

Mr. Speaker: What the hon. Gentleman raises is a matter for debate. He knows that he can apply for an Adjournment debate or table parliamentary questions. There are many ways to extract the figures that he requires.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will recall that, during business questions last Thursday, I asked the Leader of the House why we were not yet aware of the motion that the Government will table on Thursday for what he described as a substantive debate. He said:

> "It is right that we should have a full day's debate on those topics"—

agriculture, the environment and foot and mouth disease—

> "and a full motion will be tabled in good time."—[*Official Report*, 5 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 1050.]

So it was perfectly obvious that the Leader of the House seemed to know last Thursday what would be the terms of the motion that the House will debate this Thursday, yet, as I speak, there is no indication of what that will be. Can you do something about that, Mr. Speaker? If the Leader of the House knows the terms of the motion, presumably, Ministers also know them. Why cannot they share that with the House so that we can have a properly prepared, structured debate on Thursday?

Mr. Speaker: May I advise the right hon. Gentleman that this is perhaps something that he could take up through the usual channels?

Orders of the Day

Extradition Bill

[Relevant document: The First Report from the Home Affairs Committee, Session 2002–03, on the Extradition Bill (House of Commons Paper No. 138).

Order for Second Reading read.

4.24 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am pleased to introduce this important Bill. The House will understand that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is indisposed, but I am sure that he will be back with us shortly.

This important Bill will bring what are essentially 19th-century extradition arrangements into the very different world of the 21st century. The main legislation that it will replace is the Extradition Act 1989, which, of course, was a consolidation measure that included large chunks of the Extradition Act 1870. The 1870 legislation effectively still governs our bilateral extradition arrangements.

Our extradition arrangements are in urgent need of reform. On average, it takes 18 months to extradite someone from the UK and, in many cases, much longer. The system allows the fugitive to raise the same—arguably, often spurious—points time and again, and to mount numerous legal challenges. Even when—as has happened many times—an individual appeals all the way to the House of Lords following the committal hearing, he can, once the Secretary of State has considered the case, appeal all the way again on exactly the same grounds.

To give a real-life—but anonymous—example, Mr. B was wanted by the French authorities for trafficking in cannabis. It was alleged that he assisted his father in overseeing the importation of approximately £1.3 million worth of cannabis resin into the UK. He was arrested in the UK in November 1995. He appealed against his extradition, through habeas corpus and judicial review, no fewer than five times, raising many of the same issues each time, and then attempted to delay his extradition on health grounds just before his actual surrender. He was finally extradited to France in September 2001, nearly six years after his arrest, and was sentenced in November 2001 to four years imprisonment and a €45,000 fine. The costs of detention alone in this case exceeded £120,000, to say nothing of court and legal costs.

The present extradition system has manifest failings. The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), speaking in the debate on the Loyal Address less than three weeks ago, said:

> "It is clear that the extradition procedure needs to be tightened, streamlined and speeded-up . . . we need to limit the number of appeals and to tighten up the whole procedure . . . Currently, I think one can make about six appeals in the average extradition case."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 682.]

Although he went on to make several detailed criticisms of the Bill, the House as a whole will share the sentiments that he expressed in those remarks.

We live in a day and age in which crime is becoming increasingly international, and we simply cannot go on as we are. We need a quick and efficient extradition system in which proper protection for the rights of those who are the subject of extradition requests is built in. Before describing the provisions of the Bill, perhaps I can explain to the House a little of its history.

In March 2000, the then Home Secretary, who is now the Foreign Secretary, announced that a review of extradition law would take place. It was completed a year later, and a consultation paper was published in March 2001. We are very grateful for the responses that were received, which can be found in the Library and on the Home Office website. We published a draft Bill in June this year and again received many helpful comments. I particularly welcome the interest that the Home Affairs Committee and the Joint Committee on Human Rights have shown, and I pay tribute to my hon. Friends the Members for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and for Bristol, East (Jean Corston), who chair those Committees. We have also heeded what those Committees said, and a number of additional safeguards in relation to politically motivated requests and fugitives' state of health have been built in to the Bill as a consequence.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): As the Minister is aware, many important extraditions have not gone ahead because of the courts' interpretation of article 3 of the European convention on human rights. Is he aware of the Soering judgment, in which someone accused of murder could not be extradited to the United States under article 3? What will the Bill do to try to streamline such cases and make the extraditions go ahead?

Mr. Denham: It is important to say that the Bill does not seek to overturn the European convention on human rights. Indeed, the convention provides a test for extradition that is built into the Bill, so it would be wrong to suggest that we are attempting to use the Bill as a way round some of the issues arising from the convention. In drafting the Bill, we have sought to make it clear that the extradition proposals do not suspend or change the convention's provisions. Such a human rights principle should be reflected in the Bill.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Although I was grateful to hear my right hon. Friend's kind words of a moment ago, the recommendations in the Home Affairs Committee's report go considerably further than the ones that he has so far adopted. I was a little disappointed, therefore, by the off-hand press release issued on Thursday in response to our report. It seemed to suggest that we should not take too detailed an interest in this subject. I am sure that that was not the intention, but can my right hon. Friend confirm that he proposes to look carefully at the rest of our recommendations and that we might, in future, look forward to seeing some of them implemented too?

Mr. Denham: Naturally, I am very disappointed that my hon. Friend is disappointed at the tone of the press release. I hope that nothing that we said gave the impression that it was not the business of the Home Affairs Committee to look closely at this Bill. In my earlier remarks, I was referring, in particular, to the

changes that we were able to make between the draft Bill and the Bill's current version in response to representations and suggestions made by, among others, the Home Affairs Committee. In the past few days, we have received the more recent comments of the Committee on the Bill before us. I am sure that those comments will be discussed in this debate and examined carefully in Committee. We will, of course, consider every suggestion and recommendation on its merits and, if we are convinced of them, we will seek in the appropriate way to amend the legislation. I have not in any way closed the door on the principle of considering some of the recommendations from the Home Affairs Committee.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The right hon. Gentleman has received suggestions from a wide circle of people who have taken an interest in the Bill. How many consultees' suggestions were incorporated in changes to the draft Bill before it reached this stage?

Mr. Denham: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the arithmetical answer that he seeks; indeed, some suggestions came from more than one organisation. In particular, the provisions for politically motivated requests and for the health of suspects were made in response to proposals from several different organisations. Further changes were made to the drafting in respect of the release of prisoners if an extradition were withdrawn purely because the consultations revealed that ambiguous drafting had led to the wording being interpreted in entirely the opposite way to that which the Government intended. There were a series of recommendations of that sort. The consultation responses that we have permission to publish are in the House of Commons Library, and I am sure that they will be of use to hon. Members when the Bill is in Committee.

I shall describe in more detail the provisions in the Bill. Parts 1 and 2 create two parallel regimes for handling incoming extradition requests. Part 1 is the more streamlined regime. It will apply initially to requests from other European Union member states and enable us to give effect to the European arrest warrant—the EAW. The Government believe strongly in the principle of mutual recognition. It has been suggested in some quarters that the EAW is the first step towards the creation of a European judicial superstate—quite the reverse. It is precisely, if we want to avoid pressure for a Europe with harmonised laws and a single judicial system that we must be prepared to recognise the judicial decisions taken in other European countries.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): The right hon. Gentleman has just told the House that the Bill is designed to extend, in the first instance, the power to other European countries. We are, of course, dealing with the power of designation, so to what other countries do the Government, at this time, intend to designate by Order in Council?

Mr. Denham: We do not at this stage have particular countries to which that could be extended.

Major issues of concern surround the European arrest warrant. It will help if I address them now because, on closer examination, they will turn out to be unjustified. The framework decision on the European arrest warrant was given parliamentary scrutiny. The Government maintained a scrutiny reserve until both Houses had cleared the instrument, which happened after the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), had appeared before Committees in both Houses and there had been a debate in another place. By introducing the Bill, we are giving Parliament another opportunity to consider the measures.

There have been fears about foreign police officers coming to Britain to arrest people. They are groundless. Only British law enforcement personnel, such as the police and Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, will be permitted to execute a European arrest warrant in this country.

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): But the offences are not listed in the Bill and the means of changing or expanding them is by ministerial order. Do the Government not think that that is a highly unsatisfactory process?

Mr. Denham: That is a slightly different issue. I was talking about powers of arrest. The Bill reflects the framework decision on the list of generic offences and makes specific reference to that in, I think, clause 63. The list of generic offences is clear. At the moment, an amendment to the list could be made only by unanimous agreement in the Council of Ministers. It is our judgment that it is better to have drafted the Bill as we have, referring to that decision, rather than to be required automatically to have new primary legislation should such a change be made. I am sure that that will be explored in Committee. The Bill is drafted in such a way as to avoid the need to introduce primary legislation. I am not aware of any proposals in the justice and home affairs division of the EU to change the list of generic offences.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): The Minister said that only a British constable would execute the warrant. Does that mean that he accepts that we need to amend clause 3, which allows the Secretary of State to designate absolutely anyone as an appropriate officer?

Mr. Denham: I said that it was the Government's intention that only British law enforcement personnel would be permitted to execute a European arrest warrant in this country. That means the police, but it could also include Customs and Excise. There are plenty of legal precedents for using the term "appropriate person", including in legislation adopted by the Conservatives when they were in government to deal with powers of stop, search and entry that gave an even wider range of discretion to the Home Secretary. Given the point of principle that I have outlined, I have no doubt that the precise wording can be considered in Committee.

Mr. Letwin: It would be helpful if I could take it that the Minister is willing to redefine the clause so that it clearly applies to British law enforcement officers.

Mr. Denham: I am saying that there is plenty of precedent in almost identical circumstances in which

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Governments, including Conservative Governments, have restricted a power to British law enforcement personnel even though they have used the term "appropriate person", or something similar, in legislation. That should give the House sufficient confidence in this Government's intention to use the Bill in the same way. I have no doubt that the matter will be considered in Committee. However, it is important for the House to understand clearly the Government's intentions.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): A few months ago, I spoke to a police officer who worked on serious crimes, by which I mean drugs, people smuggling and so on. He said that not one of the top 100 criminals—those people who are involved in the most serious crimes—lived in the UK. Is not that a good reason why we need the Bill?

Mr. Denham: Crime is becoming increasingly organised internationally. It is important that the system of extradition does not prevent the effective but just use of extradition to ensure that serious criminals can be dealt with. It is the recognition throughout the European Union that the systems that we have in place make law enforcement and the exercise of justice more difficult that lies behind the agreed moves throughout the EU to change extradition arrangements. I think that my hon. Friend is right.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My right hon. Friend referred to the European Union. Will he confirm that if the EU is enlarged during the next few years, the proposed legislation will mean that we can take much more effective action to deal with the criminality that exists throughout the European continent? It will then be far more effective in tracking down the origins of the people smugglers and the drug smugglers who use central and eastern Europe as a conduit to this country.

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend makes a good point, to which I shall turn shortly.

An important part of the accession agreement is that states must be able to fulfil their full obligations under the framework decision and the European arrest warrant. The ability to have common approaches throughout the EU after enlargement will, I think, be of significant assistance to us in fighting international and organised crime.

I shall continue to go through the issues that have been raised as potential objections to the Bill. It has been said, for example, that people will be sent off to stand trial in another country without due process in this country. I can reassure the House. Anyone who is the subject of a European arrest warrant will be entitled to an extradition hearing before a British judge. They will then have the right of appeal to the High Court and, if significant points of law are raised, to the House of Lords.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Will the issuing country—the country that requires the extradition—have to make a prima facie case in this country?

Mr. Denham: No. In the context of part 1, the issuing country does not have to do that today, and has not had to for many years. Under the European agreement on extradition, a much wider group of countries than the EU—essentially, the Council of Europe countries—agreed more than 10 years ago that prima facie evidence did not need to be provided. It is an unfortunate myth that the Bill is introducing a profoundly new principle into our extradition arrangements with our European colleagues.

There is an issue about prima facie evidence that comes up in part 2, which I shall address briefly. However, as for EU countries, I think that there is no new issue of principle in the proposed legislation.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Mutual recognition.

Mr. Denham: The provision of prima facie evidence is not required at present and it will not be required in future. On this issue, the Bill does not introduce a new principle.

It has been suggested that a newspaper editor could be extradited for publishing an anti-German editorial. I am sure that right hon. and hon. Members will not be surprised to learn that these stories are wildly inaccurate. No one will be extradited for conduct in this country that is not illegal in this country. I shall say more about dual criminality in a moment.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Denham: No. I hope that hon. Members will forgive me. Perhaps I could make some progress and then take more interventions.

There have been complaints that we are removing the requirement for evidence in the case against fugitives to be produced. As I have said, all the Council of Europe countries have not had to provide prima facie evidence with their extradition requests since the United Kingdom signed up to the European convention on extradition in 1991. I assume that the Opposition found that an acceptable principle then—I assume that they still do today. It has been suggested that we would be obliged to extradite in cases where the presumption of innocence is not applied. As my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary pointed out to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in the debate on the Gracious Speech, the presumption is a guaranteed right under the European convention on human rights, to which all European Union states have signed up. In the case of convictions in absentia, the Bill it makes it clear that we will extradite only if the fugitive is guaranteed a retrial. A retrial is differentiated from a simple appeal by the fact that the process starts again from scratch with a presumption of innocence.

Having spent rather longer than I intended on what the European arrest warrant is not about, I shall say what it is about, and describe its benefits. It will speed up extradition with EU partners. In future, cases within the EU should take about three months, as opposed to nine to 12 months at present. The current timetable for bringing serious criminals to justice does a great disservice to the victims of crime. It works both ways—

Britain's extradition procedures are notoriously slow, but our EU partners are not always above blame, as demonstrated by the case of Mr. L. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in this country for beating a man unconscious and leaving him to die. The victim died from his wounds four days later. Mr. L escaped from prison and absconded to France, and an extradition request was made to France, where he was duly arrested. One would have thought that that was a very clear case, yet it took more than a year before he was returned to Britain—one can only imagine the additional distress and pain that the episode must have caused the victim's family.

Some of our European partners refuse to extradite their own nationals, even if they have committed the most heinous crimes in Britain. The European arrest warrant will mean that those countries will no longer be able to prohibit extradition of their own nationals, denying us the right to try those who have committed serious crimes here.

Some of our European partners have traditionally been unwilling to extradite people who have committed purely fiscal offences. The UK has never held the view that fiscal offences are minor crimes, but others take the contrary view. UK criminals have not been slow to exploit that loophole, with the result that people accused of major tax evasion and VAT fraud have been able to escape justice. The European arrest warrant means that serious criminals accused of fiscal offences will no longer be able to hide within the EU.

Some of our European partners are unwilling to extradite for crimes where they have a statute of limitations, even though we do not. The case of Mr. Y, a British national, illustrates the problem. He was accused of the serious sexual abuse of two children in Britain—a crime that by its nature only comes to light many years after the event. His extradition from Denmark was sought, but refused because Denmark's statute of limitations had expired. However, Mr. Y could legitimately have been put on trial in this country. In future, people in his position will be extradited.

The European arrest warrant will have all those clear benefits for the United Kingdom and our criminal justice system, but there will also be strong safeguards for fugitives—an extradition hearing before a district judge, the right of appeal to the High Court and, if important points of law are raised, to the House of Lords. Extradition can be barred because of double jeopardy, and will not be possible if the fugitive's mental or physical condition makes it unjust to extradite him; if there is reason to believe the prosecution is politically motivated; if the fugitive's trial is likely to be prejudiced by extraneous factors; or if the fugitive's rights under the European convention on human rights would be breached. All the states that we are talking about are mature democracies and ECHR signatories, so it is highly unlikely that some of those bars will ever arise.

Mr. Hogg: I have almost lost my voice, so I hope that the right hon. Gentleman can hear me. On the ECHR point, will it involve the district judge assessing the quality of the trial that the defendant will receive in the country to which he is to be extradited?

Mr. Denham: The Bill is based on mutual recognition of each EU country's judicial and criminal justice systems. The presumption on which the original framework decision and the legislation are based is that decisions in one another's countries are respected and trusted. None the less, we need to be sure that ECHR rights are not breached. Personally, I think that unlikely in the case of the states under discussion, but it would be open to people to argue, as it always is in legal processes, that that would be an issue. It is important that the House understands that mutual recognition is a point of principle on which the Bill is based.

Derek Conway: The Minister brings to the House his usual temperate delivery, for which we are grateful. However, there is a concern. If 32 categories of offence are exempted from the dual criminality requirement, what does the Minister say about Lord Scott's observation that the definition of a xenophobia offence in the schedule

"would almost certainly cover the distribution of Biggles and probably the Old Testament"?

On the murders, rapes and child offences, nobody in the Chamber would do other than share the Minister's views, but it is the other aspects of European law, which are not customary in the United Kingdom, that cause concern.

Mr. Denham: Perhaps it would be helpful if I turned straight to the issue of dual criminality, which is clearly an important issue in this debate.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I should attempt to answer the intervention from the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) before I take others.

First, no one will be extradited for conduct that takes place lawfully in this country. Secondly, it will be possible for people to be extradited for conduct that is not illegal in UK law, but where that conduct has taken place in the requesting state and breaches its law. The principle is simple: British people who go abroad should be expected to obey the law of the country that they are visiting, in the same way as we expect visitors to this country to obey our laws.

If a German citizen came to this country and acted illegally in the UK, we would expect them to be arrested and put on trial, irrespective of whether their conduct was contrary to German law. In the same way, a Briton who visits Germany should not expect to escape justice for breaking German law simply because Britain does not have an exactly equivalent crime. If a British citizen goes to Sweden and breaks the law there, he can expect to be arrested and put on trial, irrespective of whether the conduct is contrary to UK law. I am sure that no right hon. or hon. Member objects to that proposition—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I do.

Mr. Denham: It will be useful to flush that out in the debate. I believe that a British citizen who goes to Sweden and breaks the law there should expect to be dealt with by the Swedish criminal justice system. Opposition Members seem to believe that if that person flees before arrest and manages to cross a border, they

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should be safe from prosecution. In a world where travel is so simple and widely available, that is an indefensible position.

Mr. Swayne: Is the Minister suggesting that, had the tourists in Greece earlier in the year left Greece and got back to the UK, and had an extradition warrant subsequently been issued for their arrest, it would have been quite proper for us to ship them back for conduct—observing aeroplanes—that is a crime there, but not here?

Mr. Denham: If a country has a crime of espionage and wishes to charge people with that, that must be its right.

Mr. Swayne: Is that a yes?

Mr. Denham: Just as we in this country would expect our espionage laws to be followed. There is a fundamental point of principle here, which Opposition Members need to recognise. It is difficult to argue that British citizens should be able to travel to other EU countries and break their laws, without arguing that the same rights should be extended to visitors from the EU who come to this country. That is not what our fellow citizens in this country expect. We expect that anybody in the UK who breaks our laws can be brought before British justice and that the extradition system should enable those people, if necessary, to be brought back to face British justice.

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. Are not specific offences such as sex with children under 16 and some forms of drug trafficking or drug abuse legal in certain European countries but illegal here? Are those who oppose the measure suggesting that we should let people who commit such offences off simply because they flee the country before prosecution?

Mr. Denham: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It would be useful to find out in this debate whether Opposition Members believe that people who break the law in this country should be able to escape justice simply by leaving these shores for another European Union country. That is at the heart of the issue.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I should like to make a little progress—

Mr. Shepherd: Will the Minister give way on that very point?

Mr. Denham: After I have made some progress, I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Not all EU countries have an offence of incitement to racial hatred and most other EU countries do not have an offence of fraudulent trading—but we do. Not all EU countries have laws equivalent to ours on the evasion of excise duties. As long as Opposition Members maintain that there must be absolute dual criminality in the EU, it follows that they are suggesting that people can commit the serious offences that I mentioned with complete impunity as long as they can cross the frontier before our police apprehend them.

Mr. Shepherd: Does the Minister not appreciate that the matter is more complex? Essential to our concept of liberty is freedom of expression and free speech. We regard that as an especially important ingredient, but other countries take a view on some elements of free speech. For instance, xenophobia may be a thought crime here, but it is not a legal crime, even though it can be an offence elsewhere. The Bill is now trespassing on areas that affect the freedom of the citizen in this country, as well as that of the German or French person who expresses in words something that is contrary to their law and then seeks residence here. We would have to extradite such a person for something that we hold to be important—the right to freedom of expression.

Mr. Denham: The problem with the hon. Gentleman's argument and the logic of his position is the suggestion that somebody should be able to travel to this country from Portugal—I have nothing against the Portuguese people or any reason to believe that they might wish to do this—which does not have laws on incitement to racial hatred, and incite racial hatred here, perhaps with a serious impact on community cohesion. If they were to escape arrest, they could then return to Portugal without our being able to take action. It is our view that that is unacceptable.

Indeed, the principle that underlies the framework decision in the EU is that member states collectively and unanimously believe that the creation of loopholes that enable criminals to avoid the consequences of their conduct throughout the EU is wholly undesirable both for individual member states and for the development of the EU itself.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Denham: It is useful to have this discussion to flush out some of the issues, but I should like to make some progress. I shall, however, give way to the hon. Lady.

Annabelle Ewing: The Minister said that, in the round, the Bill, and therefore the European arrest warrant, reflected the principle of mutual recognition, which is a key legislative principle in the EU. However, does he accept that, as we have seen in swathes of legislation implementing the EC single market, the principle of mutual recognition is based on the premise of a minimum harmonisation of standards? That has not happened in criminal law as it was outwith the scope of the EC treaty. It is only with regard to third pillar measures that any moves have been made in criminal law. Is it wise to proceed with such measures when we lack proper understanding about whether we have a common and acceptable framework with regard to procedural safeguards in criminal law, for example, and also whether the presumption of innocence is applicable in the terms in which we understand it, certainly in Scots law, throughout the European Union?

Mr. Denham: That is clearly a matter on which hon. Members need to reach a judgment as the Bill

progresses. The Government believe that the answer to both the hon. Lady's questions is yes. We have sufficient confidence in the criminal justice systems of the mainly mature democracies of the 15 countries of the European Union. I shall deal with the point about the accession states shortly. The European convention on human rights is incorporated into the law of each of those countries. The protection of the presumption of innocence is therefore built into the approach that we are considering.

Mr. Letwin: The Minister has been extremely patient, but I want to take him up on his last point, which he made earlier in passing. Does he accept that there is a difference between the right to a fair trial, which the convention guarantees, and the presumption of innocence, which is a peculiarity of specific judicial systems, including ours?

Mr. Denham: I believe that the protection that we seek for the presumption of innocence is in the charter, but doubtless we shall debate the matter at greater length.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead) *rose—*

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Mr. Denham: I need to make progress, but I hope to take further interventions before I finish.

Subject to the Bill's successful passage, we shall be in a position to begin operating the European arrest warrant by the deadline in the framework decision of 1 January 2004. However, it will be possible to use it earlier on a reciprocal basis with countries that enact their enabling legislation before the deadline.

I want to consider part 2, which deals with extradition to the rest of the world. Its provisions are similar to the current system, with a continuing role for the Home Secretary, but it also incorporates some of the advantages of part 1. Instead of the multiple and overlapping hearings and appeals that currently occur, there will be a single extradition hearing, which will be followed by the Home Secretary's consideration of the case. After that, there will be a single appeal hearing, under which all the decisions can be reviewed. The case can subsequently go to the House of Lords if significant points of law have arisen. We have also incorporated significant safeguards from part 1.

No one will be extradited if their mental or physical condition would make that unjust or oppressive. No one will be extradited if a request has been made for the purpose of persecuting the fugitive on the grounds of race, religion or political opinions, or if those factors mean that he is liable to be prejudiced at his trial. No one will be extradited if double jeopardy comes into play, or if the person is below the age of criminal responsibility in this country.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I believe that clause 78 in part 2 deals with double jeopardy. The Government are about to change the law on it in this country. Will the Extradition Bill match the Criminal Justice Bill, or will the Government produce two conflicting measures on double jeopardy?

Mr. Denham: The hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point, which I was about to tackle. He is right that we will need to match the relevant provisions of both Bills so that they make coherent sense. Although the Extradition Bill simply provides that no one will be extradited if double jeopardy comes into play, as the measure progresses through Parliament, we will try to provide for the possibility of extraditing somebody from a country that took the approach that we hope to effect in the Criminal Justice Bill.

In other words, if another country had a judicial process that was akin to the ability that we propose for the Court of Appeal to set aside an existing judgment and thus enable a case to be retried, extradition could be allowed from this country. Our ability to extradite someone who, in a classic case, had been identified through DNA evidence, from another country would depend on its domestic law. The hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point, because this is not what the legislation says, as it stands, and nor is it quite what the Criminal Justice Bill says. It will be important that both pieces of legislation are worked together as we go through them. I am grateful to the hon. and learned Gentleman for ensuring that we did not go past this point in the debate without my having the opportunity to say that.

Mr. Garnier: I am always grateful for flattery, from whichever quarter it comes, but the House is entitled to know which is the lead Bill. Is it the Extradition Bill or the Criminal Justice Bill? Both cannot be discussed at once on the Floor of the House, and both may yet get Royal Assent on the same day. It is important for the public, as well as for practitioners and for potential victims—if I can use that expression—of either Bill, to understand precisely how the Government are going to order their priorities. That is wholly unclear at the moment.

Mr. Denham: We will need to keep discussions open on the way in which this is to be dealt with, through the usual channels. To some degree, that will depend on the rate of progress of Bills through this place. The hon. and learned Gentleman makes an important point, and I do not dismiss it out of hand. I hope that he will accept my assurance that we recognise the validity and importance of the issue that he has raised, and the need to be as clear as we can with those outside—as well as with right hon. and hon. Members and Members of another place—about how we intend to mesh the two Bills carefully together.

I want to say a little more about part 2. I should make the point that a district judge will be explicitly required to consider whether extradition would be compatible with a fugitive's rights under the European convention on human rights. I am sure that there will be further discussion on this, but article 6.2 of the convention states that:

> "Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law."

That relates to a point that was raised a few moments ago.

In addition, most countries in part 2 will, as now, continue to have to provide prima facie evidence to accompany their extradition requests. However, as I have already explained, under current arrangements the non-EU members of the Council of Europe do not have

[Mr. Denham]

to provide prima facie evidence, and that will remain the case. The Government believe that there is a case, as we said in the March 2001 consultation paper, for removing the prima facie requirement from certain key Commonwealth and bilateral partners. We have not sought prima facie evidence from European countries for more than a decade, so why should countries such as Australia and Canada continue to be subject to that requirement? For countries of that kind, questions of guilt or innocence should be matters for the court of trial in the requesting country. The Bill therefore allows for orders to be made removing the prima facie requirement from certain part 2 countries. The Bill also enables a strict timetable for part 2 cases to be put in place. Notwithstanding the significant safeguards for fugitives that will exist, we believe that it should generally take no more than six months for one of these cases to be completed, which will represent a significant speeding up of the process.

Part 3 deals with outgoing extradition requests. Our existing legislation is largely silent on this issue, and we have relied mainly on the use of the royal prerogative. The Bill sets out who will be able to apply for European arrest warrants in this country, how, and for what offences. Part 4 sets out the powers available to the police in extradition cases. It had always been assumed that the powers in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 applied in extradition cases, but a legal ruling in a particular case cast doubt on that. We are therefore taking the opportunity to bring a measure of certainty to the matter. Let me stress that the powers that the Bill creates are closely modelled on those in PACE. Finally, Part 5 covers miscellaneous and general matters. The Bill runs to some 208 clauses. Its length reflects the consultation earlier this year, as well as the decisions to include provisions on outgoing requests and police powers, and to make the law as accessible and clear as possible.

The case for reform of our extradition laws is clear. There is no other area of law in which people can raise the same, often spurious, points, time and again, simply as a means of delaying proceedings. The Bill will modernise our extradition procedures, while retaining the important and necessary safeguards for those who are the subject of an extradition request.

Organised and international crime is, as my hon. Friends have said, a sad feature of life in the 21st century. We need an extradition system that enables us to meet that challenge. The Bill will provide that and I commend—

Lady Hermon (North Down): I am grateful to the Minister for giving way so close to the conclusion of his remarks. Will he confirm that those Irish citizens who have committed acts of terrorism, which is a conduct listed in the relevant provisions, and who have gone on the run to the Republic of Ireland, will now be extradited?

Mr. Denham: The hon. Lady intervened during the last sentence of what I admit was a rather low-key peroration, but a peroration none the less. There is certainly nothing in the Bill to put any obstacles in the way of extradition. As I said earlier when detailing the history of the Bill, it long predates the many new terrorism measures introduced after 11 September. However, the hon. Lady is quite right to say that terrorist offences are covered by it.

I commend the Bill to the House.

5.11 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I begin by sending—on behalf of the whole House, I am sure—our best wishes to the Home Secretary for his speedy recovery.

The bulk—by volume, as opposed to importance—of the Bill is not highly contentious. Parts 2, 3 and 5 will no doubt repay attention in Committee but do not involve vast matters of principle. Part 4 contains some worrying elements—for example, clause 160(3)(b), which, if I understand it correctly, allows the police to search premises if they have "reason to believe" that a warrant will in due course be issued in some other country. That does not fill me with enthusiasm. We will have to look closely at part 4 and the powers contained therein, but by and large I do not think that it contains matters that need detain us long—they did not detain the Minister during his opening remarks.

Part 1 is a wholly different matter. There are four problems with this part, which deals with the European arrest warrant. The first problem is that the part does not say what the Minister says it means. The second problem is that what the Minister says part 1 means is not acceptable. The third problem is that we do not need part 1 in any event, because part 2 would do the trick perfectly well. The fourth problem is that the only reason for having part 1 is a reason that we do not accept. Other than that, there are no objections to part 1. [*Laughter.*]

Let me explore the first of those four objections—that the part does not say what the Minister says it means—and give some examples. In clause 2(3)(a), the definition of the scope of the warrant is given. We are told that the arrest warrant must contain a statement that

"the person in respect of whom the warrant is issued is accused in the category 1 territory of the commission of an offence specified in the warrant".

The Minister told us that that is meant to mean that the offence itself must be committed in the territory in which the warrant has been issued. I believe that that is what the Minister means it to mean, but the English language has a stubborn habit of carrying its own meanings, and the words printed do not mean what the Minister says. The words printed mean that the person in respect of whom the warrant is issued has to have been accused in that territory of the commission of an offence; the offence may actually, within the meaning of subsection (3)(a), have been committed in this country or some other country.

Let me give a second example. The Minister told us that there was no intention whatever of allowing anyone other than an English law enforcement officer, however defined—I accept that it might be an officer of Customs and Excise rather than the police—to execute the warrant. Clause 3(3), however, defines an "appropriate person" who may be allowed by the Secretary of State to make an arrest by means of the warrant dealt with in subsection (2) as

"a person of a description specified in an order made by the Secretary of State for the purposes of this section."

In other words, the Bill does not mean what the Minister wants it to mean. It means that the Minister can decide that absolutely anybody is an appropriate person, including a policeman from a different jurisdiction.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): The right hon. Gentleman has stressed the importance of using terms exactly. When he referred to English officers, did he mean British officers?

Mr. Letwin: For the purposes of English law and in England, they would be English officers. Presumably for the purposes of Scottish law and in Scotland they would be Scottish officers. My unionism is still strong enough for me not to worry too much about that distinction, although I am immensely concerned about the prospect of an officer from another EU country coming to the United Kingdom because he has been designated by the Secretary of State. I take the Minister's statement at face value, and if he says that the intention is to specify only law enforcement officers in our jurisdiction, that is what the Bill should say.

Mr. Hogg: I am sure that that is the answer we shall be given in the Minister's winding-up speech, but somewhere down the track there may well be an agreement between EU interior Ministers that each will enable the other to authorise, by some designation procedure, the officers of the other to execute the law in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Letwin: I agree. I must not have made myself clear. I do not mean that it would be acceptable for the Minister to keep saying, on the record, that he intends the clause to be used only in regard to English officers; I mean that part 1 would only be remotely satisfactory if it specifically precluded the least possibility of anyone other than an English law enforcement officer carrying out such procedures in England. That is why I say that the Bill must mean what the Minister says he wants it to mean, and not something else. I do not want to live in an Alice in Wonderland world of legislation.

Annabelle Ewing: May I take up the point made by the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas)? I speak as a Scots lawyer and the representative of a constituency controlled by the Scottish National party.

The right hon. Gentleman will know that Scotland has a separate criminal legal system—fortunately—with separate rules and regulations governing our police force. It would help if he was specific when referring to the territorial make-up and the various component parts of the United Kingdom in that context.

Mr. Letwin: In the presence of the hon. Lady, I would be terrified to make the slightest statement except in relation to English law and its enforcement in England. I am sure she will tell us what she thinks about Scotland, and we can discuss it further in Committee. I would rest content if it were the case, which it is not, that part 1 was satisfactory from an English point of view.

Tony Cunningham: Does the right hon. Gentleman have a problem with the drafting, or does he oppose part 1 in principle?

Mr. Letwin: Both.

My second objection is this. We now come to the first of the issues of principle. Part 1 would not be acceptable even if it meant what the Minister says he means it to mean. The "list of offences", for instance, is not a list of offences, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) pointed out with his usual perspicacity. It is, in fact, a mechanism whereby a set of representatives of executive powers—of Governments—in the European Union will decide what, from time to time, they wish to be the list of offences. The Minister told the House that it was far better to ensure that it was done by the unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers rather than by some other mechanism, but what does he mean by the unanimous decision of the Council of Ministers? He means that the Governments of the member states would get together and change the framework directive, and thereby change the list of offences.

Again, the Bill may not mean what it is meant to mean. Perhaps it is meant to mean just the current list; if so, let us include the current list, to which I shall shortly object in any event, and not a mechanism that seems to the ordinary reader to permit the list to be enlarged further. In fact, I believe it to be the intention of Her Majesty's Government to allow the list to be enlarged. I think that Parliament will be consciously sidelined as we proceed, with a larger and larger list of offences specified.

The list is already deeply obnoxious. It contains the arguable offence of xenophobia, which is an offence in some countries but not in ours, in a most bizarre and ambiguous form. Clause 13 specifically provides one of the few bars to extradition under part 1. For example, extradition would be barred if a person found that the warrant had been issued for the purpose of prosecuting or punishing him on account of

"his race, religion, nationality or political opinions".

I do not know what an English judge would do when faced with one clause that tells him that he cannot extradite someone if the extradition relates to the person's political opinions, when another clause tells him by the roundabout route of the framework directive that the person can be extradited if the charge is xenophobia. I do not know how an English judge could be expected to adjudicate on that appropriately. It is not clear from part 1 whether the English judge will or will not—there are two contrary suggestions within the drafting—be able to look at whether the charge of xenophobia is ipso facto a charge that relates to the political opinions of the person in question.

I do not suppose the Minister has the slightest idea what the answer to that question is. The framework decision has been adopted lock, stock and barrel, and a group of people has got together to put back, through the bars in clause 11, a few constraints designed to ameliorate a set of draconian measures.

Mike Gapes: May I take it from the right hon. Gentleman's comments that he would be perfectly happy if neo-Nazi groups in one European Union state were able to use computers, the internet and publishing material to undermine laws on incitement to racial

[Mike Gapes]

hatred or xenophobia such as exist in this country and in Germany without any possibility of action being taken against them?

Mr. Letwin: I am not sure that I have ever heard quite such a confused intervention. The difference between the offence of xenophobia, which we do not have, and the offence of incitement to racial hatred, which we do have, is the very difference that we are discussing. Of course, if the test of dual criminality continued to apply as it should—it does not under the Bill—one could continue to extradite those who were engaged in incitement to racial hatred, which is a criminal offence in this country, but not those who were accused of xenophobia, which is not an offence in this country.

Mr. Denham: The right hon. Gentleman has given his views on xenophobia. What is his view about a British citizen who commits a tax evasion offence in this country but is able to escape with impunity to another European Union country? Is he happy that there should be no extradition powers because no dual criminality exists?

Mr. Letwin: Given that we are talking about an extradition procedure that, in total, currently covers about 50 people a year, some 25 or 30 of whom come from the European Union, the idea that one would prejudice the fundamental liberties built into the fabric of our laws for the sake of the possible extradition to this country of perhaps one person every two or three years is not proportional. I should say now—I will deal with the matter in more detail in a moment—that we accept that, in the sole case of terrorism, the dangers to this country are so great that something similar to what is in part 1 might be thinkable. However, that is an altogether different level of threat.

Mr. Burnett: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister is perhaps not being as—

Mr. Hogg: Candid?

Mr. Burnett: No, not candid. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that the Minister is not being as resourceful as he could be? Tax evasion is also fraud, and presumably fraud is actionable in both states.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman has the great advantage of knowing something about English law, and of being a canny lawyer. I have no doubt that the British state could—and indeed does—arm itself with canny lawyers who could make such an argument. That illustrates very well why we ought not to seek to avoid the need for ingenuity, and why we ought not to adopt instead draconian measures that have real effects on civil liberties in this country, when the gains are so slight.

I turn briefly to the issue of the fair trial, which is of immense importance and also reflects on the Criminal Justice Bill. There has been a misunderstanding between Opposition Members and those on the Treasury Bench about the meaning of a fair trial, and of the term "presumption of innocence"; the Minister's remarks brought that out interestingly and powerfully. He pointed out that one of the bars to extradition under part 1 is any failure to comply with human rights, and in that he was absolutely right. There is no doubt that clause 21 unambiguously applies the European convention on human rights, and even if it did not I do not suppose that it would make the slightest difference under the Human Rights Act 1998. In any event, it is unambiguously present in the Bill.

Paragraph 2 of article 6 of the convention, which is properly headed "Right to a fair trial", states:

> "Everyone charged with a criminal offence shall be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law."

That is the paragraph on which the Minister was hanging his hat. In many of the jurisdictions to which part 1 applies—in all of them, I believe—the ECHR is either incorporated into, or de facto a part of, law through the monistic theory. One way or another, the meaning of article 6 is therefore already being applied in those countries, many of which have inquisitorial systems of justice. In such a system, the examining magistrate begins with the assumption, let us say, that the person whom he or she is investigating deserves to be investigated, and seeks to find out whether there was a reason why the person should not have been investigated. I would call that an assumption of guilt, to be disproved by the investigation. Call it what one may, the process is utterly different from the dialectical process in an English court of law, whereby the accused is presumed by the jury to be innocent, and the duty of the prosecution is to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the presumption of innocence was false. Those are different systems of justice.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: In a moment. Arguments can be made for either system, but they are different. We know that paragraph 2 of article 6 is applied in countries with inquisitorial systems, and that they are held by Strasbourg to be in conformity with that clause, so the Minister cannot claim that, in the sense in which we in this country mean it, the presumption of innocence and the need to prove beyond reasonable doubt is maintained through the ECHR: it is not, as a plain matter of fact.

Mr. Denham: Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman could help the House on two points. First, does he recognise that the Bill explicitly says that extradition can be only for the purpose of trial, not for investigation? Secondly, given that, under previous Conservative Governments and under this Government, we extradited many people to countries whose inquisitorial systems he does not like, does he believe that all those extraditions were in breach of human rights?

Mr. Letwin: No, because those cases—as would be the case if part 2 applied, as it should—are open to challenge. The whole point of part 1 is to undercut the

opportunity for challenge. That is the sole purported advantage of the European arrest warrant in part 1. It is a very grave difference.

Gareth Thomas: Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the adversarial system is not only different but somehow inherently superior? Many people would question that assumption.

Mr. Letwin: I suppose that I shall be accused of being old-fashioned and perhaps even xenophobic, but as a matter of fact I do think that it is superior. Whether it is superior or not, it is clear that part 1 will make it very much easier for people to be removed to places where the adversarial system does not apply and the presumption of innocence in that sense is not applied.

I said at the beginning of my speech that apart from not meaning what the Minister wants it to mean and containing things that are intrinsically offensive, the third problem with part 1 is that we do not need it because part 2 works perfectly well. I want to use the example of the United States of America, but let me point out that no observation in retort to what I say based on the death penalty operating in the United States will be of the slightest interest, because in both parts the Human Rights Act applies. Rightly or wrongly, therefore, no one would be extradited to the United States under part 1 or part 2 to face the death penalty.

Apart from the death penalty, I do not see the slightest reason to suppose that judicial operations in the United States are less meritorious than those in the European Union. As a matter of fact, its system of justice is more, rather than less, aligned to ours than those of most of our continental partners. Its record in administering justice is, like that of all civilised countries, imperfect, but it has a recognisable system of justice that, by and large, delivers justice. There is no doubt that it is a major extradition partner. On page 8 of its very useful analysis, the Home Affairs Committee reveals that the United States of America accounted for 23 of the 139 extraditions that occurred in the three years between 1999 and 2001. It is therefore the second largest partner in extradition. Germany is the only country to which a larger number of people were extradited in those years.

Part 2 of the Bill, not part 1, will apply to the United States. I cannot for the life of me understand why we are taking measures of this kind to assist extradition to other EU countries if we do not regard it as necessary to do that in relation to the United States and if we regard part 2 as a sufficient and, to the Government's credit, considerable improvement in the current arrangements for extradition. Why do the Government not have as much confidence in part 2 as I do?

I said that there was a fourth point and there is—it is the answer to my semi-rhetorical question. There is a reason why the Government do not have confidence in part 2 and why they are using part 1, notwithstanding the severe reservations of the Home Affairs Committee. The reason is that part 1 is being used as an aspect of the development of a new relationship between the EU and its member states in relation to justice and home affairs. I may part company with some of my right hon. and hon. Friends here, but I think that a rational argument could be made in favour of that transformation. I do not happen to share that view; I do not believe that it would be an advance for mankind, but I admit that there could be such a rational argument.

There can be no excuse, however, for the effort to enact part 1 without admitting the reason for doing so. An open acknowledgement that, in respect of our EU counterparts, part 1 is to be preferred to part 2, because at the time and in the context of 11 September the Home Secretary and his fellow Justice Ministers were led by those with a different agenda to adopt a system specifically designed to enlarge the area of EU competence at the expense of the member states, would be an argument worth entertaining. However, the idea that Members of the House should settle down and accept part 1, with its gross deficiencies of drafting allied to its gross deficiencies of principle and its lack of proportionality, in the presence of a perfectly suitable alternative in part 2, merely because the Government want—but do not want to admit that they want—to abet an evolution of the EU with which, I suspect, most of the people of this country are not in accord, beggars belief.

Mr. Hogg: May I reinforce my right hon. Friend's point? Is it not extraordinary that the part 1 procedure would apply to Greece yet the part 2 procedure would apply to Australia? Surely most people in this country would think that if the Government had such absolute confidence as to use the part 1 procedure, they would use it in respect of the courts of Australia and not in respect of the courts of Greece.

Mr. Letwin: Yes, I agree with my right hon. and learned Friend. Incidentally, the House should be aware that he and I have not always been on the same side in every argument about the evolution of the EU.

The measure offers a set of steps that are unacknowledged but dangerous. They are unacknowledged because the Government do not want to enter the debate that would be caused if they acknowledged what they were up to. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends in this place and my noble Friends and others in another place will prevent part 1, as drafted, from coming into effect.

Mr. Garnier: A moment ago, I pointed out to the Minister that he faced a problem with the match between this Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill. The Criminal Justice Bill attacks the jury system in a most pro-European way and the Government persist in attacking the lay magistracy. Continental Europe has neither the jury system nor a lay magistracy. There is thus a double marriage between the two measures. My right hon. Friend is rightly and carefully pointing that out.

Mr. Letwin: I agree with my hon. and learned Friend. Furthermore, the Government have presented the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill as a tiny amendment that would for the first time allow foreign policemen—whom the Minister tells us he means not to authorise, but who will be authorised under the Extradition Bill—to enter the country to pursue a villain across our borders.

[Mr. Letwin]

In short, we find ourselves surrounded by a set of minor incursions that are centripetal in their intent. There is a move towards the homogenisation of systems of justice in the EU—*[Interruption.]* The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety suggests that I do not believe what I am saying. I do not think that I have ever in my life said anything that I believe more strongly. If he is sufficiently naive as not to believe it—if he is a fellow traveller rather than a willing enthusiast—he will be sorely disillusioned as the measure progresses.

I shall not detain the House further. We cannot and will not put up with part 1 and we hope to see it erased—except in relation to the extreme case of terrorism.

5.39 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): I shall speak mainly to the Select Committee's report, to which several Members have already referred.

I thank Ministers for publishing the draft version of the Bill long enough in advance for interested parties to comment on it and for my Committee to examine it. As the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, my right hon. Friend has pointed out, one or two changes have been made as a result of representations received. I am pleased to note that and I hope that there will be more in due course.

At the outset may I say that I entirely accept that there is a need to overhaul our procedures, given some of the lengthy fiascos that have surrounded extradition cases in the past? However, in the Select Committee's view the Bill goes too far in dispensing with the protections that are rightly available to protect our citizens from injustice at the hands of foreign legal systems. To some extent, of course, it is a fait accompli because Ministers have already signed up to the framework document, committing the Government to introducing far-reaching reforms, but the Government appear to be going further and faster than the framework document requires, and we do not believe that that is justified.

As we have heard, the Bill will create two categories of country. For category 1 countries, there will be fast-track procedure, dispensing with just about all the existing safeguards, including dual criminality and the discretion of the Home Secretary. Instead, a judge has merely to satisfy himself that the warrant is in order and that the alleged offence comes within the 32 categories listed in article 2.2 of the framework document. For category 2 countries, the procedure will be more rigorous, but still a great deal simpler and with fewer safeguards than at present.

Category 1 will initially consist of all existing EU members which have signed up to the framework document. Category 2 is likely consist of all non-EU members of the Council of Europe, including countries such as Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Georgia and Russia, whose legal systems, as they would be the first to admit, leave a certain amount to be desired. Indeed, I was visited the other day by a man in President Putin's office who told me that the Russian judicial system results in a conviction rate of 99.6 per cent. One possibility—in fairness to him, he did not seek to argue this—is that he presides over a nearly perfect system, but we need to contemplate another possibility. In addition, we are told that some Commonwealth countries will be included, as well as other countries with which we have bilateral treaties.

Clauses 1 and 68 will allow the Government to designate by Order in Council which countries fall into which category. Clause 205 provides that such orders will be subject only to a negative resolution, so parliamentary scrutiny will be minimal. That brings me to the Select Committee's first concern. In effect, Ministers could add any country to category 1 or 2 without having to explain their reasons to Parliament. Although they say that they have no plans to do so, it does not need a great deal of foresight to foresee the day when they will wish to add the United States to the list of category 1 countries, to which people can be extradited with the minimum of formality. I wish to say plainly that that would not be acceptable.

I part company with the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) on the judicial system in the United States. In my view and, I think, that of the Select Committee, there is a world of difference between the judicial systems of western Europe and those in the United States, where there is a huge variation in the quality of justice available, depending on whether people are in the east, west, north or south. I do not agree that the death penalty is irrelevant to this debate. To take but one example, I can think of nowhere else in the developed world where politicians compete for office on the basis of the number of death warrants they have signed.

In the unanimous view of the Select Committee, clause 1 should be amended to specify that only countries that are signatories to the European framework document should be included in category 1. In any event, the Select Committee was of the view that no country that maintains the death penalty should be allowed into category 1. Clause 68 should be amended to specify that only countries with which the United Kingdom has bilateral treaty arrangements may be included in category 2. At the very least, clause 205 should be amended to provide that Orders in Council designating new members of either category must be approved by an affirmative resolution of each House.

Turning to category 1, almost all existing safeguards will be dispensed with for countries in that category. Instead, as I said, it will merely be necessary for a judge to satisfy himself that the alleged offence is among the 32 listed in article 2.2 of the framework document, and that it carries a maximum sentence of 12 months or more.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The House owes a great deal of gratitude to the hon. Gentleman's Committee for its work on this matter. Is he satisfied that the 32 categories are sufficiently accurately described and defined outside or in the Bill? It seems to me that some are extremely vague: for instance, the category of sabotage, which could mean a lot or very little, depending on which country was involved.

Mr. Mullin: That is precisely the point to which I was coming, although I recognise some of the problems to which the Minister referred in his opening remarks.

It is true, as we have seen, that not all the 32 offences are recognised under British law. Apart from xenophobia, which has been mentioned, those offences

include computer-related crime, environmental crime, swindling and sabotage. Under the Bill, it will therefore be obligatory for suspects to be extradited for alleged offences that British law does not recognise, and British courts will have no power to intervene. The judge who examines the warrant will be a mere cipher, which is not satisfactory.

One solution might have been to amend the list of offences for which extradition is automatic, but that is impossible as Ministers have already signed up to the EU framework document, which is now immutable. The next best solution, which is the one that my Committee commends to the House, is for the Bill to be amended to allow a district judge to examine the warrant and state whether, in his opinion, dual criminality applies. In cases in which an alleged offence is not an offence in the UK, the Home Secretary should be given the discretion as to whether to extradite. That would circumvent the problem of the offences that are not recognised in this country but are on the list of 32.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Did the hon. Gentleman's Committee reflect on the very unsatisfactory procedure in this area, whereby Members of Parliament can be asked for their views on such proposals, but their views count for nothing? Ministers can take decisions at a European level that are binding on the United Kingdom, without the assent of the UK Parliament, or of either House, having been secured beforehand.

Mr. Mullin: Indeed, we were not entirely happy with that. There has been a degree of parliamentary assent to this matter, but not the degree that most of us would like.

Gareth Thomas: On the point about giving the Home Secretary discretion when the district judge has signified that there is a dual criminality issue, did my hon. Friend's Committee seek specialist or legal advice as to whether that was possible, and whether it would be consistent with the EU framework to which the Government have subscribed?

Mr. Mullin: We did have specialist advice, but of course there are specialists and specialists. No doubt the Home Secretary had a few specialists at his disposal, and perhaps he will tell us if there is a reason why that discretion cannot be given. I am not aware, however, of any such reason. As I said, that would surmount one problem.

With regard to the seriousness of the offences to which fast-track extradition may apply, the EU framework document applies only to those offences for which a maximum sentence of three years is available. Ministers have gone much further than the EU requires. They have lowered the threshold to 12 months, which will greatly increase the number of offences for which extradition applies, not all of which, as we have seen, are recognised in this country.

Mr. Denham: Does my hon. Friend recognise that, at the moment under extradition law the threshold in this country is 12 months, so the debate is about whether it should be raised from 12 months to three years to fit in with the framework decision or whether it should be left at its current level?

Mr. Mullin: At the moment there are certain safeguards which it is now proposed we do away with. It is still a live issue, and we recommended that the three-year limit specified in the framework document should be retained, although that is a matter for debate. We may be able to improve the safeguards and thereby resolve that issue.

I wish to make one general point in passing. I realise that it is argued that no law-abiding citizen has anything to fear from the judicial systems of our EU partners and that the quality of justice elsewhere in the EU is at least as good as that available here. Generally speaking, I am sure that that is true, although I would point out that a suspect in, say, Italy could find himself on remand for several years before he has his day in court. What is more, I notice that under our existing system the courts have often refused extradition to EU countries, and so, occasionally, has the Home Secretary. What has suddenly changed that has enabled us to throw all caution and existing safeguards to the winds as regards extradition to category 1 countries?

There are other problems with category 1 extraditions. As it stands, the Bill allows the list of 32 offences to be incorporated into UK domestic law without any opportunity for Parliament to disagree with, let alone debate, the proposed changes. The Select Committee believes that that is unacceptable. Furthermore, despite Ministerial assurances to the contrary, it appears that clause 2(5) will deny our judges the opportunity to refuse an application on the ground that it does not come from a properly constituted judicial authority of a category 1 state.

The Bill is also silent as to what information should appear on a warrant. In addition, the Government have signalled their intention to abandon the so-called speciality rule, which has not yet been referred to in the debate and which makes clear the principle that a suspect can be tried only for the charge for which he is being extradited unless the extraditing authority consents to its being varied or added to. In the Select Committee's view, all those points need to be addressed, and we have made recommendations for doing so.

With regard to category 2 states, non-European countries are currently required to show that there is a prima facie case to answer before the UK will agree to extradition. Clause 83(6) will enable the Government to exempt any category 2 country from that requirement. We think that the recommendation is too broad and that it should be limited either to non-EU member states that are signatories to the convention on extradition or to any other state with which we have a bilateral agreement that imposes obligations similar to those set out in the convention.

On extradition to countries that have the death penalty, we recommend that, in line with existing practice, the Secretary of State, rather than a district judge, should be required to assess the adequacy of a written assurance that the death penalty will not be imposed or carried out. We urge Ministers to explain how such written assurances will be assessed.

Finally, we recommend that the powers of arrest contained in the Bill be tightened. It should specify the appropriate persons entitled to make arrests, although I

[Mr. Mullin]

heard what the Minister said about the precedents on that point. If we mean—in addition to the police—Customs and Excise officers, let us say so. Arresting officers should be required to show the warrant to an arrested person, and judges should also be required to inform an arrested person of the contents of the warrant and to ensure that a person has access to proper legal advice before they can consent to extradition. As I said in an intervention, I was a little disappointed with the tone of the press release that was issued in response to our report by the Home Office, under the name of the Under-Secretary my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth). In it, he said:

"Doing nothing is not an option".

Well, we agree about that. No one—certainly not the Home Affairs Committee—has suggested that we do nothing. He added:

"It's time to stop talking . . . and take action".

We agree about that, too. Nothing in our report should stand in the way of streamlining our outdated procedures. It is, however, our view that the Bill would benefit from further revision.

5.54 pm

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Liberal Democrat Members wish the Home Secretary a speedy recovery. I should also declare that I am a lawyer, but I do not practise.

I record my gratitude to the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and to the Home Affairs Committee, which he chairs, for its report on the Bill, which makes compelling reading and is extremely useful. It is a tribute to his Committee that it managed to compile it in such a relatively short time.

Most hon. Members acknowledge that certain crimes, particularly terrorism and serious international crimes, have to be dealt with as speedily as possible. Furthermore, we all understand that, as the Minister said, extradition works both ways. Not only are we called upon to extradite individuals, but there are occasions when we seek extradition to our jurisdiction.

The changes that the Bill proposes will make extradition, particularly between category 1 territories, swifter and less bureaucratic. My problem with the Bill is that it does so by jettisoning some established protections for individuals and watering down many other safeguards. I shall come to that point.

The Home Affairs Committee set out a raft of detailed objections to the Bill, and I wish to dwell on some of the principled objections. I apologise to the House if I repeat some of the points that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South made. There will be scope in Committee to endeavour to improve what is an ill-thought-out measure.

Currently, the law provides some crucial protections. First and foremost, there is a requirement for dual criminality, and that point has already been explained several times in the debate. The offence for which extradition is requested should not be of a political character. Existing law tells us that extradition is not allowed if its purpose is to secure the prosecution of a fugitive on account of his or her race, faith, nationality or political opinions or if he or she might be denied a fair trial for those reasons. The fugitive will not be extradited if he or she has been previously acquitted or convicted of the same offence for which his or her extradition is sought. That is the current state of play. Most important, we will not extradite for an offence that carries the death penalty in the requesting state, although undertakings that the death sentence will not be carried out can be given.

Furthermore, after a fair appeal process, there is the rule of speciality that the hon. Member for Sunderland, South mentioned. It provides that the fugitive cannot be charged with any conduct for which he was not extradited. This is, for obvious reasons, an extremely important rule that prevents extraditions for trivial or other offences that are subsequently dropped and for which a prosecution in the extraditing country of a more questionable offence is substituted.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): We will want to discuss in Committee how the rule of speciality applies. There is clearly the issue—it is not hidden—of the dropping of dual criminality for those offences on the list. The hon. Gentleman claims that other safeguards will be removed, but surely he recognises that the proposals in the Bill do not change anything to do with extradition to countries with the death penalty or with the bar relating to politically motivated prosecutions.

Mr. Burnett: I am grateful for that intervention. I am not suggesting what the Bill will do but merely giving an exposition of what I believe the current law to be. I was interested by what the Minister has just said and by what the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety said earlier about his mind not being closed to amendments. I was glad to hear that.

Other principles are worthy of mention, and they include legal representation, abuse of triviality, consular access, availability of interpreters, habeas corpus and no undue delay. Some of them are unfortunately absent even in countries that are signatories to the European convention on human rights. As the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing) pointed out, we should expect minimum standards. We do not want to put the cart before the horse. It is a shame that the Government have signed up to the framework decision before securing those minimum standards in the European Union itself. The first is that a suspect or defendant must be able to understand and contribute to the legal process. If he or she cannot, there can be no effective participation. Such impediments, whether linguistic, physical or mental, must be overcome. That means having adequate interpreters, legal representation and consular access.

Unfortunately, some member states do not have legal aid—I understand that Greece is one—and cannot provide proper legal support. We need effective participation in the legal process, and it will be denied if the apparatus, such as access to interpreters, is not in place. Furthermore, rights that we believe are fundamental, such as the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, the right to bail if appropriate and the right against self-incrimination, should be expected from all jurisdictions to which a person is extradited. Not only have the Government precipitately signed the

framework decision, but the Bill takes the provisions further, as the hon. Member for Sunderland, South stated.

Our main objection to the framework decision is the fact that the principle of dual criminality is surrendered if the offence falls within one of the 32 offences listed in article 2.2 of the framework decision, or if the offence carries a maximum penalty of at least three years' imprisonment in the issuing state. To say that some of those offences are nebulous is an understatement. Some of them are certainly not capable of definition and many are capable of distortion, as the Home Affairs Committee points out. Swindling and xenophobia are difficult to define under the current law in EU member states, including this country. There is no way of knowing how those offences may be defined in future. Offences such as participation in criminal organisations, corruption and fraud are extremely broad, as the Select Committee states in paragraph 26 of its report.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the distinction that he is trying to draw implicitly challenges the principle of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do"? The offences for which one might be extradited would, with rare exceptions, be those that are committed on the soil of the country where the law applied. Unless the hon. Gentleman wishes to change that, he must accept that it is possible to be arrested on the spot. We are debating only whether a person could be arrested if he flees the country before the authorities catch up with him.

Mr. Burnett: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but we had a short debate on that earlier. As I said when I intervened on the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), it is clear that, with some resourcefulness, one can invariably match up the crimes and there is no problem with dual criminality.

If we are asked to execute a European arrest warrant, our courts will not be able to refuse to do that on the ground that we disagree with the legal classification of the offence. We will be bound by the classification made by the issuing authority.

Tony Cunningham: Does the hon. Gentleman oppose the European arrest warrant in principle, or is it the detail or the drafting that causes him problems?

Mr. Burnett: I do not oppose it in principle, but there have to be minimum safeguards and conditions. That is what I am trying to advocate.

Regrettably, we are committed to those provisions, and they sweep away the crucial safeguard of dual criminality. That long-standing and powerful principle is a protection against abuse. The Home Affairs Committee helpfully recommends in paragraph 31 that, in each case, a district judge should look at the terms of the offence specified in the European arrest warrant and state whether dual criminality applies. If the offence is not a crime in the United Kingdom, the decision should be referred to the Home Secretary. I am anxious to know what practical steps are needed to achieve that important amendment.

Clause 12 is not sufficiently tight in relation to double jeopardy, which occurs from time to time throughout Europe. Lorry drivers are particularly vulnerable as they can be charged on the same facts in more than one country, but with different offences. Like most hon. Members, we are concerned about the Executive's wide discretion to designate states as category 1 or 2 territories. The Bill provides that that can be done by an Order in Council. It does not provide for guidance covering the choice of territories and the Order in Council is subject only to annulment by negative resolution of the House. Again, as the Home Affairs Committee points out, it enables any country to be designated a category 1or 2 territory. There is nothing to prevent an Order in Council from designating a country that has not signed up to the framework decision as a category 1 territory, so a highly unsuitable country may be promoted for a pragmatic reason. I hope that the Government will table amendments in Committee along the lines suggested in paragraphs 41 and 43 of the Select Committee's report.

I believe that a prima facie case should be made. I am aware that changes to that were made some time ago between EU countries, as the Minister explained, but it should be preserved for category 2 territories. Furthermore, the rule of speciality should be preserved in all respects for all extraditions. That means securing that a requesting state proceeds against an individual only on the facts and for the offence for which he or she is sought for extradition. I agree that for that reason clause 53 should be deleted in its entirety.

Finally, there is no justification for extending category 1 status to any country that maintains the death penalty. That is because the clause 15 bar is not absolute. As the Home Office admitted, it will be possible to designate non-EU countries as category 1 countries and it is conceivable that such a country would retain the death penalty on its statute book. That is reason enough to justify the proposition that part 1 should not be extended to include any countries that still use the death penalty as a form of punishment.

We have reservations about many other matters, although they are more appropriate for deliberation in Committee. My colleagues and I thought long and hard about our attitude to Second Reading. As I said, there are practical reasons why the extradition system should be less bureaucratic and swifter, but on no issue and in no circumstances can we justify reducing the proper judicial safeguards and other safeguards to which all citizens are entitled. There is a case for reforming extradition law, but not for abandoning the safeguards to which I referred.

The Bill has fundamental flaws that must be remedied in Committee. I am glad that the Minister has not closed the door on amendments. I was also pleased to hear the Under-Secretary's comments. However, unless there is root-and-branch change, we shall vote against the Bill in future proceedings in this House and the other place.

6.8 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): The Bill is long overdue, but I have several concerns on which I hope to be reassured in the winding-up speech and during the Bill's progress through the two Houses.

The Government's approach has been to expose the Bill to criticism. A draft Bill was prepared on which the Joint Committee on Human Rights produced a report and the Home Affairs Committee, chaired by my hon.

[Ross Cranston]

Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), commented. That is all to the benefit of the House. Too often, Bills are presented to us and we do not have the time to consider them properly. In this case, the approach has been correct. There may be disagreements about what we should do about the Bill but at least we know the issues because they have been exposed.

There is no doubt that the law of extradition is out of date. To some extent, it dates back to 1870, when the law divided the world into the empire and the rest. Although there have been changes since then, the case for updating the law is strong.

There are practical difficulties with the administration of extradition law at present—my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned its cost. The procedures are often dragged out and too much time is taken. In addition, with cross-border crime, we need a law that more readily addresses the issues. My hon. Friends have raised international drug dealing and trafficking in children.

Concerns have been raised about part 1. There are advantages in its drafting because considerable safeguards have been inserted. The bars to extradition are flagged up in clause 11 and developed in later clauses. The provisions mean that we shall not automatically extradite to category 1 countries. There are bars on double jeopardy. In response to an intervention, my right hon. Friend said that the provisions would have to take into account the Criminal Justice Bill. That is not a major problem, but he gave a welcome reassurance.

Clause 13 refers to extraneous circumstances. We shall not extradite people where they might be pursued for political or religious opinions. That is a good thing. There is, of course, the question of definition. In the Shayler case, the French court refused to extradite Shayler to this country on the ground that it was a political offence, so there can be disagreement about what extraneous circumstances might entail. However, there is a valuable barrier that will operate in our domestic law.

The barrier imposed in respect of the death penalty has already been mentioned. Both my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and Liberty have raised issues about the assurance that we shall have to receive, and to what extent it will be carried out in practice. We already have considerable experience of that issue in extraditions to the United States. As the Bill is considered, it will be helpful to hear how in practice the provision will operate with countries other than the United States.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) mentioned speciality, which is a valuable barrier that will operate on extradition. There are other barriers. into which I need not go, that relate, for example, to persons who have been convicted in their absence and are being pursued by the requesting state.

There are two concerns that I should raise. The first involves the list of offences. It goes without saying that I would have preferred the list to be in the Bill. In a way, we are being asked to approve a Bill when we do not know, without referring to another document, what we are voting for. However, I understand the difficulties. It would be necessary to produce a composite definition involving offences in all the jurisdictions in the European Union in relation to the list. There is great merit in the Home Affairs Committee's recommendation in paragraph 55 of its report: if the list is to be extended in any way, Ministers should explain to the House when countries are being added to category 1.

Derek Conway: The hon. and learned Gentleman is making a telling point. I am sure that he heard the Minister of State say that the list could be extended by the Council of Ministers. I was not sure from the right hon. Gentleman's contribution whether that meant that the matter would return to the House for scrutiny or whether there could be an Executive power in conjunction with the other members of the Council of Ministers.

Ross Cranston: The difficulty is that, for members of the European Union, in many ways, decisions are made by the Executives of the different countries. The Parliaments of the different jurisdictions will have to rubber-stamp, as it were, the proposals that are made. That is the nature of membership of the EU. That arises in many federations. Executives of federations agree on a policy, and the Parliaments, states, provinces or whatever are asked to give approval. In many instances, legislators are presented with a fait accompli. The Select Committee is recommending that, in that case, the Government should explain the matter to the House so that at least we can be reassured on what has been decided.

The protections of the European convention on human rights that are built into the Bill are extremely important. Xenophobia is a listed offence. Article 8—freedom of speech—might well be brought to bear in extradition in relation to that offence. I am concerned that the list is not in the Bill, but I accept that there are practical reasons for that. At the same time, there is great merit in what the Select Committee said about a fall-back position.

The Select Committee also recommended that a district judge might certify that there is not dual criminality and that then the Home Secretary—

Mr. Cameron: I do not want to be oily but the hon. and learned Gentleman has considerable legal expertise. We thought long and hard on the Select Committee before submitting the suggestion to which he referred. Will he tell us whether, from his experience, it would amend the European arrest warrant to make it something that we had not signed up to, or whether it would be an acceptable way of making the procedure work and provide an extra safeguard?

Ian Lucas: Do not give free advice.

Ross Cranston: Perhaps my hon. Friend is right.

At this stage, I can only say that I see some merit in the suggestion. I want the Government to consider the point seriously in Committee. It seems to have a certain value.

Mr. Shepherd: The hon. and learned Gentleman took comfort in the fact that there was a back-stop in the

European Court of Human Rights, but states already have xenophobia as an offence as part of their legal codes. That has presumably been acceptable to the Court, which would therefore be no protection in a collision between the freedom of expression that we respect and the criminal code of other countries.

Ross Cranston: Yes, there is no doubt about that. I shall shortly consider the operation of legal systems in other countries that have often got the green light in decisions by the European Court of Human Rights even though one may doubt whether they are human rights-compliant. Clause 21, however, says that judges have to address the human rights point. In theory, they could decide—I do not suggest that this is a strong possibility—that, even though the warrant relates to xenophobia, that runs contrary to article 8 in the European convention on the freedom of speech and that extradition should not take place. As I said, the list of offences gives rise to concerns. During consideration of the Bill, the Government may well introduce changes to assure us that the bars on extradition will operate robustly.

I have already foreshadowed the fact that even though countries may be members of the European Union or, in a wider context, the Council of Europe, we are not always reassured by the operation of their criminal justice systems. My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South mentioned people being on remand for substantial periods, and I certainly have knowledge of that. It would be invidious to mention particular countries, but the system in some EU countries or, more widely, European convention or Council of Europe countries, does not always reassure us about the extent to which human rights are taken into account in practice.

I am reassured by the robust approach of our courts in, for example, the recent Ramda decision, when the High Court said that the fact that France was a signatory to the European convention on human rights was not a complete answer. The courts have also said that they are not prepared, in asylum cases, for example, to accept what Germany does. France and Germany, one may think, have systems comparable to ours but our courts, taking a closer look, have said that they are not prepared to accept at face value the extent to which human rights operate there.

Clause 21 will therefore be extremely important in the operation of the system. We must work on the assumption that each EU member and, possibly, each signatory to the European convention has a criminal justice system in which human rights are recognised and which complies with article 6 and the fair trial provision. Clause 21 opens up the possibility that the subject of the warrant can say, "In these circumstances, the operation of the system will not be human rights-compliant," which will be of considerable reassurance to hon. Members.

In conclusion, the Bill is overdue, the system is in need of considerable reform—it is weighed down by an accretion of law going back more than a century—and the problem of cross-border crime needs to be addressed. None the less, we cannot give the Bill unequivocal approval because some matters still require the Government's urgent attention—the list of category 1 offences and the fact that some category 1 countries, although they may generally operate in compliance with the European convention, may not in practice meet that standard.

6.25 pm

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): As a simple and humble man—I know that my colleagues share that view—I hesitate to intrude on what, on such an occasion, can be a lawyer fest. When introducing the Bill to the House, the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety used tempered words, which were very convincing indeed. However, before the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) gets too excited, the response of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) was utterly devastating. I do not think that he is a lawyer, but I would hate to appear against him as the defence—his performance was extremely impressive, and many of his points will be difficult for the Under-Secretary to answer in his winding-up speech.

On many occasions, I have listened in the Chamber to Ministers' tempered words and the honeyed assurances of lawyers. In fact, they came from a Conservative Government. When the House was considering the Single European Act such was the effectiveness of those reasonable words that they even secured the enthusiasm of Baroness Thatcher and Lord Tebbit. I see one or two faces in the Chamber this afternoon who, like me, were less persuaded. Sadly, however, my right hon. and hon. Friends fell for those honeyed words, only to regret it later. When legislation is introduced which, whatever people say, extends the power of European states, the House should tread with great care.

The report produced by the Select Committee chaired by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) makes for interesting reading. The House should take its advice and exercise great caution. The Bill has been described as an attack on civil liberties, and I have not yet heard a convincing rebuttal of that charge. Our Front Bench spokesmen are right to oppose the Bill—I shall join them tonight—and the introduction of a European arrest warrant. It is not right to extradite Britons for offences that are not crimes in the United Kingdom—that is not acceptable to our constituents. The thought of foreign police being able to initiate the arrest of a British citizen in the UK for something that is not a crime here will go down very badly with the British public. The Minister graciously gave way to me, but did not deal with my point about the 32 serious offences that may cause UK citizens to be handed over to a foreign power, even though they will not have committed a crime here.

Dr. Palmer: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the reverse is acceptable? Does he believe that if someone comes here and commits a crime under our law, but can argue that it is not a crime in his country, we should not extradite him?

Derek Conway: I am not sure that I do—it depends on the crime. People have a right to expect protection from the Government of the country where they are citizens. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman reads *The Daily Telegraph*—I know that it is not the most popular

[Derek Conway]

newspaper among Government Members—but Lord Scott, a Law Lord, commented in it that the definition of a xenophobia offence in the schedule to the Bill

"would almost certainly cover the distribution of Biggles and probably the Old Testament".

I am too young to understand the reference to Biggles, but some of my hon. Friends may have read about him—perhaps it would cause offence in continental Europe. However, people who take such books abroad with them as holiday reading should not risk being arrested when they return to Britain.

The definition of political opinions is more serious and much more worrying. The process of extradition may well be imperfect, but it could cause us to risk sending British citizens abroad for trial. I do not believe that there is a Member on either side of the House who would challenge the proposition that appalling crimes should be dealt with. No reasonable person believes that a national or geographical border should hamper ultimate justice, but provision already exists in English law to protect that process.

I believe the Bill to be another brick—a very heavy brick—in the growing temple of the European state. It goes agin what Britons have held and continue to hold dear, which is not only sovereignty, but the protection of our citizens in our country. I hope that the measure fails to obtain a Second Reading tonight.

6.30 pm

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): I speak as a lawyer—a former lawyer, I should stress—and I aspire to the humbleness to which the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway) referred. When one approaches the issue as a former lawyer, it is important to be aware of one's current responsibilities to represent one's constituents. While there is always the temptation to become enmeshed in legal argument when dealing with such legislation, there is also always a requirement to look at the big picture concerning the enforcement of the law in respect of serious criminal offences which are borne from abroad into our country and also to consider the attitude of our constituents to such offences and the way in which the law operates against them.

I welcome the Bill in general terms, and I welcome one aspect of it that has not yet been mentioned. In general terms, I do not like politicians being intimately involved in the judicial process. That concept has had its day. The Home Secretary has on a number of occasions encountered difficulties in the courts in recent times, on subjects such as mandatory life sentences. As a former lawyer and now a politician, I believe that it is better for criminal justice cases to be dealt with, as much as possible, in the criminal courts. I have confidence in the existing judicial process, and I believe that the Bill contains substantial safeguards that would enable our judiciary to exercise discretion in favour of any individual whose human rights it considered were being substantially interfered with by the Act, as it would then be.

Ross Cranston: My hon. Friend makes a valuable point about politicians not being involved in judicial decisions. Of course, when the Home Secretary exercises that jurisdiction, he acts in a quasi-judicial way, but that still means that he can be subject to criticism. I agree with my hon. Friend. The point has not been mentioned and it is valuable.

Ian Lucas: I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for his intervention. The intricacies and traps that exist in a quasi-judicial process were fully exhibited in the Pinochet case, which caused all sorts of judicial and ministerial problems at the time. Such a situation should be avoided as far as possible in the future.

I am conscious that we are discussing heartfelt individual rights, and it is important that those rights are always taken very seriously by all hon. Members. I know that there are Members, particularly Opposition Members, who have taken that view for many years, both in government and in opposition. I respect that viewpoint, but I believe that the legislation will provide the necessary safeguards, although in certain respects it can be improved.

We must accept that the extradition system is outmoded. It is largely the child of the 19th century—we have heard reference to legislation from 1870. It is based on the concept that the British criminal justice system is inherently superior to any other criminal justice system that has ever existed or still exists. When I was preparing for the debate, I had in mind the type of attitude exhibited by Lord Palmerston in the Don Pacifico case, and that impression was reinforced by some of the interventions and references from the Opposition today. I am glad that I looked out the statement in which Lord Palmerston, in a five-hour address to the House back in 1850, said:

"as the Roman, in days of old, held himself free from indignity, when he could say *Civis romanus sum*; so also a British subject, in whatever land he may be, shall feel confident that the watchful eye and the strong arm of England will protect him against injustice and wrong."

[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] I sensed that that would be the reaction from Opposition Members, but I think that we have moved on from that attitude. I find it surprising that the Opposition consider the criminal justice system in this country to be perfect. There have been substantial miscarriages of justice in recent years, which must cast doubt upon the strength of our system. There are good arguments to support the contention that certain aspects of systems in various parts of Europe are better than ours. We can respect other criminal justice systems in Europe, and build a sensible extradition system on the basis of mutual respect and mutual recognition.

Simon Hughes: I accept the hon. Gentleman's proposition entirely, but does he accept that the evidence shows that we cannot generalise? Some of the other EU countries are unexceptionable and have all the safeguards that we would wish, but those who practise regularly in courts in those countries and in the UK note that certain countries, of which Belgium and France are two, do not have the same level of safeguards. There are regular problems. We must therefore be clear about the generality and note where the standards do not rise to the level that we would expect as minimum legal requirements for our citizens.

Ian Lucas: In any system of justice, one must be watchful and always safeguard the rights of the

individuals whose liberty is in question in the courts. I do not believe that the British criminal justice system is inherently superior to any other system in Europe. In a modern world we need to devise an extradition system that is responsive to the needs of our country and of our constituents.

I am conscious that in the debate today, we have heard little about international crime, which is an issue of profound concern to many of my constituents in Wrexham, in north Wales. Those people are worried about international trafficking in class A drugs. Given that we have an extradition system that is still based largely on concepts from the late 19th century, when it was rare indeed for my constituents to travel to England—mine is a border constituency, 5 miles from the border—we ought to be considering ways of improving the system to ensure that it is responsive to international organised trafficking and crime at a level that is unprecedented in our history.

At times like this, as a former lawyer, I try to become a politician. Although I have concerns that have been bred into me through my training, I must also listen to the concerns that I hear from my constituents—the anxiety about serious crime and the threat to their children from the blight of drugs in their community. As always in these matters, one must exercise a degree of balance. It is difficult to do so, particularly when one is dealing with the individual liberties of anyone who appears before the courts.

I am sure that in Committee, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), whom I know well, will listen carefully to all the matters put to him, and will respond to them in due course with well reasoned and well considered arguments.

I welcome the fact that the procedure is a judicial procedure and that it will be swift. The Minister referred to the time and expense that the current procedure involves for the criminal justice system. In the context of the Criminal Justice Bill, that money could be better spent on assisting drug addicts, better sentencing or improving our court structure than on antiquated, protracted and technical extradition procedures. Although I have some concerns, I welcome the general thrust of the Bill in that regard.

I commend the way in which the Bill has been considered to date and greatly welcome the publication of draft legislation, which allows points to be made and will lead to a general improvement in legislation. I understand that the Bill has been considered by the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union, the Select Committee on European Scrutiny, a European Standing Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Select Committee on Home Affairs. We are still at a stage at which not everyone is happy, even on the Labour Benches, with every aspect of the provisions, but I am sure that that process has improved them. The scrutiny will continue, as I am sure will the improvement.

Simon Hughes: There was a lot of scrutiny and the publication of the draft Bill was welcome, but I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will understand the concern felt by many of us that we still have a procedure of accountability that serves us poorly. The Under-Secretary knows that Ministers end up presenting proposals to Committees several months after they have been debated and when there may have been significant changes, and that there is nothing that we can do about it.

Ian Lucas: I am sure that the Government are aware of that problem, which needs to be addressed. None the less, I think that they believe in increased scrutiny. For example, I do not believe that any Government who contemplated reducing scrutiny would introduce draft legislation. We all agree that that is an exceptionally good innovation and that it will lead to better legislation in due course.

I mentioned that I had some concerns about the Bill. My major concerns are twofold. First, the list of individual offences that has been mentioned is not set out in the Bill. I would like to be satisfied that, if the list were to be extended, there would be due opportunity to consider the matter and ensure proper scrutiny.

Secondly, I am unhappy about the provisions relating to the death penalty—an issue about which I feel very strongly on a moral basis and, speaking as somebody who has been intimately involved with the courts professionally, as a result of the failures of the judicial process. Indeed, many such cases have been a matter of public record. I cannot feel comfortable with the clause 91 provisions on the death penalty and the written assurance that is to be given to the Secretary of State. There are compelling arguments for the view of the Home Affairs Committee that no country that has the death penalty should be admitted to category 1. I would be very uneasy in any circumstances about the extradition of any individual to a country that maintained the death penalty.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I assure my hon. Friend that there is no intention on the Government's part and no desire in the USA—the main country that we are talking about in terms of extradition—to propose consideration for entry into category 1. However, we have extradited people in fairly substantial numbers to the United States, many of them potentially in respect of capital offences, without any problem, having received the assurances that are set out. There is no intention of watering down assurances about capital punishment in respect of either category 1 or category 2 or allowing extradition so that people can be executed.

Ian Lucas: I am pleased and reassured by the Minister's assurance. I know well and greatly admire the stance that the Government have taken on the death penalty internationally. My concern is that the written assurances would relate not only to the United States, but to another country that has not been specified at this stage. I wonder whether we can rely on written assurances from other Governments on the same basis as that on which we rely on those of the United States.

Annabelle Ewing: I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns about clause 91 and, indeed, clause 15, which deals with the same issue. I find very worrying the language saying that we must rely on a judgment made by the Secretary of State. Even in the United States, the

[Annabelle Ewing]

death penalty process can take a decade or even longer. At what point will the assurance become less assuring, given that the process takes so long?

Ian Lucas: I shall leave the Under-Secretary to respond in due course.

Harry Cohen: The Government rightly ask for assurances from the United States, but other Governments or even individual Ministers who are more supportive of the death penalty may decide not to ask for such assurances. Is my hon. Friend taking that into account?

Ian Lucas: I take my hon. Friend's point, but the Bill relates to this country, so although our ambit is wide, I think that his approach is rather Palmerstonian. Perhaps we should restrict our discussions to the United Kingdom.

I should like to take up one further point in relation to the speech of the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who often makes great play in the House of terminological exactitude and the importance of being very specific. Indeed, that was part of his criticism of the Government's position, but in that context, it would be appropriate in future for him to make it clear whether, in talking about the United Kingdom, he is talking about England and Wales, Scotland or the United Kingdom as a whole. As an Englishman who is proud to represent a Welsh constituency, I know that a large number of my constituents would not take kindly to the attitude that he took in his speech. Indeed, it may go some way towards explaining why the Opposition have no representative of Wales in the House.

6.48 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): I thought for a moment that the Government had found a supporter in the hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), but I am afraid that his speech was less unequivocal than it had seemed it would be. So far, the Government have failed to find unequivocal support among their Back Benchers.

I firmly believe—the Minister referred to me in this respect—that we must reform our extradition legislation. I believe equally firmly that the Bill is the wrong reform. I have no problem with part 2, although I shall mention one or two minor concerns, but I have very serious problems with part 1, which was effectively demolished by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and the Chairman of the Home Affairs Select Committee. Indeed, one is tempted to leave it at that, say "It's over to you" and ask the Minister to explain why those are not killer objections.

I came to this issue after 11 September when I discovered that some suspects who were wanted in the United States and France for terrorist offences had been in this country fighting extradition for a very long time. I raised the issue, referring to all the suspects, when the Prime Minister made his statement immediately after 11 September. There were four of them, but I was horrified to find on checking the matter at the end of last week that they are all still here. Three people are wanted for the African embassy bombings in August 1998 and are still here four years later. It took the courts a long time to deal with their cases, but the House of Lords dismissed all their appeals on 17 December last year. Nearly a year has passed, yet the Home Secretary has failed to decide whether to deport them. He can hardly blame the state of current legislation when he cannot make decisions in a year.

The case of Rachid Ramda has already been mentioned. He was arrested in November 1995 at the request of the French authorities for the Metro bombings in the summer of that year in which many people were killed. He managed to drag out the time before the case reached the House of Lords until May 1999—nearly four years after he was arrested. He dropped his appeal, and it was up to the Home Secretary to decide whether to remove him. It took the Home Secretary 29 months—nearly two and a half years—to make a decision. It has been reviewed by the divisional court and is back in the Home Secretary's hands. Rachid Ramda has therefore been here for seven years.

I raised the matter with the Prime Minister and said that it was a scandal. He replied that it was the law's fault. That is partly true. I agree that the law provides for far too many appeals and stages of the process. Part 2 goes a long way towards tackling that. However, the problem is also due to the courts being incredibly dilatory. I do not know how judges can look at themselves in the mirror when terrorist offences occur around the world and they know the obstacles that they unnecessarily place in the way of justice. People are entitled to a fair hearing but not to drag out proceedings for seven years. The Home Secretary should not blame the law or the courts when he has been dilatory in exercising his functions.

The courts can deal with such matters quickly. For example, the Pinochet case was heard three times in 15 months in the House of Lords. It is possible to do things quickly if there is enough political pressure to do so.

I agree that we need new legislation. We need to reduce the number of appeals and have a faster procedure for countries whose judicial systems we trust and respect. However, part 1 removes almost all the protections that have been constructed over many years. They include dual criminality and the Home Secretary's final discretion. Provisions for prima facie evidence have already gone. Those matters have been at the heart of our extradition law for a long time. That does not mean that they are bad. It has taken a long time to build up those freedoms in this country. I do not know Labour Members' view of history before May 1997, but we have a history of constructing individual freedoms against the power of Governments. We should not discard them lightly, as the Bill does.

I want to consider part 1, to which I have the greatest objections. The list of offences is vague. A law graduate who worked for the parliamentary draftsman and produced the list as proposed legislation would not survive the probation period. It is so vague that it defines nothing that would pass muster in our law. For example, what does participation in a criminal organisation mean? What is computer-related crime? The categories are too vague and too wide and are unacceptable.

It is our job to protect our subjects' liberties unless a process of law deprives them of it; the Extradition Bill provides for such a process. Unless the offences and the process are clear, we do not honour our obligation. It is wrong simply to refer to the framework decision to justify such vague offences. Most of them exist in our law, and we could define them adequately. We could define racial hatred, although xenophobia does not exist. Some computer-related crimes are offences in our law. We should define them and let our citizens know when they are in danger. We should have clear law, not a vague list of offences that is imported from a framework directive.

Dr. Palmer: The choice is between listing categories of offence and individual offences. The hon. Gentleman implies that we should list every offence that might apply so that people know exactly where they stand. Does he not agree that the problem is that although we have a definition of racial hatred, it may be slightly different from, for example, that in Portugal? Does he suggest that we assemble a list of all possible crimes in every European Union country to which we might be prepared to apply the Bill?

Mr. Maples: The Bill removes the defence of dual criminality. If it continued to exist, I would not have a problem because the person whose extradition was sought could use the defence that the action was not criminal in both jurisdictions. However, that defence will no longer be available, so I believe that we should define the crimes more closely and carefully.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it would be helpful, for example, on racism and xenophobia, if the draft framework decision, which we recently considered in the European Scrutiny Committee, at least made it clear that

"an offence was not committed unless the behaviour is threatening, abusive or insulting and is carried out with the intention of stirring up racial hatred, or is likely to do so"?

Mr. Maples: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. Of course, the problem would not exist if the defence of dual criminality remained. However, I am amazed that Ministers allowed the directive to appear in that form, with incredibly vague wording. To that extent, I agree with the hon. Gentleman. If Ministers are determined to maintain a category of offence for which dual criminality is not available as a defence, it is incumbent on them to tighten the drafting.

European Union directives and regulations and the European Acts are worded vaguely. That is acceptable in many European jurisdictions, but it is not acceptable to us. We define matters tightly in law, and we should not make the Bill an exception, especially as the liberty of British subjects is at stake.

I should be happy with part 1 if dual criminality remained a defence. It is an absolutely fundamental protection in our extradition law, but the Bill removes it. It also removes the Home Secretary's final discretion about whether to extradite someone. At least a British subject has someone—the Home Secretary—who is accountable to a democratically elected Parliament for his final decision. As I said earlier, we have already dropped the requirement for prima facie evidence.

Where will we extradite people? I do not have problems with France, although the divisional court in the Ramda case does. I do not have problems with most European jurisdictions, but that does not apply to them all. Has any hon. Member not had a constituent languishing in a Spanish jail for months awaiting charge and trial? Let us consider the recent case of the plane spotters in Greece. The point was made that if they had returned from their holiday, the photographs had subsequently appeared and they had been charged under the Greek terrorism Act, they would have been on the plane to Greece, with no defence. The hon. Member for Wrexham would have found it difficult to explain to his constituents, whose will he believes he is doing, if someone's son, daughter, father, mother, husband or wife was on the plane without a sniff of a defence that they had committed no offence in British law and no facts had been established.

Ian Lucas: Were not the Greek plane spotters acquitted?

Mr. Maples: After an extremely long time and a ridiculous, farcical procedure. I pray the case in aid as an example of a jurisdiction the equality of whose justice with ours I do not accept. I am prepared to accept that of France, Germany, Sweden or the United States. However, that does not apply to all the countries, and I have cited two examples.

The Bill will apply not only to existing but to new members of the European Union. Twelve years ago, some were communist countries and they have no tradition of impartial and independent judges. Their tradition is heavily politically motivated. Turkey may become a member of the European Union. There are so many awful stories about the administration of Turkish justice to foreign citizens that we would have serious difficulties if the Bill applied to Turkey.

The European convention on human rights is not adequate protection. We should include a requirement for minimum standards in the Bill. The Government clearly recognise the problem because two clauses deal with extraneous considerations. One appeared in a previous draft and the other did not. Their inclusion suggests that the Government accept the possibility of a category 1 jurisdiction seeking to pursue someone on the grounds of race, religion, nationality or political opinion. The incorporation of a human rights provision in clause 21 adds protection. The Government therefore appear to accept that that is necessary and that the jurisdictions are not perfect.

The other offences that the Bill covers at least require dual criminality to be proved. That makes them reasonably acceptable. I do not have great problems with category 2 because prima facie evidence is required in most cases, but it can be waived if the Government identify specific countries for which it is not required. Again, however, the Home Secretary's ultimate protection is very limited.

Under clause 193, the Home Secretary's discretion to disallow someone's extradition is severely curtailed. He would have to do it either in pursuance of statutory authority or in circumstances in which he had exempted the person from the possibility of prosecution. It would also have to be done in the interests of national security.

[Mr. Maples]

I would suggest that that does not go wide enough. We need to go further, and at least include the provision that someone should not be extradited if a serious miscarriage of justice were likely to occur, or if the national interest required it. The Home Secretary is the right person to make such decisions.

I want to identify a couple of other weaknesses in the Bill. In many continental jurisdictions an investigating magistrate is entitled to arrest people in the course of his investigation, to examine them as witnesses and to collect evidence. Under the Bill, if such a magistrate had signed an arrest warrant he would be able to arrest someone, who might not then be charged for a long time, if at all.

I am also concerned that, under subsections (4) to (6) of clause 63, there is a possibility of a British Minister's extradition being sought by a category 1 country for something that that country might define as a war crime. I shall return to this matter in Committee or on Report, or perhaps the Minister will be able to deal with it when he replies to this debate. In the Pinochet case, a Spanish magistrate issued a warrant for Pinochet's arrest for something that had not happened in Spain or the United Kingdom. In the very special circumstances of that case, he was not extradited. Although few of us had a lot of personal sympathy with General Pinochet, we should not allow that to colour the fact that there could be a very dangerous hole in the law.

Let us take a relevant example that might touch a nerve with the Government. Our bombing of Kosovo was almost certainly illegal under international law. It is impossible to find a serious international lawyer who thinks that it was not. It may have been the right thing to do, but it was certainly illegal. Greece was very sympathetic to the Serbs in that conflict. I would like to be assured that the Bill could not be used in similar circumstances to those of the Pinochet case by, for example, a Greek magistrate bringing a prosecution against a British Minister for their action in connection with the Kosovo conflict, or to prosecute a Minister in the then Conservative Government over their action in the Falklands, as it could be argued that one or two things done there were outside the remit of international law. Ministers are responsible to the House for their actions, and I would like an assurance that that could not happen.

We have seen the consequence of this with the plane spotters, and the provisions could have all sorts of other hypothetical consequences. A British citizen could be investigated on the say-so of an investigating magistrate for a vaguely defined offence that was not an offence in the United Kingdom, with no prima facie case having been established, and no democratic accountability. That person could languish in a foreign jail for a long time without being charged, let alone tried. That is unacceptable, which is why I shall vote against part 1. I do not understand how anyone could vote for it.

I would like to suggest some possible amendments. First, the rule covering dual criminality should be retained in all cases. There should be no distinction between offences in the framework decision and offences outside it.

Dr. Palmer: I would like to ask the hon. Gentleman the same question as I asked the hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway). Does he believe that, if someone commits an offence in Britain that is not an offence in his home country, that should be a sufficient defence?

Mr. Maples: Yes, I do, because I want that protection for our citizens. It is our job to protect the liberty of our citizens, and if the price to pay for that is that someone who commits an offence here goes back to Germany, Spain, Greece or wherever and cannot be extradited for that reason, I absolutely accept that. It is unlikely to occur in what we would consider to be very serious cases, such as crimes of violence, armed robbery, murder, or terrorism. It is likely to involve only trivial cases involving dealing in some of the less important kinds of drugs, for example, or photographing military aircraft in Greece. I do not think that the security of our country or the integrity of its criminal justice system will fall because of this issue.

Gareth Thomas: I am intrigued that the hon. Gentleman has referred to possible amendments. To what extent does he envisage that there should be an exact correspondence between these offences in different jurisdictions? Does he also feel that his overriding view in favour of streamlining the present system is consistent with his views on the dual criminality issue?

Mr. Maples: Yes, I do, because I have said that I would be perfectly happy if part 1 required dual criminality for both sets of offences—those in the framework document and those outside it. It is required for those outside it. If it were required for those within it, there would not be a problem. As to whether my amendments are consistent with the obligations to the European Union that we have undertaken, the answer is that I do not know. Clearly some exemptions are consistent, because the Government have already put them into the Bill, including those relating to extraneous considerations, human rights and one or two other things. Those are clearly acceptable. If my proposals are not consistent with those obligations, I hope that it will be the will of the House that the Government should go back and renegotiate, because what they have negotiated is absolutely unacceptable.

I shall continue through my list of possible amendments. If we cannot reintroduce dual criminality for everything, it would be right to adopt the amendment suggested by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, which proposed that a judge should certify that the case would not pass the dual criminality test, and that the Home Secretary should then take the final decision on it. I also agree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) and his Committee that we should not lower the standard in this regard from three years to 12 months. I do not know why we have chosen to introduce a lower standard. The framework decision requires a maximum sentence of at least three years, and I cannot think why we have reduced it to 12 months.

The Home Secretary should have wider discretion under clause 193 than he has, and it should relate to questions of national interest, rather than national security. Category 1 offences should be confined not only to European Union countries but to those of whose judicial systems we in the House have specifically

approved. There should be minimum standards, and, under the Bill, a minimum guarantee that, if someone is extradited to another country, they should be charged within a certain time—a few weeks—and tried within a few months. If that does not happen, they should be returned.

The Bill is just another example of the long list of freedoms with which the Government have become very careless. These freedoms are long held and hard won, and they are very valuable to the citizens of this country. Our history over the last 500 years has involved the acquisition by individuals of freedoms that used to be held in the power of the state. The Government are reversing that process in the interest of getting a few more convictions. Jury trial is being seriously circumscribed, and the presumption of innocence dramatically reduced in some cases. The burden of proof is being shifted in some cases, the admissibility of previous convictions is now being considered, and the double jeopardy rule is to change. All those provisions are being compromised. They are fundamental principles of our criminal law and of our rights and freedoms as British citizens, and the Government are getting very careless with them.

In some ways, the Extradition Bill represents the worst of all the proposed changes. At least in the other cases a British court and judge would try a person—often with a jury—in their own country and in a language that they understood. If a person is extradited, none of those things will apply. They will probably not understand the language, the law will not be familiar, and it will operate in a system that they do not understand and in which they may not have much confidence. In some ways, therefore, these freedoms are the worst ones to erode.

It seems that just about every Labour Member who has spoken—and who has thought about this—shares some, if not all, of my reservations. I hope, therefore, that there can be cross-party consensus and that we can collectively make the Government think again about this Bill. I want to know how Government supporters who do not vote against the Bill will explain—as I know I could not—to a constituent why their mother, father, son, daughter, husband or wife has been extradited under this procedure, as one of those plane spotters might have been, and is languishing in a foreign jail awaiting trial, as constituents of mine have done in Spanish jails.

7.08 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I would like to apologise to the Front-Bench speakers for the fact that, owing to Committee work, I was unable to attend the early part of the debate. I apologise to the House more generally if I inadvertently duplicate any points that have already been made.

As a starting point, we need to stress that the current position is not satisfactory. We are not living in an ideal world in which extradition works perfectly, in which wrongdoers are invariably returned to the country in which they committed an offence, or in which we can sit back and feel that we must not disturb this idyll because any change would be a change for the worse.

Now, when we attempt to extradite someone who has committed or is alleged to have committed a crime in another country, it normally takes us about 18 months and costs the taxpayer £125,000. It is reasonable to ask whether that process is necessary for the exercise of fairness and justice. None of us wants justice to be accelerated to the extent that people are sent back under some sort of summary decision and then treated cruelly and unjustly in another country, but most people who have had anything to do with extradition accept that the current process is abnormally cumbersome.

Conversely, when we attempt to extradite people in other countries who we believe have committed crimes in Britain, the process usually takes at least a year, and quite often we fail to get the necessary extradition order, especially when financial crime is involved. That, too, strikes most people as unfair—that a person who lives in Britain and commits a crime will, we hope, be brought to court and so to justice, but if, before the crime is detected, the person escapes to the Côte d'Azur or some other location within the European Union, he will have a sporting chance of not being returned for a long time, and perhaps not at all. Most people would agree that that does not seem a sensible way in which to proceed.

Some argue for what one might describe as the lowest common denominator of European offences. They say that they would be willing to apply a more rapid extradition process, but only where dual criminality applies, which is to say that the offence allegedly committed in another country is also an offence in Britain. The effect, if all those bilateral decisions were applied, would be that the only international extradition network that functioned efficiently would be in respect of crimes that were crimes throughout the EU.

Some go yet further and argue for the application of what one might describe as the British common denominator. The hon. Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway), who is no longer in his place, argued that we should protect British citizens who return to Britain from overseas from having foreign laws applied to them, but we should be able to apply British law to people who come to Britain, after they have returned to their own country and even if their own law exempts them. I may have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman, but if I have represented his argument correctly, I have to say that such a one-sided position is not sustainable in any serious EU discussion.

I respect the different position held by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples). He courageously accepts that sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander and that if we say that we will not allow a British person to be extradited for a crime that is not a crime under the British code, we will accept the reverse. He suggested that that would apply only in relatively trivial cases, but I would like to give a couple of concrete examples of the type of case that we are discussing, because I feel that our debate has been conducted in a vacuum, whereby we discuss everything in principle.

My understanding is that, in Spain, the age of consent is 12. Sexual intercourse with a 12-year-old in Spain is legal, whereas in Britain it is an act of serious sexual abuse. If someone from Spain visited Britain and had sexual intercourse with a 12-year-old and it was detected the day after he returned to Spain, I suspect that the hon. Gentleman would feel that it should not be a sufficient defence for that man to say that, in Spain, what he did

[Dr. Nick Palmer]

would have been legal. Even if the hon. Gentleman does not wish to intervene on that point, he might like to reflect on it.

Conversely, in Germany, for historical reasons with which we are all familiar, it is illegal to claim that the holocaust—the slaughter of millions of Jews and other people—never took place. It is illegal to do so because it is seen as giving aid and comfort to neo-Nazi groups who might want to revive past horrors. In Britain, because it has never been such a major issue, it is not illegal so to do. Anyone can go out on the street, grab people by the sleeve, and try to persuade them that the holocaust never happened. People would think it disgusting, but it would be legal. A couple of years ago, a well-known Englishman went to Germany, where he supported an extreme right-wing group which, among other things, claimed that the holocaust either did not happen or was grossly exaggerated. He then returned to Britain. Under German law, he had committed an offence. Under British law, he had not.

If we deny the European arrest warrant, we are saying that neither the Spanish paedophile under British law, nor the extreme right-wing English historian under German law, should be prosecuted. Are we saying that? No, we are not. We are saying that we should not prosecute them if they happen to have crossed the border. We accept, and have always accepted, that if people commit an offence in a country that they are visiting, that country has a right to prosecute them. The only question at issue is whether the country still has the right to prosecute if the person who commits the offence crosses the border before the offence is noticed. That is the apparently holy principle to which hon. Members refer when they say that we have had 500 years of liberty and so on: the issue is not whether one can be prosecuted for an offence in another country, but whether we allow people to escape by crossing a border.

Various suggestions have been made on how we might make exceptions to a dual criminality rule. The Home Affairs Committee suggested that a district judge should examine such cases, and if he or she determined that the crime in question was not covered by the British criminal code, the case should be referred to the Home Secretary. We all like to make life difficult for the Home Secretary—it is almost a national sport—but what is the Home Secretary supposed to do? Under the European Council's decision, he is compelled to decide that extradition is possible if the case comes under one of the listed categories, so in fact we are building in one of the notorious delays which, as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon rightly said, are an unpleasant characteristic of the current system. We have someone who is accused of a crime that in another country is considered a serious matter, and everybody knows that he has to be sent back sooner or later, but we build in a clause that states that first his case must go to the Home Secretary, the Home Secretary has to think about it, and then say yes. That is not an advance. It imposes not an additional freedom, but additional delay.

There is a tendency among defenders of liberty, whom I respect, to use delay as a defence of liberty. That is undesirable in principle. The idea that justice should be speedy is not wrong in itself, but we should impose delays only where that improves the quality of justice, rather than as a token extra step.

I am sorry if the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon feels that I am getting at him, but I want to respond to what he said in his interesting speech. Another point—others made it by implication, without being as clear as he was—is that if we are to have exemptions from dual criminality, they should be specific. We should have a list of well defined offences so that we all know where we stand. The hon. Gentleman will correct me if I have misrepresented him, but I think that that is his position.

I am not sure how many serious criminal offences—"serious" as defined in the Bill—exist in the British code, and in the French, German and other codes; but there are a great many. There are, for instance, a number of possible crimes under the heading "Sexual abuse of children". I think most reasonable people would agree that we should not introduce a lot of legal hurdles in such cases, but should allow extradition even if the definition is not precisely the same in our country. In those circumstances, we would have to replace the broad category with a list of all the offences that we were prepared to accept. We would have to get the Home Office to inspect the Portuguese criminal code, offence by offence, saying, "Yes, we will accept that one," or "No, we will not accept that one."

It would be the exception rather than the rule if the definition of the offences were identical in every EU country. If we are saying that not just categories but individual offences must be identified, we are giving our law-makers a momentous, mammoth, gargantuan task.

Annabelle Ewing: Some offences on the list simply do not exist in Scotland—sabotage, for example. Some definitional guidelines would give sheriffs an idea of what criminal conduct was being discussed.

Dr. Palmer: It would be a good idea for the hon. Lady to look up the definition before visiting a country where sabotage is a criminal offence, if she was thinking of doing something that could reasonably be construed as sabotage. I remember when those applying for a visa before going to America had to sign a form saying that they were not planning to engage in terrorist activities. Currently, if the hon. Lady commits an act in Italy that constitutes sabotage according to the Italian code, she can be arrested and sent to prison for years. We are merely discussing whether, if she got out of Italy before she was caught—I hope she will forgive me for referring to her directly—that would allow her an exemption.

The hon. Lady implies that we will all be able to travel freely until the Bill becomes law, and that we need not know what constitutes sabotage in foreign jurisdictions because it will not apply to us. That is not true. It will apply to us; indeed, it applies to us now. The only question is whether we can extradite people for it if they come back to this country.

I think Members may agree, if they think further, that it is not practicable to descend to the level of the individual offence. They might be on slightly firmer ground if they suggested that the categories of offence should be recognised more in Britain.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My hon. Friend will surely realise that while the offences in the framework document are

generic offences, and such crimes are covered for the very reasons he has been giving—problems would be involved in doing anything else—when a Scottish judicial authority frames a warrant it will frame it in Scottish law. The offence will be very clear in Scottish law. It will meet the requirement in the framework document and the minimum sentencing requirement. When a warrant is received from a Danish or French judicial authority, the offence will again be spelled out clearly in Danish or French law. There will be no dubiety about the fact that an offence has been committed in one of those jurisdictions.

Dr. Palmer: That is a good point. We should not give the impression that people will be extradited on the basis of a vague warrant that says, "We think he carried out some sabotage"; the warrant will be very specific.

Annabelle Ewing: The sheriff will not know what it means.

Dr. Palmer: At the risk of repeating myself, let me say that the hon. Lady will need to know what it means; otherwise she will be at risk when she travels today, regardless of the Bill.

Annabelle Ewing: Perhaps I did not make myself clear enough. It is of no concern to me whether an individual like me is aware of the criminal code in each EU state. The key point I was trying to make is that the court in Scotland would have to have an idea of what criminal conduct was being discussed. The Minister's response did not deal with that. Sabotage, for example, does not exist in Scots criminal law. With no guidelines on what is encompassed in that category, the sheriff—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Lady must be more concise in an intervention.

Dr. Palmer: I take the hon. Lady's point, but I think she is trying to smuggle in the idea that the Scottish, or the English, courts would have a second bite at the cherry and make an assessment of whether the crime had actually taken place. I think we must accept, when we are talking about extradition, that people are not tried at both ends. They are tried in the courts at the other end, under the law as defined at the other end.

What we are discussing is whether there are certain categories of offence that are so serious that they warrant going beyond the principle of the lowest common denominator—whether, even if we accept that the law differs slightly from country to country, it is reasonable for the country against which such offences have been committed to ask for the extradition of the suspect. As most Members have accepted, this is very much a dual facility: either we get it for ourselves, or no one gets it. If we are fanatical and say that we will not extradite anyone unless they have clearly committed a crime that is also a crime in Britain, we are accepting that the Spanish paedophile and everyone else who commits a crime in Britain that is not a crime at home can escape scot free. I question whether our constituents wish us to do that.

Several Members cited the plane spotters in Greece, asking how, if a constituent was one of them, we could justify the Greeks' entitlement to try them for the alleged offence. I think we would be on uneasy territory if we started discussing each individual case, but few Members would claim not to be able to find an example of a British court case with peculiar features, causing most to wonder why it had been brought. They say that hard cases make bad law. As most people would accept, we should not base the entire principle of mutual extradition within the European Union on the specific case of an unreasonable prosecution of a plane-spotter in Greece. If we do, we will be saying that if any country in the European Union sometimes brings a prosecution that we think unreasonable, as happens every month, if not every week, in Britain, we will not accept the principle of mutual extradition.

What is more, it is less purist than that. People say that they accept the principle of mutual extradition but that they want it to take a long time: they want it to cost £125,000, to take 18 months, to clog up our courts, to go to higher courts, to the Court of Appeal, to the House of Lords and to the Home Secretary. It is so important to them that we preserve the distinction and protect the rights of the Spanish paedophile and the English right-wing historian that they are willing to accept that as the price.

I doubt whether the average constituent who is not involved in a specific case would agree with that. Constituents who are involved in a specific case will always feel strongly that it is an outrage and should not happen. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) is pointing at his watch. I do not know whether he has an urgent engagement but I have not noticed a great flood of Conservative Members seeking to speak. When they flood in, I shall take care to give them adequate time.

I raise some specific issues. I raised this one in European Standing Committee B: the impact of the internet on the entire process. Clause 63(2) on page 30 refers to the alleged crime occurring in a category 1 territory. If the offence is committed in Germany, as we have discussed, dual criminality may not be a necessary condition.

Let us say that I set up a website written in the German language, marketed for readers in Germany and run through an internet server in Britain, and that I never set foot in Germany. Will I be liable under clause 63(2) because the offence has been committed in a category 1 territory, namely Germany? The question is: is it my location, or the location of the supposed victim, the person who is forced to read, let us say, neo-Nazi propaganda, which would be illegal in Germany?

What would happen if I went to Germany and urged people to look at the website—if I did not when in Germany promote neo-Nazi views but encouraged people there to read my website? What if I gave interviews to the German media and said, "I have a website full of interesting things about Germany, and I urge you to read it," and then travelled back to Britain? Would I have committed an offence under German law? Would I have committed an offence on German territory? If I did not travel to Germany but placed an advertisement in the German media, would any offence have occurred in a category 1 territory?

The Minister may feel that I am making a fine point, but it is the sort of thing that will come up more and more as the internet becomes our main source of

[Dr. Palmer]

information. The entire category of crimes that consists of making inflammatory statements that are illegal in a number of countries will become the subject of intense legislative debate, and it would be helpful if the Minister at some stage during the proceedings on the Bill were to address that issue.

I do not wish to prevent all the Conservative Members who wish to speak from getting in, so I will bring my remarks gradually to a close. As has been pointed out, the opposition to this entire Bill is based on the underlying assumption that other courts cannot be trusted as much as ours. I do not say all other courts; I say some other courts.

We must make a decision. We must decide whether we are prepared to have a common legal framework for serious crimes to the extent that we will trust each other to prosecute them. If we are not prepared to have that common trust, we will be saying that people can be war criminals, or sex offenders, that they can commit a wide range of serious offences, and that if they slip through the net of the current system, we will accept it because we do not trust the Greeks—look at the plane spotters. It is not reasonable.

Angus Robertson: The Birmingham Six.

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman points to the Birmingham Six as an example. Every country has examples of miscarriages of justices. That is not a reason not to prosecute. It is a reason to prosecute carefully. Either we accept that the other countries are worthy of respect in this case, or we do not.

Those hon. Members who say that we should not respect the other countries' courts are often the hon. Members who do not respect other aspects of the other countries in the European Union, who say that they cannot be trusted to follow the rules of the European Union, and who say that they wonder whether we should be members of the European Union at all, given that the others are so unreliable.

Angus Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that many hon. Members may agree with the sentiments that he has expressed but will not be prepared to vote for a Bill that does not have what we consider adequate safeguards?

Dr. Palmer: I accept that. I am not claiming that anyone who disagrees is a Europhobe. I am saying that there is a tendency here: that some hon. Members are opposed to the Bill because they instinctively mistrust a number of foreign jurisdictions; and that that reflects a wider mistrust of foreign communities in general. That is an area where the Government have made a difference compared with previous Governments. When we say that we are willing to engage with Europe, we mean that we are willing to discuss with our European partners what a reasonable joint basis is and to proceed on the basis of mutual trust. Sometimes it may go wrong. Sometimes—often, I believe—it will produce more justice than we have at the moment. On that basis, I commend the Bill to the House.

7.38 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer). I congratulate him on speaking for more than half an hour. I oppose the European extradition warrant because it is a bad law founded on a good principle that has been wildly misapplied by our masters in the European Union who have agreed the warrant. That is the principle, to which the Minister alluded, of mutual recognition.

Fans and amateurs of the European Union, such as me and the hon. Member for Broxtowe, who spoke at such great length, know that the principle of mutual recognition has brought many benefits to the people of the European Community. The principle arose from a famous case—the Cassis de Dijon case—and I hope that hon. Members who are waiting to speak will forgive me for briefly reminding those who have forgotten about it.

In Dijon, a vendor of Cassis de Dijon, a substance used to transform Kir into Kir Royale, had difficulties selling his product to Germany, and he went all the way to the European Court of Justice, which is the supreme judicial body on our continent for the European Union. It decided that what was good for Dijon should be good for Germany, and that there should be a principle of mutual recognition of standards.

From that, of course, flowed all the benefits of the single market. For example, Labour Members could, if they so chose—I hope that, in due course, they will—take up alternative careers as dentists in Belgium or taxi drivers in Greece. That is the triumph of the single market, which was of course promulgated and pushed forward by great Europeans such as Lord Cockfield and Mrs. Thatcher.

It must be said that that principle cannot be universally and successfully applied. Hon. Members who have travelled to the continent will know that, in spite of 30 years of EU membership and working away solidly at the principle of mutual recognition, it is not yet possible to plug in one's toaster in France—should one bring it from Britain—and nor is it possible to use a British video recorder. Another example of the failure of the principle of mutual recognition can be found in road safety. It would be unwise if the European Union were to apply the principle to driving on the left-hand side of the road. It would lead to many fatal accidents if Ministers were to turn up in France and try to drive on the right. The principle of mutual recognition cannot be excessively applied because it does not cohere with what happens in the real world.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The hon. Gentleman touches on a real point, which I should have thought was an advertisement for the principle of mutual recognition. He is right that we cannot have a European system of law that applies to the rule of the road, because some drive on the right and others on the left. However, surely we can have mutual recognition so that, when somebody is accused of dangerous driving and potentially killing someone in France, that penalty can be taken into consideration in Britain so that they are not liable to do the same thing here. Surely the hon.

Gentleman accepts that such mutual recognition protects our citizens, as well as those of the rest of the European Union.

Mr. Johnson: The Minister is groping towards the essence of the problem, which is that mutual recognition can only go so far. It does not work in the sphere of road traffic, because trying to drive on the left-hand side of the road in France would prove catastrophic, and it does not work in the criminal justice system. It is eccentric, dangerous and profoundly undemocratic to apply that principle to this very delicate area of law. There is simply no reason to do it. The only possible outcome of abolishing the principle of dual criminality is the creation of a single legal regime that does not have the sanction and authority of this House. It is particularly worrying- -

Dr. Palmer: Does the hon. Gentleman suggest that it should be a defence for a Frenchman who drives on the right in Britain to say that in France, it would be legal to do so?

Mr. Johnson: The hon. Gentleman's point is so frivolous as to not be worth answering. It is perfectly obvious that mutual recognition is not applicable in the sphere of driving or in the criminal justice system. As he himself said, very different approaches to the law exist. It is particularly worrying that British citizens could face immediate and unchallengeable extradition for offences that may carry as little as 12 months' imprisonment in the extraditing country.

The problem is not just that the list of 32 offences is inchoate and vague but that this House has had no say in the drawing up of the laws that fall under those categories. As has been said repeatedly, it is therefore possible for a British citizen to be extradited for conduct that has not been criminalised in this country. Worst of all, it is particularly intolerable that this House will have no control over any future legislation that may fall under any of these vague categories, and which may be drawn up by any member state in any contracting country.

I shall not delay the House with examples of cases where our law does not criminalise activities illegal in other countries. The point about the plane spotters has already been well made. I thought it generous of the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety to concede in advance that, under this EU extradition warrant, those people would have been sent back to Greece immediately, had they been in Britain. That rather kicked the legs out from under his position, and it infused the contributions of most Labour Back Benchers, with the exception of the hon. Member for Broxtowe. The point about xenophobia has also already been well made.

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Johnson: I give way with pleasure to the Minister. Perhaps he is going to retract what the previous Minister said.

Mr. Ainsworth: I am not going to retract what my right hon. Friend said. First, the Greek plane spotters case was not an extradition case, but had it been so, potentially it would be extraditable now. The charge was espionage, and no ability exists to question on a prima facie basis whether or not such an extradition would be carried out. The European arrest warrant would not materially change that situation. Those people could be extradited now, under law passed by the hon. Gentleman's own Government some 10 years ago.

Mr. Johnson: I understand the position, and I am grateful to the Minister for trying to save his right hon. Friend from the very difficult position in which he put the Government. However, I think that he will find that, under the current dispensation, it remains at least within the power of the Home Secretary to vary such a decision by not extraditing on the spur of the moment—as this EU extradition warrant envisages—a bunch of poor tourists who fall foul of the Greek authorities.

I shall not labour the point, but I want to make one other that occurred to me during the debate. It relates to a particular category of difficulty that many Members will have noticed in their postbags: the different approaches in EU countries to the law of custody of children. I can well imagine that Germany, for instance, might take a very different view of what constitutes illegal restraint—as it is described in the 32 new categories—from that taken by our courts. British mothers of children with a German father who brought those children to England might well fall foul of the German courts, and could be extradited to Germany for something that is not a crime in this country. I mention that as merely one example of the dangers inherent in the abolition of the principle of dual criminality, and of the establishment of mutual recognition of criminal law.

What is the benefit of the proposed change? The Government have proposed only one serious benefit: once in a blue moon, it might be possible to snare a tax avoider who absconded to Luxembourg. More or less, that was the only good argument that I heard. That is a pitiful and petty objective. If that is all that we hope to achieve by giving away the legal certainty of people in this country, that is a shameful thing. It is wrong to do away with the principle that the criminal laws by which people in this country can be held to account should at least be consistent with the laws passed by the Parliament of this country. If Ministers want a law against xenophobia, they are perfectly entitled to draw one up and bring it to Parliament to see whether we will pass it but that cannot happen without the approval of Parliament.

I was interested in the remarks of the hon. Member for Broxtowe about paedophilia, although I thought that he elided his example. Consenting sexual relations in Spain became, in his mind, paedophilia. If the Spanish want to change the law on consenting sexual relations and to raise the age of consent, that is a matter for them and not for this House.

Dr. Palmer: In contrast to my previous intervention, I want to make a serious point. It seems to me that it is a matter of serious concern in Britain if visitors from another country believe that they can safely have sexual relations with children aged 12 because it is legal in their

[Dr. Palmer]

country. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would believe that to be of interest not only to the Spanish Parliament.

Mr. Johnson: If the hon. Gentleman accurately represents the position in Spain—I have no independent knowledge of it and should be grateful for elucidation afterwards—he has a fair point. In that respect, what takes place in Spain is clearly a matter of interest to us. However, to do away with the legal certainty of people in this country that they will be governed exclusively by the laws of this country, passed in this House, for the sake of the elusive prize of capturing one so-called paedophile or someone who has sexual relations with a person aged 12 and over is, I think, very wrong.

It is plain what needs to be done. We need to insist on the principle of dual criminality or to do as the Home Affairs Committee has suggested and Members on both sides of the House have proposed: we should leave it to the power of the district judge. If he decides that dual criminality does not apply in a particular case, he will give the case to the Home Secretary to decide whether the extradition may go ahead. That at least would provide the procedure with the fig leaf of democratic accountability—anything else would undermine confidence in justice and in our democratic system.

7.52 pm

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): This has been an interesting debate. Opposition and Labour Members have ventilated some important principles and issues. However, although Conservative Front Benchers have a principled objection to part 1, one cannot help feeling that much of the heat generated by the Opposition is informed by plain anti-Europeanism or Euroscepticism. Having said that, I welcome the Bill but have reservations about its practicalities. I was impressed by the report of the Home Affairs Committee and the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

I agree with the Government that reform of the law of extradition is necessary and overdue. Current procedures are too slow and expensive, and ineffective in dealing with the growing phenomenon of organised crime that knows no international boundaries. The current system does a disservice to many victims. I agree with my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety that, when it takes six or seven years to conclude extradition proceedings and the process can be punctuated by no fewer than seven different forms of appeal, something is clearly wrong. That surely is an illustration of the axiom that justice delayed is justice denied.

There is something of a tension as far as the objectives behind the legislation are concerned. One can accept that there is increasing co-operation between the member states of the European Union. We know that the Government have subscribed to the aim of establishing an area of freedom, security and justice. That is an extension of the single market, and that requires mutual recognition, as the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) said so eloquently and humorously. However, it is not always possible to achieve mutual recognition. Business in this country—particularly the professions—finds it frustrating that our European friends do not recognise our professional qualifications and often do not give the reciprocity necessary to establish a single market. However, there is a need for judicial co-operation if that single market is to be established in terms of recognising civil judgments and civil legal procedures.

In criminal justice, if we are to create a European Union in which there is freedom of movement, security and justice for all our citizens, we need to trust our European Union partners. I speak as someone who is by no means a Euro-enthusiast when I say that I recognise that there needs to be greater judicial co-operation and an extension of trust by this country when dealing with extradition requests from other EU member states.

If a Government are concerned, as this Government are, to expedite the long-winded and cumbersome extradition procedures, it is necessary for us not blithely to abandon caution but to extend a fair degree of trust to those mature democracies that we feel have a system of justice that can more or less be trusted. That is why I think that the Bill's structure, in so far as it draws a distinction between category 1 and 2 countries, is justified. We know that the so-called fast-track procedure involving the European arrest warrant will apply to category 1 countries.

The removal of protections that hitherto existed, however, is quite a draconian step. If countries can avail themselves of the fast-track procedure, there needs to be a reasonable degree of parliamentary scrutiny of which countries should be included in category 1. Although I welcome the Bill as a whole, I agree that the Home Affairs Committee recommendation on that point is particularly compelling. The Committee concluded that it was wrong for the Government to be able to add non-EU countries to category 1, thus enabling them to benefit from fast-track procedures, without there being appropriate parliamentary scrutiny. Will the Minister confirm whether the measure will leave it open for the Government, as a discretionary matter and without adequate scrutiny from the House, to add other countries to category 1?

It is important to stress that if trust between countries is to be the basis for extending a fast-track approach to category 1 offences, Parliament should have the right to test the Government's view that it is right to extend that privilege to other countries. Trust is a byword, however; if we are to have good and practical relations with our European neighbours, there must be an expedited procedure.

I have some support for the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South about dual criminality. Hon. Members will recall that he argued for the necessity of some political process to ensure that a district judge could express a view that dual criminality did not exist—in other words, that the offence that was the subject of the warrant might exist in the country where the warrant was issued but did not exist in the UK.

As I understood my hon. Friend's argument, he envisaged a situation in which a district judge could make a declaration that dual criminality did not exist. In those circumstances, the Home Secretary—accountable

to Parliament as he is—could make a separate decision on whether extradition was appropriate. In that sense, parliamentary scrutiny would be brought to bear on the case and that would give an important safeguard.

However, there is a false element in that argument. I tend to the view that if we are serious about trusting countries admitted to category 1 status, we have to accept that they are a job lot—to put it crudely. Having accepted the principle that there should be fast-track procedures for mature democracies, which have robust judicial systems that provide safeguards for individuals and which adhere to the European convention on human rights, we cannot gainsay that and embark on a minute assessment of their criminal law systems.

One has thus to accept the logic of the Government's position—although hon. Members may be right to express some reservations about how it would work in practice. There is room for abuse. The provisions could be a blank cheque. What may be appropriate at present may not be in years to come. We cannot guarantee that laws passed by our EU partners will meet our expectations as regards conformity with human rights standards in the future.

The provisions may give rise to some tension. I shall be interested to hear the Minister's broad response to my points. If one is to take the route proposed in the measure, one cannot complicate matters by creating a situation that brings about the very mischief of delay and expense that the Bill is intended to address.

Hon. Members who suggest that there are dangers in doing away with dual criminality may be overstating the case. As I understand it, English common law never required that there should be an exact correspondence between offences in the country to which extradition was required and those that could be heard before courts in England and Wales. English common law applies to Wales and some Labour Members who represent Welsh constituencies hope that primary legislative powers for Wales will remain in this place.

Extradition treaties between sovereign countries have been in existence since the time of the nation states of Greece and Sparta, as I am reminded by the learned author Michael Forde in his recent publication on extradition law. He makes the point that extradition is an extension of diplomacy because if nations are to have good relations with each another, they need to show respect for and trust of their respective judicial systems.

Michael Forde states:

"Undoubtedly there was some form of extradition in ancient Greece and also between the Italian city states. During the 18th century France had extradition arrangements with Spain, with Portugal and with Wurtemburg."

He notes that the "Jay" treaty of 1794, which marked the end of hostilities between the United States and Great Britain, made provision for extradition between Holland, the United States and Great Britain.

We have moved away from the use of extradition treaties to a more logical approach. To return to what I regard as the overstatement of Opposition Members' case on dual criminality, I refer to clause 10, which deals with the initial stage of the extradition hearing. It contains an important safeguard on which the Minister might care to comment. The clause states:

"This section applies if a person in respect of whom a Part 1 warrant"—

in other words, a fast-track procedure—

"is issued appears or is brought before the appropriate judge for the extradition hearing . . . The judge must decide whether the offence specified in the Part 1 warrant is an extradition offence."

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will correct me if I am wrong, but my understanding is that the clause imports an element of judicial discretion in interpreting the European arrest warrant. One accepts that the 32 categories of offence in the EU framework are generic and vague in certain respects, but there is a safeguard none the less. The judge is required to assess whether the warrant includes something that is an extradition offence.

There are some good points in the measure, but one can understand the reservations. We are taking our neighbours on trust and we are doing away with a legal and political tradition, but life moves on. Organised crime moves on. Society moves on. People are more mobile and we have to produce legislation that is consistent with our era. I believe that the Bill meets that requirement.

I shall refer to another point made by my hon. Friend the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, and there is something very compelling in it. It relates to what I and perhaps other hon. Members would regard as the Government's gold plating of that part of the EU framework decision that deals with dual criminality. To refresh hon. Members' memories, the European arrest warrant refers to 32 offences that do not require criminality in the country that seeks extradition to correspond with that in the country to which the warrant refers.

Page 11 if the Home Affairs Committee report states:

"As discussed in paragraph 16 above, article 2.2 of the framework decision provides that surrender of a suspect under a European Arrest Warrant will *not* be subject to the dual criminality requirement where the offence for which extradition is sought falls into the list of 32 offences",

to which copious reference has been made,

"and"—

this is an additional requirement—

"carries a maximum penalty of at least three years' imprisonment in the issuing state."

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: May I point out to my hon. Friend that this is not a case of gold plating? Although the requirement for dual criminality has been removed from offences on the generic list, a directly comparable offence will be found in the two jurisdictions in the overwhelming majority of such cases. By ending the requirement for dual criminality, we will prevent endless legal argument about whether there is an exact replica of the alleged criminality in another state. So to move from one year to three years would represent a considerable weakening of our current, long-standing extradition arrangements with our European partners.

Gareth Thomas: I understand what the Minister says, perhaps as well as his point about the inherent delay in the present system, where a nit-picking analysis of what is and what is not a criminal offence in one country or another can take place. However, with the greatest respect, my hon. Friend has not dealt with the fact that the Government have subscribed to the framework document, which refers to a three-year imprisonment

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threshold for the European arrest warrant to bite. Why do the Government therefore feel it necessary to go over and beyond that protection? The Home Affairs Committee was correct to say that that decision seemed somewhat extraordinary.

Mr. Ainsworth: The simple reason is that our current extradition law refers to 12 months, not three years, so we cannot possibly be gold plating the framework decision. That decision is drafted to encompass only far more serious crimes than our current, long-standing extradition arrangements carry.

Gareth Thomas: With the greatest respect, our current extradition law does not operate in the context of an all-embracing fast-track system, which will apply to category 1 offences. To create that sort of category is a drastic, but necessary step, although it should be counterbalanced by certain protections.

Mr. Burnett: Will the hon. Gentleman lead us on to the further protections that we may lose? Will he say a few words about speciality?

Gareth Thomas: I may get on to that subject, but I repeat that the Government should look again at lowering the threshold from three years to 12 months. I accept the Minister's comment that, as a matter of common sense, we have conventionally operated a 12-month limit because we think that offences that carry a sentence of no less than 12 months are probably sufficiently serious to justify the extradition process. However, we shall operate in different territory if the Bill becomes law and, with respect, my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South and others make a strong point when they say that, if we are to go down the route of the European framework, we should at least apply the protections that are in it and adhere to the three-year threshold.

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Gareth Thomas: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Cameron: I thought that the hon. Gentleman had finished.

Gareth Thomas: I was about to deal with the question of scrutiny as regards the categories of country that can take advantage of the fast-track procedure. Again, I ask the Minister to refer specifically to that issue because it leads on from my reservations. Yes, the new systems are required, but there must countervailing checks and balances. There is a case for Parliament having an opportunity to debate whether countries should be added to that list.

I shall conclude because other hon. Members may be anxious to catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I welcome the Bill—it is a recognition of changing times and realities—but it is capable of being improved, and I earnestly ask the Government to consider the points that I have made with a view to providing some countervailing checks and balances.

8.17 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): One of the great advantages of being called relatively low down the batting order is that many of the important points have already been made and one therefore has the luxury of being brief. I am sure that the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) excuses himself from not having made use of that luxury on the grounds that he was not present for the opening speeches, but I am afraid that that excuse is not available to the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas). How he managed to work the Spartans into this debate is a matter of great ingenuity. To be fair to him, his points were well made, although he took rather long in getting round to them.

My constituency is not inundated, as are some hon. Members' constituencies, by the problem of asylum seekers and refugees. In that respect, my constituency is well favoured, but asylum seekers have come to my surgeries—I can think of a couple of cases in the past year—in an attempt to enlist my support for their case. I openly admit that I have sat there with a certain amount of preconceived prejudice, and I have judged the implausibility of the case that is put before me. It is right and proper, therefore, that my prejudice should have nothing to do with the case, which will be properly determined by a tribunal that will examine the prima facie case.

What strikes me as extraordinary is that, while we are labouring under the huge number of asylum seekers and the system that attempts to be fair to them and give them a fair hearing, the Government are introducing a measure that will remove the proper procedures and throw people out of this kingdom to be dealt with by courts elsewhere. That is absolutely grotesque.

Mike Gapes: I fail to see the connection between asylum seekers and people being extradited for crimes. Is the hon. Gentleman implying that asylum seekers are somehow responsible for crimes?

Mr. Swayne: No, I was merely juxtaposing that with what I regard as the ridiculous nature of this measure. Clearly, I made a mistake in giving way to the hon. Gentleman.

Labour Members—and one Opposition Member—have displayed squeamishness throughout this debate, which was clearly unjustified. In expressing their support for this measure, they have said that it must not be applied wherever capital punishment might be the consequence of extradition. They are not being just to the arguments. When the Minister replied to my question about the case of the tourists who were plane spotting in Greece, he said that we cannot have citizens of our country travelling the world, breaking laws, and coming back here expecting to get away with impunity. Sauce for the goose, however, is sauce for the gander. If people are prepared to go to other parts of the world and break the law, surely they should have some mind of the penalty for those crimes. In trying to draw a distinction in respect of countries where capital punishment exists, hon. Members undermine the whole argument for the general principle that they have espoused.

The Minister went further in his reply and said that we cannot have people from this country going across Europe and breaking the law. He exhibited precisely the

same prejudice to which I admitted when listening to what I considered to be the implausible arguments of an asylum seeker explaining his case. One cannot make the presumption that people have gone abroad and broken the law—a proper procedure exists for courts in this country to decide whether the law has been broken. This measure attempts to do away with that, or to go further in doing away with it than we have already gone.

I now come to the heart of this abominable Bill.

Mr. Ainsworth: If a British driver were found guilty of dangerous driving in France, would that not be a matter of concern for people in this country? The hon. Gentleman appears to be saying that it is not a matter of concern, that we should concern ourselves only with dangerous driving that occurs in this country, and that whatever occurs abroad is nothing to do with us.

Mr. Swayne: The hon. Gentleman mistakes me, and it is my fault. I was speaking of the reply of the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety to my intervention. As the hon. Gentleman has raised the issue, however, I accept entirely that if there is a case to answer for a crime that is also a crime in this country, it is proper that extradition should take place. What I reject utterly is the proposal that we should extradite for crimes that do not exist in this country—clearly, the crime of dangerous driving does exist in this country, and I would have absolutely no objection to such an extradition when a prima facie case was made.

I return to the rotten heart of this Bill. The reality is that we are elected to this legislature to determine the laws of this country—what constitutes criminal behaviour, and for what offences our constituents should be sent to prison or extradited. The Bill takes that decision from this legislature and hands it to the Council of Ministers, who will decide for what crimes people will be extradited from this country.

Angus Robertson: I would like to raise a point that has not reared its head in the debate so far. In relation to decisions being made in the Council of Ministers, has the hon. Gentleman considered the fact that the Scottish Minister for Justice, a Liberal Democrat, has managed to miss 15 of the last 19 Council of Ministers meetings? What kind of guarantee is that in terms of the guarantees of Scots law?

Mr. Swayne: I assure the hon. Gentleman that nothing would surprise me about the indolence and incompetence of such a Minister, particularly one from that party.

Matters that are properly for this House to decide are being taken from it and given to somebody else. No self-respecting legislature or free Parliament should vote for such a measure.

8.26 pm

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): I am generally supportive of this Bill, but it needs careful and close scrutiny, which I hope will happen in Committee. I hope that the Government will have an open mind to some of the changes that are proposed, and will be prepared to accept some of them.

When Bills that have connections with other countries come before the House, the security services often get involved, and they seem to have too much influence in comparison to the civil liberties lobby. I know that what they have to say must be taken seriously, but a balance needs to be struck between what the security services think are in their interests—or what Foreign Office civil servants think are in their interests—and the civil liberties lobby. We cannot ride roughshod over civil liberties.

On that subject, I agree with the principle outlined by the Minister that we would want crimes committed in this country by foreigners to be dealt with by our courts, so it is reasonable for crimes committed by Britons in foreign countries to be dealt with by those countries' courts. A glaring loophole exists at the moment, however, in relation to diplomatic immunity cases—the Foreign Office civil servants are still protecting their own. Foreign diplomats are not subject to the law if they commit crimes in this country, and some very serious crimes have been committed by foreign diplomats in this country and by British diplomats abroad. They have claimed diplomatic immunity, which is an anachronism. They should not be allowed that, and, if necessary, extradition should be applied to them. Given the principle that Ministers have outlined, I ask them to consider that aspect anew, and to persuade other countries, too, to rethink their approach in that respect.

I support the Bill's underlying principle of greater international judicial co-operation. A few years ago, when I was on the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's economic committee, I led a delegation of parliamentarians from Europe and the United States to Interpol. There must be greater police and judicial co-operation to tackle organised crime. Police chiefs at Interpol told us that organised criminals deliberately used the boundaries between countries, the different rules and laws and even the nuances in the laws to get away with crime and to evade justice. Therefore, the principle of a European arrest warrant is okay. The shadow Home Secretary's criticism of it was unjustified.

The shadow Home Secretary tried to compare the position here with that in the United States. We are not a state of the United States; we are a member of the European Union. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to seek better arrangements with the European Union.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Even if the hon. Gentleman did not listen to the extremely detailed arguments of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), will he not consider the similar arguments advanced in the incredibly hostile report produced by the Labour-dominated Home Affairs Committee, which is led by the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin). If the hon. Gentleman will not listen to my right hon. Friend, surely he should listen to a Labour-dominated Committee that has considered the Bill in great detail. The hon. Gentleman

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

also said that we should not ride roughshod over civil liberties, but does he not accept that Liberty, which is the main champion of civil liberties, shares all our criticisms of the proposals?

Harry Cohen: I will mention Liberty and other aspects of the Bill. I pay tribute to the Home Affairs Committee and its report. It raised very important issues. My speech will contain criticisms of the Bill and that is why I began by saying that I want it to be closely scrutinised in Committee and that I hope the Government will have an open mind about changes to it. However, I have been outlining the fundamental principles behind the Bill and my view that they are worthy and worthwhile.

My former pair, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), made an impressive speech, and I agree with certain aspects of it. He made a good point about the problems of facing a trial in a court where a different language is used. I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to consider that point. Perhaps more support should be offered to someone in those circumstances in a foreign court.

However, the hon. Gentleman made a couple of points that left me flabbergasted. In particular, he seemed to suggest that criminals could almost pick and choose the country to hide in. If every country adopted the approach that he and those on the Opposition Front Bench have taken, the criminal could go to the country that afforded him the best protection for the crime that he had committed. That runs contrary to the aim of having a general European arrest warrant that closes the loopholes that the Interpol chiefs mentioned in their comments to my delegation.

Gareth Thomas: Has my hon. Friend had the opportunity to holiday in Spain recently? I am unaware of the current position there. As he will recall, an area known as the "costa del crime" was of considerable concern to this country. Like me, would he be interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about that phenomenon?

Harry Cohen: Indeed, I would. The "costa del crime" did not do this country any favours abroad. I support better arrangements with Spain and other countries so that there is a fair extradition process.

One of the themes in the Queen's Speech was that there should be justice for the victims of serious crimes and their families. It is right that that principle should apply to victims abroad and not necessarily just to Britons. We should prevent people from evading and delaying justice by using their UK citizenship as a cover for that purpose. People do not have the right to commit crime abroad and then come back to hide in this country.

I do not support the approach that was described as a form of judicial imperialism. The law must apply both to those countries that extradite criminals to us and to this country when we extradite criminals abroad. The process must be fair and equal.

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman's comment on judicial imperialism has formulated a thought in my mind. Will the Bill apply to British overseas territories or Crown territories, or is similar legislation expected?

Harry Cohen: I am not an expert on that and leave it to the Minister to respond. I think the Bill should apply to British overseas territories. I am not unsympathetic to the idea that people should stand trial in the country in which they committed the crime, although the language consideration is relevant.

Delays of six years have been mentioned before a decision is reached. That is too long and needs to be reduced.

Two aspects of the Conservatives' approach worry me. The first relates to the death penalty. In an article on 8 October, the leader of the Conservative party described Labour's plans not to extradite people to countries where they may face the death penalty as "ridiculous and mad", but it is not ridiculous and mad at all. The right to life is a basic human right; it is not for the state to take it away. People may be innocent or political opponents of a state. The death sentence is invariably disproportionate to the crime committed. People with mental health difficulties might be executed, as we have seen in the United States. In the period between commission of the offence and the death sentence being carried out, someone may become a changed person. We need to encourage the United States, Russia, China, Iran and others to abolish the death penalty. It is important that we never extradite anyone to a country that might pass the death sentence. The Conservatives are playing fast and loose by not making their position clear.

My second concern about the Conservatives' approach relates to xenophobia. Some hon. Members said that UK law does not cover xenophobia, and the Conservatives have used that as a reason to oppose extradition. Let us consider the appalling genocide in Rwanda. It was well known that that was incited in many ways, including in the country's media. The mass slaughter that followed was incited for xenophobic reasons. A person who incited such violence could come to this country without the Government's knowledge and be allowed to stay. Indeed, that has happened. Provided that all the rules come into play, including the policy of no death sentence, it would be proper for the Government to extradite someone who incited such murder—it was a holocaust, really—in order that they may face justice. It would not be unreasonable in those circumstances for xenophobia to be taken into account or at least considered when an extradition request is made.

I have some concerns and criticisms. I want an assurance that mental and physical health will be taken into account before extradition is granted. If it is not, that itself could be an oppressive punishment, or could add to such a punishment.

Liberty makes three good points. One is that British citizens could be extradited for offences that are not crimes in the United Kingdom. The test should be that where there is no offence in this country when set against what is being requested for extradition by another country, extradition should not take place. However, where there is a similar offence—what I would describe as nuances in different laws—that should be reason enough for the extradition process to be allowed. I do not know exactly how that would be worked out, but I ask my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to adopt that approach in such cases.

Secondly, Liberty goes on to say that the process should apply only to serious offences to guard against thousands of individuals being sent abroad for minor or

trivial offences. I agree. The threshold for the extradition procedure is too low. Twelve months has been mentioned, and the Minister referred to three years, but even three years is too low. We do not want the procedure to apply to many thousands of people, either way. It should apply only to the most serious crimes.

Thirdly, Liberty says that the list of offences that can give rise to extradition is too vague and too wide, and includes unacceptably ambiguous offences such as computer-related crime. That is a good point. The list should be much more specific. Computers are still relatively new, as are the applications for using them. Those who use computers may engage in some form of criminality, and may even know that they are doing so, but that should not mean that the extradition process will automatically kick in. The Government should be much more specific.

There have been some cases of people hacking into the Pentagon computer. I do not know how serious the breaches were, but the United States obviously regarded them as serious. If they could have started world war three, they were certainly serious, but they may not have been so serious as to warrant people being extradited to the United States, perhaps to suffer a harsh punishment. Such matters could have been dealt with easily in the United Kingdom, and that should be considered.

There are three other points to be made. — *[Interruption.]* I am making genuine points; I am not waffling. If I am upsetting Opposition Members, I shall make them quickly. I thought that they would like my points because I am making criticisms. First, the United States has denied civil liberties at Guantanamo bay. Military law applies there and defendants are not allowed an independent defence. The United States is detaining people without trial and is ignoring the Geneva convention. The shadow Home Secretary praised the US and said that we should have an agreement with it. However, I bet that he would not support sending someone back to a country just to face military action—that is what we would be doing by extraditing people to Guantanomo bay. We should not do so—the United States is out of line with international standards on civil liberties. It is not right that people should be extradited to a country if it imposes military law on them and does not comply with the Geneva convention.

Secondly, the Government have produced a Green Paper on mercenaries and legislation will be introduced in future—they may even be legitimised. Mercenaries carry out killings and it would be unreasonable to grant an exception in extradition law so that they can do so without facing extradition or any justice at all. They may start or be involved in a war or civil war against the UK's proclaimed policy, and should not be allowed special concessions. We will see how the legislation turns out after the consultation, but it must be linked to existing extradition measures.

Finally, the Secretary of State's involvement in political cases is excessive. He should intervene less and the judiciary should be involved more—we should examine those cases under a proper judicial process. It is wrong for political considerations to drive extradition. I note that the exception for political offences, which provides a defence of political motivation, is to be abolished. However, that defence is still needed. People may commit a criminal act. For example, some of those who fought against apartheid in South Africa committed criminal offences, and some of the people resisting the Zimbabwean regime now may be committing criminal offences. However, they probably had, or have, a political motive and reasons that we would otherwise support for doing so. The defence is still needed, although I accept that there must be a balance between consideration of the criminal act and someone's political motivation. I do not favour getting rid of the political offence exception altogether.

I hope that the Government will consider those points carefully in Committee and at later stages in the Bill's consideration. I hope that they will take some of my criticisms on board and amend the Bill accordingly.

8.48 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am pleased to be called to speak, and am grateful for the opportunity to follow the hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen), who made his points clearly, if lengthily.

I was rather disappointed by the comments of the hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas), who said that Conservative Members spoke purely and simply from a visceral dislike of anything European. That is a grave disservice to my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), both of whose speeches were extremely cleverly formulated and, I like to think, were free of the tedious prejudice which, I admit, was often expressed by my party in the past.

Gareth Thomas: I was trying to make the point that some basic principles have come across clearly. Labour Members could not help but think that underpinning those principles was a fair amount of Euroscepticism which may reflect arguments going on in the Conservative party. That is all that I said.

Patrick Mercer: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I commend those two speeches in particular as being completely free of that negative influence.

I shall be as brief as I can in speaking about the background to the Bill. I wholly understand that something needs to be done about extradition. I largely support every part of the Bill, except part 1. If I contradict myself, I hope that the Minister will bear with me. Although I understand that the conditions that prevail after 11 September make the simplification of extradition necessary, I believe that tinkering with the current extradition rules is dangerous and liable to infringe freedom, and may aid and abet terrorists. I shall try to explain.

I do not know how familiar the House is with the French press. For several years, well before 11 September, the term "Londonistan" had been used frequently. What does it mean? The French particularly view London as the centre for international terrorism, with British laws allowing terrorists to prosper and act freely, and with the British police being singularly ineffective against them. I wholly rebut that. None the less, that opinion is gathering steam abroad.

Obviously, it was America that was attacked on 11 September, but Germany and France particularly have suffered at the hands of terrorists. There is certainly a

[Patrick Mercer]

head of steam building up in European nations that have been attacked, albeit in a fairly minor way, which may, once further terrorist attacks occur—and they will—end up endangering the due process of justice. I shall explain in a little more detail.

The impact of terrorism has been keenly felt by America. That country was not used to terrorism in any shape or form before 11 September, at least not on home territory. The reaction of America to 11 September was measured, partly owing to the influence exerted by this country, because of our experience of terrorism and our laws which have dealt effectively with terrorism in the past. None the less, I ask right hon. and hon. Members to reflect on the fact that US allegations against a UK resident accused of involvement in a serious terrorist crime turned out to concern a minor misdemeanour once it was scrutinised. I suggest that terrorist violence turns the mind and can cant the judgment.

May I point out what has happened in Australia recently? It is probably fair to say that Australia was not expecting to be attacked as it was in Bali. To quote one or two comments from the Australian press, Australia is now ready for a much more hairy-chested foreign policy. That means that the judgment of countries such as Australia is likely to be skewed, and countries in Europe are likely to be subject to the same pressures.

If we take away the existing restrictions and protection, we probably end up doing the terrorists' job for them. Having fought terrorism for the best part of 25 years, I can say that it was always an article of faith that security forces acted with complete moral and legal rectitude in everything that they did. Britain has experience of terrorism and the maturity in its laws to deal with it. I am concerned that any alterations to the extradition laws may endanger that.

Furthermore, we have heard in recent weeks arguments from Labour Members about the risk of scaring the pants off the population by warning people about likely terrorist attacks. They have argued, cogently in some respects, that that does the terrorists' job for them. Any changes to our extradition laws will partially assist the terrorist in achieving his aims of bringing about a change in the law and a wholly different climate in which law-abiding nations work, and of dissolving the moral superiority with which so-called civilised nations deal with the problem.

I could deal in detail with one or two of the points that have been made, but frankly, they have been made with much greater clarity than I could ever make them. I also realise that time is short, so I shall conclude my remarks. I believe that part 2 will do the job, but part 1 infringes everything that this country's courts and law have stood for over the years. While I fully take the point made by hon. Members on both sides of the House and agree that times and circumstances are changing, I suggest to the Minister that now is the time for this country, which understands the problems of violence, terrorism and subornation of the legal process, to stand firm in what it believes, to continue to provide protection to people, and to stand, alone if necessary, but 100 per cent. behind the defence of the individual. Only by being 100 per cent. above corruption and completely correct can we hope to prove to our enemies that our cause is correct.

8.57 pm

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) made a point that was partly correct when he spoke about London and international terrorist organisations. The circumstances that he described may have existed in the past, but since we introduced the Terrorism Act 2000 and the post-11 September legislation, the situation has changed considerably.

Patrick Mercer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mike Gapes: I am short of time and I should like to build my argument.

I believe that the Bill is not only about terrorism, but about a range of issues of which terrorism is one. As the Minister said in introducing the Bill, current legislation is more than a century out of date. The measures introduced 12 or 13 years ago were consolidation measures. The reality is that current legislation dates from the Victorian and imperial age. Let us think back to that time. There were very few states in the world, a large swathe of which was coloured red.

Mr. Cameron: Pink.

Mike Gapes: Indeed. The reality of the situation today is that we have about 200 nation states, the United Nations, the International Labour Organisation and the World Trade Organisation, and a huge number of international covenants and treaties dealing with genocide, crimes against humanity, laws of war and many of the issues that are currently considered when we discuss the workings of the International Criminal Court. In those circumstances, it is absurd for extradition legislation to be based on a pre-modern age—the Victorian age and the age of empire. For those reasons, significant modernisation is well overdue.

There are also other reasons; for example, the current system does not work and allows the wealthy criminals and the criminal lawyers to benefit from their expenditure to avoid justice. I use the phrase "criminal lawyers" advisedly. Some people in the legal profession do well out of representing international criminals, drug dealers and people who are engaged in crimes in one country, live in another and have offshore assets in some bank account that is hard to get at.

We live in an age when people use the internet to commit crimes. They perpetrate sophisticated fraud on gullible and/or innocent people. Yet the international policing organisations are often unable to track them down. We have heard the debates about paedophilia, and we know that racist, Nazi groups use the internet. We also know that Nazi groups who operate in Germany are based in Denmark because they can easily get across to Schleswig-Holstein and smuggle in literature. Current Danish law does not allow them to be picked up or prosecuted because Denmark has an absolutist, free-speech approach, which some Conservative Members favour.

It is fortunate that this country has laws against incitement to racial hatred. We have the Public Order Act 1986, and other legislation, which is not enforced strictly enough against organisations that peddle race hate, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. I should like us,

like some other European countries, to have a law relating to holocaust denial. Britain should be alleged to be a sanctuary for neither terrorists nor racists and extremists.

Let me give a specific example. For many years, the people who carried out the bombing in Bologna in the 1980s lived in Brighton, and nothing was done about it. They were linked with far-right groups such as the League of St. George, and involved in fascist training camps, yet they lived in Brighton without anything being done about it. That is outrageous. I hope that a common European arrest warrant and provisions for a Government to ask for extradition would lead to a solution to such a problem.

We have experienced problems over the years that relate to Northern Ireland; for example, we had problems with the Irish Republic. I believe that they have been resolved since the Belfast agreement. Nevertheless, the Irish courts often refused to extradite. We experienced similar problems with the United States. For example, IRA fundraisers, people who were wanted for crimes, and even people who had escaped from prison could live in the USA because the courts would not extradite them to this country.

The Bill may not be a perfect solution, but it highlights a genuine problem that must be tackled. The way in which Conservative Members and Liberal Democrat Members in the House of Lords deal with the Bill when it emerges from this House will be interesting. The past two or three years have shown that the Conservative-Liberal alliance in the House of Lords can defeat the Labour Government, with their democratic majority, whenever it chooses. Labour has only 26 per cent. of the peers in the upper House. The Liberals and the Conservatives have ganged up on several Home Office measures in recent years. That presents more of a challenge to the Liberals than the Conservatives, because I expect the latter to use their normal approach in the House of Lords. However, the Liberals have to reconcile their pro-European stance with their libertarianism. Perhaps they will have a problem in deciding which side to choose; maybe they will sit on the fence.

Mr. Hawkins: Does not the hon. Gentleman recognise that many of his own party's supporters in the upper House have been voting with the Conservatives and the Liberals to take out the more outrageous parts of his Government's legislation?

Mike Gapes: No; what I recognise is that many people in the legal profession who have made their living as QCs over many years have a view of the realities of the world different from that of my constituents and those who suffer from the effects of drug dealers, paedophiles and all the others who engage in international criminal activity. It is time for the voice of the ordinary people who suffer from the effects of international criminality to be heard.

Let us take another example. In east London—and other parts of the city—at this moment, international gangs of criminals are operating prostitution and drug rackets. We need effective measures to deal with them. Such people often flee this country to escape justice. As we enlarge the European Union and get better international co-operation, we must ensure that the new member states—as well as the applicant states and those that aspire to become part of the European Union, perhaps in 10 or 15 years—will get their house in order, and use our support and the support of others to do so. For example, British drug enforcement officers and police officers are working in countries such as Romania and Bulgaria today. Similarly, we are doing good work in Kosovo.

We must work together with our European Union partners, and that will involve our having the ability to extradite criminals from those countries. I was in Pristina last year, where I saw hundreds of motor vehicles with German, Austrian and Italian registration plates. They had been stolen and driven across into Kosovo. Those activities do not happen by accident; they are carried out by organised gangs. We then hear stories of people in our constituencies inadvertently buying vehicles that have been stolen in some other European country and re-badged. We must get to grips with these problems, and the way to do that is through international co-operation. We talk about international law, and about the United Nations, but this is really all about getting rid of our petty, narrow-minded belief that, because we are British, we somehow have the best legal system in the world, despite the fact that it has not delivered justice to many people for many years. Instead, it has delivered fat fees to lawyers and given many of the victims of crime a sense of growing frustration.

If we are to have effective law, we must ensure that our systems work quickly and get the right results. We do not want the wealthy—whether it is the van Hoogstratens, the Kenneth Noyes or the Jeffrey Archers of this world—to be able to escape justice because they have a large amount of money. Those three people have all been subjected to justice, and one of them was brought back from another country to be tried. We need a structure that will give the people on the street the confidence that the criminal justice system is doing its best for them. That will mean greater international co-operation in extraditing those who are living on the "costa del crime", and those who are exploiting the poor and weak in our own communities and taking their assets out of this country to some other part of the world. For that reason, I welcome the Bill and I hope that it gets through both Houses very soon.

9.9 pm

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes), who speaks with great passion. If I were a lawyer, I would not want to meet him on a dark night. My brother is a lawyer, so I will tell him to avoid Ilford when the hon. Gentleman is around.

I serve on the Select Committee on Home Affairs and I am pleased to contribute to the debate. I think that we produced a good report in a very short time, although I would have liked it to go a little further. I will vote against the Bill because I disapprove of part 1, specifically the changes to dual criminality. It has for many years in this country been a safeguard that one cannot be extradited for something that is not an offence in this country, and that safeguard should not be lost. I did not sulk, but tried to help the Committee to suggest

[Mr. David Cameron]

some safeguards, particularly our ingenious safeguard of involving the district judge and the Home Secretary in checking on the dual criminality element.

The Government are going in entirely the wrong direction in respect of extradition and deportation. It has become close to impossible to deport or extradite those who might actually be a danger to this country—my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) made that point. That is why we have the stern detention powers in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001—vast powers to detain people without charge and without trial. One reason we have those powers is that it has been so difficult to extradite or deport those who pose a threat to the life of the nation.

The reason for that is not the European convention on human rights itself, but the way in which it has been interpreted. Two cases are essential to understanding why that has happened. The first is the Soering case, which I raised with the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety. The judgment in that case was that an alleged murderer could not be extradited to Virginia because of the conditions on death row. In one step, the Soering case internationalised the European convention on human rights so that it applied not only to the countries that had signed it, but to America and other countries that had not signed it.

The second case, which might be regarded as more serious, is the Chahal case, in which it was found that the Home Secretary was no longer able to balance the risk to national security of keeping someone here against the risk to the individual of being maltreated if he were to be deported or extradited. The judgment in that case stated:

"The prohibition provided by Article 3 is equally absolute in the expulsion cases . . . in these circumstances the activities of the individual in question however undesirable or dangerous cannot be a material consideration."—

I repeat, "however undesirable or dangerous". Imagine that, by some chance, Osama bin Laden arrived on the shores of this country. If the Americans tried to extradite him and refused to waive the right to impose the death penalty, the Chahal case, as I understand it, would make it impossible for us to extradite him from this country to the United States of America.

We have a crisis in extradition and deportation, but what are the Government doing about it? They are not sorting out the problem of the jurisprudence under article 3 by re-acceding to the European convention on human rights and admitting some exceptions, as the French have done. Instead, through the Bill they are adopting the European arrest warrant, which means that UK citizens can be extradited for alleged offences that are not crimes in this country. It is extraordinary that, on the one hand, it has become harder to extradite people who have done something that is an offence in this country and could present a grave risk to the life of the nation, but, on the other hand, it will become easier to extradite someone who has done something that is not a crime in this country. That is why I say that the Government are going in the wrong direction.

I find the European arrest warrant highly objectionable because of the problem of dual criminality. Hon. Members have spoken about that, but let us be clear about what it means. One of our constituents goes to Spain on holiday, commits an alleged offence, and returns home. All that is necessary for him or her to return is that the warrant is correctly filled out—in its report the Select Committee set out what a warrant looks like—and that a district judge in the UK sees the warrant and judges that the offence falls into one of the 32 categories. At no time is it asked whether the offence is a crime in this country.

When one examines the matter, as the Home Affairs Committee did, one finds that the position is far worse than that. Nowhere in the Bill are the 32 categories of offences mentioned or written down, as the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) pointed out. The Committee asked the Home Office why the 32 categories were not listed in the Bill. Our report states:

"The Home Office responded that this was because article 2.2 allows for the list to be amended".

Whole new classes of offence could be added to the European arrest warrant without proper parliamentary scrutiny.

That is bad enough, but it gets worse: individual EU countries can decide which offences fall within the 32 categories. It is a case of—I quote from the report—

"as they are defined by the law of the issuing member state".

Again, we asked the Home Office—this sounds a bit like "That's Life", and "We went back to the gas board . . . ". The Home Office said that it

"does not have detailed definitions of offences in the criminal justice systems of other EU member states".

We simply do not know what we are letting our citizens—our constituents—in for.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), whom I am pleased to see back in his place, made one good point in his long speech. It is difficult to list all the offences, and to ask all the other EU countries to list them all. The Select Committee recognised that, and it is a good reason for doing away with the dual criminality provisions altogether.

The situation gets even worse: countries can add to the offences in the 32 categories. The Select Committee made an important point in paragraph 26, which states:

"Not only does it appear to be largely unknown how the categories of offence will be defined by the current law of EU member states, there is no way of knowing how those offences may be defined by the future law of member states."

They can add to the offences—

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: So can we.

Mr. Cameron: Yes, but we do not know what we are letting our constituents in for.

And it gets still worse. Countries joining the EU can automatically be designated category 1 countries. I have huge respect for countries in eastern Europe that have broken free of the communist yoke and I welcome them into the EU—I think that their joining is extremely important—but we must recognise that, if we pass the Bill, we will be taking other EU judicial systems on trust. That does not involve only the countries that are currently EU members, with their current laws, but all the countries that will join in future, with their future laws. It means taking an enormous step.

Perhaps the biggest objection of all for those of us who care about the House and the way in which Parliament works is that we cannot amend the list of offences. We must either take the Bill whole, or reject it whole. We cannot take out the most general offences, such as xenophobia and computer-related crime; we must take the lot, or none at all. That is why I think it would be best to vote the Bill down. The Select Committee came up with an ingenious suggestion that I hope the Home Secretary will consider. It stated:

"in each case the district judge should look at the terms of the offence specified in the European Arrest Warrant and make a statement as to whether dual criminality applies. In cases where the alleged offence is not a crime in the UK, a separate decision about whether to extradite should then be made by the Home Secretary, who is responsible to Parliament."

I know how few our numbers are on these Benches, and I know that we will probably be defeated in the Lobbies, but I hope that the Minister will consider that.

What objection could there be? There are two possibilities. One is that this is, as I believe it to be, a modest additional safeguard that does not change the terms of the warrant but merely gives a new, additional responsibility to the district judge and the Home Secretary—a backstop power. The hon. Member for Broxtowe said that it was far more than that: he said, effectively, that it would run counter to the whole European arrest warrant, and could leave the Home Secretary in an invidious position because it would cause a conflict between him and the Council of Ministers in relation to their decision on that warrant. If someone came before him who had committed an offence that was not a crime in this country, according to the district judge, the Home Secretary would have to say, "I am sorry. You may spend time rotting in a Greek or Spanish jail. Weeks may pass before you are even charged with an offence that is not a crime in this country. But there is nothing I can do about it." If that is so, it demonstrates the inflexibility of the law that the Government have signed up to on our behalf—and if it is that inflexible, we should not adopt it.

One of the things that we are supposed to do here is to defend the rights of people in this country: the people who send us here, our constituents, citizens of this country. We are meant to stand up against an over-mighty Executive, whether the over-mighty Executive are making decisions from Westminster or from Brussels, as is the case with this measure, particularly when our Government do not have the wherewithal to stop it. Therefore, the best we can do is to vote down the Bill tonight.

9.20 pm

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), who has made a powerful contribution to the debate, as he always does on home affairs matters.

It is worth reflecting on the fact that this has been a slightly unusual debate. Conservative Members have made a large number of relatively short, powerful and well-observed speeches that have looked at the Bill itself, at its details and at the report by the Select Committee on Home Affairs, whereas a small number of Labour Members have made extremely lengthy speeches in which they ventilated many of their prejudices but hardly talked about the Bill and occasionally mentioned the reservations of the Labour-dominated Select Committee. Basically, they were so embarrassed by the Bill that they wanted to talk about other things that were only tangential to extradition.

It is worth looking in a little detail at how the Bill came to be in its current form. My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) has talked about the fact that one needs to have exceptional provisions to deal with the exceptional danger of terrorism. That is something on which we on the Conservative Benches and the Government agree: one should have rare exceptions to deal with an exceptional threat.

That was the genesis of the framework directive. In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, an urgent meeting of EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers took place. It discussed the proposal that an arrest warrant would need to be issued in a member state and executed in another member state, and the person arrested would be transported to the originating member state without the protections of ordinary extradition procedure in terrorist cases alone.

I am indebted to the distinguished jurist and constitutional lawyer Leo Price, QC, for his description of what happened next. Until just before the Laeken summit in December 2001, Italy was not willing to agree to any such European arrest warrant proposal unless the relevant offences were restricted to seven offences plainly of terrorist character. As my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset set out, we would still be happy for the sole exception of terrorism to be included, but other people, in drafting what was proposed in Europe, decided to see the measure as a vehicle for introducing something else that, until then, the present British Government had always opposed. They wanted to introduce part of the corpus juris that successive British Governments, including the current one, had previously rejected as unacceptably contrary to our common law traditions. Suddenly, we had the list of 32 offences, which were not part of the war against terrorism at all.

The arrest warrant, in its much wider form, with the implementation of part of the corpus juris, was formally adopted at a meeting of the EU Justice and Home Affairs Council on 13 June this year. It adopted the arrest warrant proposal despite the fact that it was under what is called scrutiny reserve at Westminster. Scrutiny reserve applicable to proposals for EU legislation requires that our Ministers do not agree in Council to proposals for EU legislation that are still under scrutiny by this sovereign Parliament. The scrutiny arrangements do not always work well but Leo Price has concluded that that adoption was in contempt of our parliamentary arrangements for scrutiny reserve.

Then, my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson) and I expressed in some of the European Committees our concerns about who was going to be regarded under the new arrangements as a competent judicial authority. In that regard the case of the Greek plane-spotters in Kalamata, which many Members have mentioned in interventions and in speeches, is particularly relevant.

[Mr. Nick Hawkins]

We remain of the view that, if one cannot say who is a competent judicial authority, the proposal is extremely dangerous. In many other countries covered by category 1 of the proposed legislation, those who take the role of an investigative magistrate in another jurisdiction—a juge d'instruction, or something of that ilk—will be regarded automatically as a competent judicial authority, and no British court will have the right then to intervene to protest about the way in which such an arrest warrant has been issued. The whole burden of all that we Conservatives have said this evening is that we ought to preserve the protection for British subjects whereby a British court—and, potentially, the Secretary of State—has a reserve power to scrutinise what is going on before somebody is simply arrested and taken away to face a foreign court that perhaps has a wholly inappropriate system of justice, in which there is no presumption of innocence.

I know that the Minister always speaks very softly when introducing proposals, however controversial they are, but we did not find today's soft words of much reassurance. We want provisions such as those that we have discussed to be included in the Bill as safeguards, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset and many others have said. The Minister's soft words were obviously reassuring to some Labour Members; indeed, so soft were they that the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) was fast asleep for several minutes of his speech, before a message from the Whip woke her up. On a serious note, there needs to be sufficient maturity of criminal justice in all the countries to which part 1, in particular, relates.

The hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the distinguished Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee, set out its very powerful reservations about this legislation. Conservative Members share many of those reservations. He referred to the vagueness of some of the crimes—such as sabotage and environmental crime—set out in the framework directive consisting of 32 crimes. He rightly said that a British judge's becoming a mere cipher was not acceptable. We agree with his Committee's suggestion that the proposal should be amended to allow a district judge to scrutinise anything put forward in such an arrest warrant.

The hon. Gentleman said that, instead of a reduction to 12 months, we ought to go back to the proposal for a three-year limitation. He also reminded the House that, in practice, courts have often refused extradition under current law—even to EU countries—and so have successive Home Secretaries of different parties. As the hon. Gentleman rightly asked, what has changed to lead us to throw all caution to the wind? In our view, nothing has changed to allow us to discard those safeguards.

The hon. Gentleman further pointed out that the proposed EU arrest warrant requires inadequate information, and yet again we agree. We need a much more detailed warrant, and even for category 2 countries—the hon. Gentleman talked about clause 83—the Government's freedom to exempt is far too wide. He suggested a restriction in respect of signatories to the convention on extradition, or of bilateral extradition treaty countries. That is a matter to which we shall undoubtedly return in Committee. The hon. Gentleman also rightly said that proper legal advice should be given to anyone before they consent to extradition from this country. Again, we regard that as an enormously helpful safeguard.

The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett), who spoke for his party, said that in his view, the Bill is unacceptable in its current form, and that he wants to improve it. He pointed out that many signatory countries to the framework directive do not in fact have the legal safeguards that we enjoy. In Greece, for example, there is no legal aid. It is also important to protect the presumption of innocence, which does not exist in many other countries. However, the hon. Gentleman's main objection was that the dual criminality rule was abolished for category 1 countries. We entirely agree about that. He talked, as did the hon. Member for Sunderland, South, about vague and nebulous offences, and ended by saying firmly that he wanted the Bill completely changed because it was unacceptable in its current form. We will be watching with interest what he and his colleagues do in the Division Lobby tonight.

The hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) said that the law needed updating. He wanted the Government to address his points, which were in some ways similar to those made by the Home Affairs Committee. However, he said that he is not always reassured when he sees the rest of the European Union's judicial systems in operation, something that I thought very significant coming from a former Solicitor-General in this Government. The thought crossed my mind that perhaps when the hon. and learned Gentleman was in office he advised against the introduction of this sort of measure, which is why he now finds himself on the Back Benches. Perhaps we will never know, but he rightly reminded us that British courts have always taken a very robust view about these matters. He stressed, again quite rightly, that clause 21 on the human rights safeguards will prove very important. In summary, he felt that he could not give the Bill an unequivocal welcome.

In a powerful contribution, my hon. Friend the Member for Old Bexley and Sidcup (Derek Conway), warned against the extension of the European state. He used the parallel of what had happened in the past over the Single European Act. He quite rightly said that the Bill is an attack on civil liberties and that there has been no effective rebuttal of what the Law Lord, Lord Scott, had written about xenophobia and that something as simple as distributing a Biggles book or the Old Testament could be regarded in some countries as xenophobia.

The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas), in what I thought was a slightly schizophrenic speech, first said that he welcomed the Bill in general terms but that he did not like politicians being involved in the judicial process in general terms. He pointed out that the Home Secretary has had problems on such issues as mandatory life sentences. He said that he was speaking as a former lawyer; he felt that there had been problems with the Pinochet case and that the legislation could be improved. However, he went on to say—and this is where I thought he contradicted himself—that the extradition system, purely as a creature of the 19th century, should not preserve the reliance on the

judiciary that Lord Palmerston had used in the Don Pacifico case in 1850. If the hon. Gentleman believes that politicians are interfering too much and that we ought to rely on the judiciary, it is not really logical to say that we have to move away from the protections of the judiciary by which our citizens have been protected since the 19th century. The hon. Gentleman's attitude was that it does not matter about protecting British citizens who will be extradited—he was more concerned about people being extradited to this country. The Bill deals with both eventualities, and we must preserve the protection for our citizens.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon pointed out that the Bill had been comprehensively demolished in the opening speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset. My hon. Friend said that the Government are careless with the freedoms of our citizens. He talked about the cases of people who should have been deported being delayed, not because of delays in the judicial system but because the Home Secretary had not decided on cases in which appeals were rejected by the House of Lords as far back as December 2001. He said that it was not good enough for the Government to say that the judicial system is slow; he pointed out that the Pinochet case had been heard three times up to the House of Lords in 15 months. If a case has sufficient political priority, it gets heard.

My hon. Friend drew attention to the year zero kind of thinking on the Government Benches which says that just because something is hallowed by tradition, it is automatically wrong. He said that we must not disregard the protections that have been built up over the generations for British citizens. He talked about the dangers of the Bill being used for allegations of war crimes, as in the Pinochet case. He wondered whether Ministers might be worried if some other judicial authority one day decided that they were guilty of war crimes in relation to the bombing of Kosovo.

My hon. Friend also rightly pointed out that many of the offences in the list of 32 could and should be fully defined in the Bill. In response to an intervention from the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) about definitions, my hon. Friend said that we need the dual criminality safeguard that has always existed. In the past, our divisional courts have had a problem accepting even French or Spanish jurisdiction. The safeguard should be preserved.

The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) maundered on for about a half an hour saying nothing very much. However, he engaged in an interesting exchange with the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), who speaks for the Scottish National party. It seemed that she and the hon. Gentleman were in greater agreement with one another than he was with the Minister.

Dr. Palmer: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, I am pressed for time so if the hon. Gentleman will forgive me I shall not give way.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) talked about the history of mutual recognition and the Cassis de Dijon case. He rightly pointed out that our sovereign Parliament had no say in drawing up the list of offences and will have no say in any future changes to the list. As he said, Parliament should object to that.

The hon. Member for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas) said that a sifting process was necessary and that hon. Members were right to express reservations about how that would work in practice. He expressed concern about the lack of counterbalance in the measure.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) exposed the lack of logic in the Minister's case on the death penalty. My hon. Friend expressed concern that the Council of Ministers had the power to change the categories of offence when Parliament had no scrutiny of that process.

The hon. Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen) said that the concerns of the civil liberties lobby could not be ridden over roughshod. He expressed anxiety that various matters were not dealt with in the Bill; for example, diplomatic immunity and the death penalty in Rwanda. He shared some of the reservations expressed about the Bill by the Select Committee on Home Affairs.

The hon. Gentleman did not refer to any of the differences between category 1 and category 2 extradition, but he believed that the provisions were needed to deal with the costa del crime problem. May I point out to him that category 2 extradition, with which we are happy, would deal with that? He really should study in greater detail the comments of the Select Committee on category 1 extradition. That is the real problem. The hon. Gentleman also referred to Guantanamo bay, mercenaries and political cases although I do not think that they had much to do with the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) said that, like my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset, he supports the provisions on category 2 extradition, but not those on category 1. He rightly pointed out that to tinker with the current rules is extremely dangerous. He talked about the belief of some writers in the French press that terrorists operate in London with impunity. Before the Government start threatening the safety and security of my constituents and those of other hon. Members, many people would probably want them to deal with the difficulties in deporting some of the mullahs who preach treason.

The hon. Member for Ilford, South (Mike Gapes) ventilated his lawyer-bashing tendencies and said that previous legislation had not worked successfully. He and his colleagues are always the first to say that everyone must have the right to representation, but it seems from his speech that people have that right only if he and his colleagues agree with them.

Mike Gapes: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hawkins: No, I am coming to the conclusion of my speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Witney in the final contribution to the debate, said that he was proud to be a member of the Select Committee that produced the report. He drew attention to the fact that it is almost entirely impossible to deport the type of people we need to deport in order to protect our security. He referred to the recent cases of Soering and Chahal. He showed the contradiction in Government policy as regards the problems with the Human Rights Act 1998, to which we have already referred, in terms of delay, cost and

[Mr. Hawkins]

injustice. Like so many speakers, my hon. Friend supported the safeguards that would be provided by district judges and the scrutiny of the Home Secretary.

There are many things to which we shall return in Committee. We need to press hard so that the Government make the changes that will be forced on them by another place. The Bill is dangerous; it goes much too far and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, part 2 would have achieved all that the Government wanted. Part 1 should be anathema to all British citizens.

9.39 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): Although spiced with prejudice and Eurosceptism, the debate has been thoughtful and serious, as it should be on such a serious issue. Although the Conservative party has decided not table an amendment or to vote against the Bill, one thing is clear: our present extradition arrangements are unsatisfactory, and I have not heard a single Opposition Member say that that they can be allowed to continue. It is simply not right that it can take more than five years to extradite a person accused of a serious crime, especially when the requesting state is another EU country. Of course there must be proper protections for those who are subject to an extradition request, but that should not extend to their being allowed to launch appeal after appeal, all on the same point, for the sole purpose of frustrating the process.

Mr. Maples *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I will try to give way to the hon. Gentleman in a while.

The Bill will ensure that no one can be extradited where the request is politically motivated, where the double jeopardy rule applies or where the fugitive's medical condition—an issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead (Harry Cohen)—would make it unjust. On conviction in absentia cases, we will extradite only where the fugitive can be sure of a retrial. We will not extradite unless we are certain that the death penalty will not be carried out. Finally and very importantly, extradition cannot take place where it would be incompatible with the fugitive's human rights.

Many detailed points have been made during the debate, and I shall try to respond to at least some of them. My hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer) raised the issue of the internet and asked whether someone who put neo-Nazi propaganda on a German website would be liable for extradition under a European arrest warrant. In those circumstances, the court would probably take the view that the conduct had occurred outside the requesting state and apply the dual criminality test. Since holocaust denial is not an offence in the United Kingdom, the dual criminality requirement would not be met and extradition could not take place.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who is not now in his place, asked whether the Bill would extend to British overseas territories. The relevant provisions, with modifications as appropriate, can be extended to British overseas territories by virtue of clauses 174 and 175, but that will apply only to category 2 procedures, not to the European arrest warrant.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead asked about the language in which a European arrest warrant may be sought. Article 11.2 of the framework decision provides that the person who is arrested for the purpose of extradition under a European arrest warrant will have a right to be assisted by legal counsel and any interpreter needed in accordance with the national law of the executing member state.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and my hon. Friend the Member for Leyton and Wanstead raised the issue of diplomatic immunity—one on one side of the argument and one on the other. Nothing in the Bill will affect state or diplomatic immunity. That may reassure the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon and it may be a matter of concern to my hon. Friend, who may want to raise the issue further with us, but it goes far wider than the Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) raised a number of concerns, as did the Home Affairs Committee in its report. Those concerns are shared by many of my hon. Friends, who have broadly supported the Bill, but have none the less sought reassurances in some areas. They include my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) and my hon. Friends the Members for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) and for Clwyd, West (Gareth Thomas), as well as other hon. Members on both sides of the House.

In relation to speciality, extending the list—whether in relation to other offences or to other states—and effective oversight and scrutiny arrangements in the House, I hope that we will show in Committee to the satisfaction of hon. Members that we have covered those issues. Alternatively, as I understand the point made about not trusting honeyed words, we will genuinely listen to hon. Members' concerns, and, where they remain, we will seek to make changes to the Bill in relation to the framework document.

The Bill contains clear safeguards on the death penalty, on whether people will be extradited to face execution, on whether people could be extradited in contravention of their human rights, and on whether people could be extradited for reasons of their political opinions. The right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) shakes his head. I know from his opening speech that he has read the Bill, so I refer him to clause 13 on extraneous considerations, under which extradition will not be allowed of people being prosecuted or punished for crimes that are accounted for by their race, religion, nationality or political opinions. Extradition is specifically barred when those cases apply, and it is specifically barred in category 1 and category 2 when a death sentence might be carried out. It is specifically barred, too, under clause 21, when a person's human rights under the Human Rights Act 1998 and the European convention on human rights would not be fully protected.

Mr. Maples: If the hon. Gentleman has such confidence in the fairness of the judicial systems of all our European partners, why is clause 13 necessary?

Mr. Ainsworth: Let us identify what changes are in the Bill, and what changes are not in the Bill. Clearly, there are two changes. One is the speeding-up of the process, which is greater in relation to European partners with whom we have very porous borders that allow law-abiding citizens and criminals to travel freely between our jurisdictions. The other is the abolition of dual criminality in relation to the list offences. Those are the only fundamental changes that are being made. As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety clearly demonstrated at the start of the debate, the prima facie requirement for evidence was removed a long time ago.

Mr. Burnett: I, among others, referred to paragraph 31 of the Select Committee's report and to the suggestion that, if there is dual criminality, the matter should be referred to the Home Secretary for his decision. What I—and, I believe, other Members—asked was what practical steps were necessary to achieve that end.

Mr. Ainsworth: We will have the opportunity to talk about that in great detail in Committee, and I hope that we do so. In my opinion, the issue that the hon. Gentleman raised would undermine the position of mutual recognition. He suggested in pursuance of that, and was supported in it by the right hon. Member for West Dorset, that we could get round some of our current problems with a little ingenuity. All that we needed to do was to frame our request in a different way and, all of a sudden, the walls of Jericho would come tumbling down and we would not face some of the serious problems that exist with regard to the current extradition law. However, that is simply not the case. Some countries in the EU will not extradite for fiscal offences. One can frame the extradition warrant however one likes, but they will not do that. Under the current arrangements, they will not extradite their own nationals, and it does not matter what heinous crime they may have committed in this country. Some countries will not extradite their own nationals, and no amount of ingenuity can get us round that.

Some countries have statutes of limitation. When my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety opened the debate, he pointed out some of the injustices that have occurred because of those statutes of limitation. Some crimes are not reported until many years after they are committed, but it is wholly wrong that people should escape justice simply because there is a statute of limitation in the country to which they have fled and because we cannot require them to return to this country.

Mr. Cameron *rose—*

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I shall give way to the right hon. Member for West Dorset in a moment.

We will discuss in Committee the issues that the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) raised, and I hope that I can satisfy him on them. However, I was a bit concerned about the tone of his reception for the Bill. It was totally at odds with the Liberal Democrats' submission to the consultation. They then said that

"the removal of judicial review and habeas corpus . . . are, we believe, adequately compensated for by the duty on the courts to consider the ECHR implications of extradition, provided there can be no derogation from ECHR rights. The proposed appeals system would allow for a fair review of the case on both points of law and fact."

I seriously hope that we have not seen a dramatic shift to a Eurosceptic position by the Liberal Democrats. Such news would go far wider than the Bill.

Mr. Letwin: I entirely welcome the Liberal Democrats' damascene conversion on this matter. The Minister is being thoroughly reasonable, so will he clarify one point? Were his earlier remarks intended to suggest that the bar on political opinions being a cause of extradition under part 1 would override the inclusion of xenophobia in the list of 32 offences?

Mr. Ainsworth: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, clause 13 contains a bar on extradition. It does not say that there may be a bar, because it is clear that there will be a bar on extradition on the ground of

"race, religion, nationality or political opinions".

That point is quite definite. It is in our law and applies to our citizens. It is wholly wrong for the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that the bar is anything other than a bar. A British judge will sit in a court and consider the case. If he considers that it involves issues concerning a person's political opinion, he will not issue an arrest warrant. I do not understand why the right hon. Gentleman has great difficulty with that.

The right hon. Gentleman raised some of the issues that many of my hon. Friends raised, including speciality, scrutiny and the politically motivated crime that we have just discussed. However, the overwhelming point that he made was his view that the problem with part 1 resulted from the fact that the Government were involved in a great, secret conspiracy to which they were not prepared to admit. He suggested that it had come about as a result of 11 September. However, let me make it clear to him that the treaty of Amsterdam in 1997 and the subsequent temporary special council agreed that mutual recognition of judicial decisions would become the cornerstone of judicial co-operation. That included fast-tack extradition arrangements. The British Government are leading on the issue of mutual recognition as an alternative to a European corpus juris. There is no secret about that and our approach came about long before 11 September.

Opposition Members demanded that no one should be extradited for conduct that would not be criminal in Britain. I think we are entitled to ask them a couple of questions that flow from that. First, a Frenchman who commits a crime in Britain that is not illegal in France can expect to be put on trial if he is arrested here. Why should he be entitled to escape justice simply because he has crossed the frontier? Secondly, why should someone be able to commit an offence, such as incitement to racial hatred or fraudulent trading, in this country with impunity simply because he can get to an EU country that does not have a corresponding offence?

[Mr. Ainsworth]

The Opposition have either avoided the questions posed by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State or they have effectively said that that situation is okay.

Mr. Maples *rose—*

Mr. Ainsworth: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman once and I am not doing it again.

Those Opposition Members who were prepared to answer the question seemed to say that the problem did not matter. I wonder whether the victims of crime feel the same way.

EU countries are mature democracies. All of them have signed up to the European convention on human rights. In an age when people, including criminals, can move freely about the EU, we should be prepared to operate on a principle of mutual recognition. We should not prevent extradition simply because of the lack of an exact equivalent offence. We need to recognise the other benefits that the introduction of the European arrest warrant will bring. It will end the ability of other European countries to refuse to extradite their nationals; it will end the refusal by other European countries to extradite for fiscal offences; and it will end a situation in which extradition cannot happen because another European country's statute of limitations has expired on a particular crime. We are well into the 21st century. There can be no excuse for continuing to use procedures that have largely been unchanged since the 19th century and that work against the interests of the victims of crime and the interests of justice.

The Bill will modernise and simplify our extradition arrangements. It retains proper safeguards for fugitives. We will discuss the issues raised by my hon. Friends, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin), the Chairman of the Select Committee, and take them seriously. We are prepared to respond flexibly if they can show that there is a problem, but I think that the Bill contains many of the answers. I hope that I will be able to convince them of that.

We cannot ignore the menace of serious international crime. We need the tools to combat it. The Bill will be an important part of that armoury. I commend it to the House.

Question put, That the Bill be now read a Second time: —

The House divided: Ayes 325, Noes 146.

Division No. 21] **[10:00 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, Frank *(Stockton N)*
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen

Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Jim Fitzpatrick and Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter

Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and Hugh Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill read a Second time.

EXTRADITION BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Extradition Bill—

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on 21st January 2003.

(3) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

(6) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Mr. Bob Ainsworth.]*

The House divided: Ayes 321, Noes 149.

Division No. 22] **[10:14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, Mrs Ann *(Keighley)*
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary

McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prescott, rh John
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes: Jim Fitzpatrick and Dan Norris

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Ewing, Annabelle
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*

Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Hugh Robertson and Mr. Mark Hoban

Question accordingly agreed to.

EXTRADITION BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified--

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Extradition Bill, it is expedient to authorise the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by the Lord Chancellor under the Act;

(b) amounts ordered to be paid in respect of expenses incurred in connection with extradition proceedings;

(c) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment.—[Mr. Jim Murphy.]

Question agreed to.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Question, That the Bill be now read a Second time, *put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 56 (Consolidated Fund Bills), and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question, That the Bill be now read the Third time, *put and agreed to.*

Bill accordingly read the Third time, and passed.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITY DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 119(9)(European Standing Committees),

Major Accident Hazards Involving Dangerous Substances

That this House takes note of European Union Documents No. 15275/01, draft Directive, and No. 12530/02, amended draft Directive, amending Council Directive 96/82/EC on the control of major accident hazards involving dangerous substances; considers that the proposed amendments would achieve the objectives of the Directive; takes account of studies carried out by the Commission on carcinogens and substances dangerous to the environment and recent major incidents involving dangerous substances; and welcomes the strengthening of protection standards for human health and the environment.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Environmental Protection

That the draft Air Quality (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Terms And Conditions Of Employment

That the draft Flexible Working (Procedural Requirements) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

INCOME TAX (EARNINGS AND PENSIONS) BILL

Ordered,

That the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Bill be proceeded with as a tax law rewrite Bill.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Thalidomide Trust

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10.29 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The Thalidomide Trust, which is based in my constituency, was established in 1973 to administer ongoing compensation offered initially by the Distillers company to the victims of thalidomide. The trust is responsible for supporting all the British survivors of the thalidomide tragedy, currently numbering some 450 individuals.

Many of the beneficiaries, most of whom are aged between 39 and 42, are now raising families and engaging in a variety of careers and activities. To give some idea of the severity of the disabilities faced by the survivors, about 10 have no hands, arms or legs; a further 100 have either no arms or no legs, or so-called flipper arms or legs; and the majority of the remainder have short limbs, particularly arms, and hands with no thumbs.

It is important to point out that as the victims age, their needs are changing. Many are experiencing deterioration of their health and medical condition, which is both making life today more difficult and causing them to worry about the future. For example, some are finding that, because the lack of some limbs has caused them to overuse others, arthritis and similar complaints are gravely compounding the disabilities that they have worked long and hard to overcome.

It is worth pointing out that thalidomide victims do not fit the typical description of a disabled person—someone who has all their limbs, but requires the use of a wheelchair. Thalidomide victims have unique needs—for example, they might be unable to reach buttons at ticket barriers, or to work locks and catches, or to carry loads owing to their having deformed shoulder joints. Those problems will not diminish with the passing of time; in fact they will certainly become worse. They were a factor in the generous decision made in 2000 by Diageo—a successor company to Distillers—to pay a further £32.5 million to the trust at present day values.

The trust was set up as a charity because it was believed that its objects, being charitable, would result in all distributions made to beneficiaries being tax exempt, but that proved not to be the case. However, the then Government agreed that there had been a genuine misunderstanding about the tax treatment of the payments made to beneficiaries by the trust. On that basis, in 1974, the Government paid a sum of £5 million to the trust to offset the tax payable on distributions. Further payments totalling £12.8 million were made to the trust in 1975, 1979 and 1996 by Distillers and its successor company, Guinness.

It is important to note that each time a request was made by the trust to the Government, such a request was made on the basis of offsetting the effect of tax on the distributions of the trust, and the same formula for calculating the offset was used in each case. Another important point is that previous Governments' payments to the trust do not set any sort of precedent for other charities, which might give the Government reason not to wish to give the traditional relief to the Thalidomide Trust again. That is because a class action compensation settlement being made today would normally be established as a structured settlement, with payments in all normal circumstances being tax exempt.

Even taking previous Governments' tax payments into account, it could not be said that the trust has not paid any tax—indeed, although Governments have paid £12.8 million to the trust since 1974, they have received taxes of more than £15.5 million from the trust, and are likely to take another £20 million in tax receipts between 2002 and 2022, thus providing a Treasury profit over the years of about £23 million. In practice, about £12 million of that tax has been recovered by beneficiaries claiming tax allowances, but that still leaves the Government approximately £11 million in profit.

The tax position of thalidomide beneficiaries is that victims without other sources of income are able to reclaim the difference between the tax that the trust deducts from distributions to them and their personal allowance of the basic rate of tax. That means that beneficiaries can achieve tax reclaims typically a year after they have received the payments, although, unfortunately, it is believed by the trust that many of the beneficiaries do not take advantage of that, either because of their lack of understanding of the system, or because of the need to employ accountants to prepare their tax returns for them.

To return to the current position, if the formula that was applied to previous extensions to the original Distillers covenant were to be used, the Government should now be paying the trust £6.1 million. The Government have implied that the trust has a significant pot of money, and that that in itself is a reason for it to pay tax. Although the covenanted sums may indeed sound significant, they are relatively modest compared with many modern-day court settlements, and in any event are less following recent stock market falls. The money needs to last for a long time, and current annual payments to victims range from between £5,000 and £25,000 a year, the average annual payment being only £11,000. Unfortunately, however, on 30 July this year the Chancellor turned down the trust's request to be treated in the way that every past Government had allowed. As a result, no Treasury payment is now being offered in respect of the recent Diageo covenant. The decision has now been confirmed in a letter that I received from the Chancellor this morning.

Many people, including the trustees and certainly the victims themselves—some of whom are here today—many of their supporters across the country and, indeed, over 80 Members of Parliament who signed early-day motion 107 have been extremely perturbed and disappointed by the Government's decision.

The Government's reasons for the rejection are set out in a letter from the Chancellor dated 30 July this year. The first general point is the Chancellor's statement that

"the Government greatly values the work of the Trust in supporting the victims of the Thalidomide tragedy".

How well that claim sits with the fact that this is the first Government to refuse tax relief is a judgment that I will leave others to make. I think it worth noting, however, that my predecessor, the right hon. John Major, first wrote to the Chancellor requesting the granting of relief on 14 February 2001. He sent a further letter on 30 April 2001, asking for a reply.

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

Following my own election in June 2001, I asked for an update by way of a written question on 18 July 2001, and then wrote to the Chancellor asking for replies to Mr. Major's letter on 32 January 2002, and again on 15 April 2002. Finally I asked for a reply by way of a further written question on 10 June 2002, to which I received a one-word reply from the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, namely "Shortly". Given that this was hardly a new issue, having been a settled course of action since 1974, I feel that the Government's 17-month delay in responding sits uneasily with their claim to value the trust's work. None the less, I shall address the Chancellor's key contention as set out in his letter. He wrote

"The Trust put forward the same case in 1995 and, although the Government of the day did make a payment in 1996 with £7 million, this was on the explicit understanding (made clear in the Department of Health press release at the time) that this was a 'final' and 'once and for all' payment, made in recognition of the unique and tragic circumstances surrounding the Thalidomide disaster and not to be offset for taxation."

I have previously explained to Members that, although the circumstances are certainly unique and tragic, they are almost certainly ongoing. Indeed, the trust may need to last for another 40 years or more until there are no survivors left. Furthermore, each Government payment to the trust has been stated to be full and final in respect of the taxation arising from each further covenant, and the situation here is exactly the same.

I have now received a copy of the original letter from the Prime Minister's private secretary, dated 8 November 1974. It states

"The Inland Revenue made it clear all along that they could give no assurance that all payments from the Trust would be tax free, although clearly there has been some genuine misunderstanding on this point. In view of this, the Government decided to make a once-and-for-all capital payment of £5 million to the Trust, which will increase the income available to the Trust in a way, which should at least offset the effects of taxation. It will, of course, be for the Trustees to deal with this additional assistance to individual children in accordance with the terms of the Trust. In this way, the Government hopes to ensure that the Thalidomide children are not prejudiced and at the same time avoid any possible doubt as to the tax consideration applying to any settlement if any comparable tragic case should arise in the future."

The point, therefore, is that every previous Government payment has been treated as a once-and-for-all settlement in relation to this matter. For the Government to say that because the Chancellor in 1995 also stated that the then new covenant should be final means that a payment should not be made simply does not fit with the facts. I also note that in 1974 the then Government saw their method of repaying tax as a way of differentiating their treatment of thalidomide from that of other charities, so as not to set a precedent.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I congratulate my hon. Friend on his comprehensive demolition of the principal reason advanced by the Chancellor in justification of his decision. Does my hon. Friend share with me some sympathy for the Paymaster General, who has been placed in an impossible position this evening by the refusal of the Chancellor to accept my invitation to come to the House personally this evening to defend his mean-minded decision; and will my hon. Friend accept my assurance that the next Conservative Government will make in full the payment to the trust that should have been made by the Chancellor this year in accordance with the precedents that my hon. Friend has explained?

Mr. Djanogly: I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for that tremendous intervention. I am sure that many victims across the country will be very grateful for his words and I thank him on their behalf.

The UK has the second largest population of thalidomide victims world wide. The country with the largest such population is Germany, with 2,851 registered survivors. After the UK comes Japan, which has 317 survivors. It is important to realise that, of those three nations, the UK Government are alone in never having agreed directly to compensate thalidomide victims. Indeed, looking at it in that way, not only have the UK Government not had to pay a penny to thalidomide victims, but they have been receiving tax revenues from the payments made by drugs companies for the welfare of victims. I ask the Minister: how fair is that?

All payments made to thalidomiders in Germany are tax free. For a more local comparison, I refer the Minister to section 192 of the Irish Taxes Consolidation Act 1997, which states that any handicap that can be linked with the taking by the individual's mother during her pregnancy of preparations containing thalidomide is to be exempt from income tax and not to be reckoned in computing total income. Accordingly, not only does the current Government's position run totally contrary to the spirit and practice of Government policy since 1974 in terms of dealing with the effects of this terrible tragedy, but their position runs contrary to the practice of every other country I have been able to find, which all basically follow the principle that Government should not make a profit from the victims of thalidomide.

I urge the Government to think again on this matter. Please look at how the victims are still struggling by reason of no fault of their own; look at what every Government since 1974 have done for the victims; look at the tax income that the UK has received from the victims, despite Government payments to the trust; look at the fact that the British Government have never directly given a penny towards the welfare of these victims; look at the fact that every other country not only does not tax its own victims, but gives them taxpayers' money; and then please look again at the Chancellor's mean-spirited and factually incorrect response to this sensible and fair request. The eyes of the country are on the Government. Please do the right thing for the victims of this terrible ongoing tragedy.

10.44 pm

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): I congratulate the hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) on securing tonight's Adjournment debate. As Members can probably tell, I have a very bad cold, so I hope that my voice will hold up during my reply.

I intend to explain to the House the decision of the previous Government in 1996 according to the documentation, the basis on which that decision was

taken, why we believe that it was correct, and why it should stand. Although a vital piece of the jigsaw was missing from the hon. Gentleman's contribution, it was otherwise excellent, and the whole House will want strongly to add its voice to the points that he made—*[Interruption.]* I caution Conservative Members against commenting until they know what their Government's policy, which is the one in place now, was.

The position is quite clear, and the hon. Gentleman explained it in great detail. First, he noted the incredibly important work that the trust does, and its valuable role in supporting the victims of the tragedy—remarkable people who are now approaching middle age. The trust has played a valuable role in enabling them to lead fulfilling lives. As the hon. Gentleman also pointed out, over the years, successive Governments have made significant contributions to the trust. In 1974, the then Labour Government contributed some £5 million in recognition that, in terms of the original settlement, confusion over the tax position may have changed the decision on how much money was paid into the trust. They made a subsequent contribution in 1978, in recognition of the new beneficiaries within the trust's remit, and in fairness to the original payment. That payment was in respect of the setting up of the trust, and of the actual amount that would have been settled. From 1974, the tax position was clear, and I shall explain to the House what it is now.

In 1996, the then Conservative Government made a further payment, but the hon. Gentleman is not correct in saying that it was made on the same basis as that made in 1974. In fact, it was less than it might have been, had it been made on the same basis as the 1974 payment. The hon. Gentleman and the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard), said that the Government have abandoned an important tax concession, which they have not, that there is a long-standing convention that the tax should be disregarded, which there is not, and that not reinstating the tax concession to the trust was reprehensible. Yet the right hon. and learned Gentleman seems conveniently to have forgotten the arrangement made by his Government, and the terms of the settlement to the trust in 1996.

I shall explain the details to the right hon. and learned Gentleman. The then Chief Secretary to the Treasury set out in a letter the basis on which the £7 million payment was to be made to the trust. The letter states very clearly that the payment was not being made for the offset of tax treatment; however, it went further. It said that any payment would

"not represent any offset for tax, and that future support for the Trust will be a matter solely between the Trustees and Guinness",

now Diageo. The letter continues:

"I would be very concerned if the Trustees and Guinness assumed that the taxpayer would automatically pay a proportion of the cost"

for the trust. Indeed, as the hon. Member for Huntingdon pointed out, following discussions between the then Chief Secretary and the then Secretary of State for Health, the right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell), the press release from the Department of Health said that a once and for all payment would be made to the trust.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: No, I will not give way.

In 1974, the tax position was contentious and the Government responded, but by 1996, the position was clear. There is no confusion. Let me remind the House exactly what tax is due. As the trust is a charity, it claims a repayment of the tax paid on its investment income. [HON. MEMBERS: " Who wrote this?"] We could ask who wrote the disgraceful contributions that seek political advancement from a sensitive and tragic case. *[Interruption.]* When Ministers in the previous Conservative Government looked at the evidence—

Mr. Howard: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: No.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Dawn Primarolo: No, I will not give way.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Paymaster General is replying to an Adjournment debate brought by a single hon. Gentleman. She is entitled to give a reply to him.

Dawn Primarolo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The allegations are made in the press release. Conservative Members seek to advance them on the Floor of the House this evening with no reference to the facts of the case. As the trust is a charity, it claims a repayment of the tax paid on its investment income. Some payments made by the trust are taxed. The fact is well recognised. However, there is sometimes a misunderstanding—I put it generously—about the exact process. How the trust distributes its finances on income support and capital grants means that there is a difference in the tax treatment. Capital grants are not subject to taxation, and that accounts for 57 per cent. of the total distributions. Income distributions are, under certain circumstances, which accounts for 43 per cent. of the distributions.

We can give an example of what would happen on income distributions. Non-taxpayers can reclaim the full amount of tax as a tax credit. Starting rate taxpayers—the 10 per cent. taxpayers—can reclaim £24 of the £34. Basic rate taxpayers can reclaim a proportion—£12—of that money, and higher rate taxpayers cannot. The central argument advanced by the Thalidomide Trust is that although its members, some 450, may well be entitled to the tax credit, they are not claiming it. This is about the money that the individuals get. The Government have said quite clearly that they are prepared to work with the trust to ensure that those who are entitled to the tax credit get it back. That is precisely what is in the fact sheet produced by the Thalidomide Trust.

[Dawn Primarolo]

This is an important debate about how we take forward the principles of taxation and support for the victims of thalidomide and how we treat others who, in tragic circumstances, find themselves in the same position. The circumstances are not unique.

The Opposition refuse to accept the good, sound decisions that they took when they were in government—

Mr. Flight: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I shall not give way to the hon. Gentleman; this is an Adjournment debate.

The Opposition invent the facts of the case, missing out the inconvenient ones, and then try—unforgivably—to make political capital out of—[HON. MEMBERS: "That is a disgrace."] If anything is a disgrace, it is the press release issued today in the name of the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) who clearly does not know the facts of the case.

Mr. Howard: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Would you be good enough to confirm, first, that there is no convention of the House that prevents an hon. Member from giving way when replying to an Adjournment debate; and, secondly, that it is the convention of the House to give way when accusations of the kind that the right hon. Lady has just made in respect of another hon. Member are so made?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) gave way to the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard). That was his privilege. It is the same for the Paymaster General. The right hon. and learned Gentleman will know that in an Adjournment debate there is an allocated time for the hon. Member who initiates the debate and for the Minister to reply. The Paymaster General has time to consider—*[Interruption.]* Order. I am trying to point out to hon. Members that an Adjournment debate held at the end of the day is not similar to a normal debate.

Dawn Primarolo: Opposition Members do not like rebuttal on the Floor of the House; they prefer to make their accusations in press releases that cannot be answered.

The Government take the view that we should constantly and actively seek to support the Thalidomide Trust, including working closely with it to ensure that those who are entitled to a tax refund receive it. We are prepared—

Mr. Djanogly: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Dawn Primarolo: I shall give way to the hon. Member for Huntingdon in a moment—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] It is his Adjournment debate.

We stand ready to work with the trust. The Government are also clear that funding for the national health service and for social services, as well as the remarkable increase in that spending, ensures that we can support all those people, as well those in the Thalidomide Trust in challenging—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment.

This Adjournment debate should be a rational discussion of how best to support individuals and use the resources available. If Conservative Members look back at what they did in government, they will see that that was the case.

Mr. Djanogly: If it is the intention of the Government to hold a rational debate, will the right hon. Lady confirm that it will not take her two years to respond to the next letter?

Dawn Primarolo: In all modesty, I think that I have done remarkably well in trying to conduct a reasonable debate in the face of outrageous accusations and constant barracking—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MR. SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at one minute to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 10 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

MESSAGES FROM THE QUEEN

QUEEN'S SPEECH

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received with great satisfaction the loyal and dutiful expression of your thanks for the Speech with which I opened the present Session of Parliament.

DOUBLE TAXATION RELIEF

The VICE-CHAMBERLAIN OF THE HOUSEHOLD reported Her Majesty's Answer to the Address, as follows:

I have received your Addresses praying that the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (South Africa) Order 2002, and the Double Taxation Relief (Taxes on Income) (Taiwan) Order 2002 be made in the form of the drafts laid before your House on 30 October 2002, in the last Session of Parliament.

I will comply with your request.

Oral Answers to Questions

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

The Secretary of State was asked—

Iraq

1. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What assessment he has made of Iraq's compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1441. [84320]

2. **Mrs. Jackie Lawrence** (Preseli Pembrokeshire): If he will make a statement on progress made by UN weapons inspectors in Iraq. [84321]

7. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What recent discussions he has had with the US Secretary of State about UN weapons inspectors in Iraq; and if he will make a statement. [84326]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I apologise for the non-attendance of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who is attending the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels. I understand that you, Mr. Speaker, and the spokespersons for the Opposition parties received notice of that.

Inspection activity in Iraq resumed on 27 November. To date there have been no reports of serious or deliberate obstruction of the inspection teams. The teams have so far principally concentrated their efforts on revisiting sites identified as being of concern under the previous inspection regime, although they have also gained unrestricted access to a presidential site that had previously been denied.

Under the terms of the United Nations Security Council resolution 1441, Iraq handed over a declaration running to more than 11,000 pages to the UN in Baghdad on 7 December. It is now being analysed by UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency. This process will take some time.

We maintained regular dialogue with the US Secretary of State and with other countries throughout the drafting of resolution 1441, and will continue to do so.

Mr. Luff: Is the Minister satisfied that the arrangements made by the Security Council and with the United States of America for consideration of the 11,807 pages, 352 pages of supplements and 529 megabytes of data are satisfactory and will enable a full and transparent interpretation to be made in good time?

Mr. O'Brien: Yes, I am satisfied that the process is being handled properly. At the request of the Security Council presidency, the United States is helping with the formidable task of reproducing the documents for the permanent five members, who will then be in a position to assist UNMOVIC and the IAEA in removing material of proliferation concern from the declaration, before it is circulated more widely. There is no question of denying or delaying access. Copies were handed to all the P5 in Washington or New York last night, and I understand that we now have a copy here in London.

Mrs. Lawrence: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply, and hope that the UK will support the inspectors in their work and not denigrate them, as is happening in some quarters in the United States. Will he explore all possible alternatives to war, including using international law to indict Saddam Hussein and his regime for war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide?

Mr. O'Brien: We certainly do strongly support the inspectors and want their tasks to be carried out to the full: there needs to be a full and proper inspection to ensure that Iraq is dealt with in terms of its development of weapons of mass destruction. Resolution 1441 is an opportunity to find a pathway to peace, disarming Saddam Hussein and removing the threat of weapons of mass destruction. We want him to take that pathway, which we have made open to him, to avoid war and ensure that the threat of weapons of mass destruction is dealt with. In that sense, the ball is in Saddam's court. We need to ensure that we are not threatened, and we hope that the pathway to peace will be taken.

Mr. Ruffley: Does the Minister truly believe that 17 weapons inspectors constitute an adequate number to do the job, and if he does not, can he tell the House what Her Majesty's Government will do about that?

Mr. O'Brien: Seventeen weapons inspectors are there, 25 are in transit, and 100 should be there before

Christmas. If UNMOVIC and IAEA require further inspectors, they will be in a position to request them. Obviously, inspectors need to be properly qualified. They are not that easy to come by, but opportunities do exist to recruit further inspectors, and to request members of the UN to provide qualified people. At this point, we believe that a steady increase in the number of inspectors, allowing for the capacity of equipment and buildings available to them, is the proper way to deal with the situation, and we hope that they will be able to do the job efficiently and effectively.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Does my hon. Friend recall that in 1995 two sons-in-law of Saddam Hussein defected to Jordan and revealed the extent of the biological weapons programme that previously the regime had strenuously denied having? Why should we believe that this hide and seek game with the inspectors will lead to anything, bearing in mind the amount of time that Saddam Hussein has had to conceal the weapons of mass destruction? This is a murderous and lying regime that cannot be trusted under any circumstances.

Mr. O'Brien: It is true that defectors revealed the development of weapons of mass destruction, particularly biological weapons, in 1995. This should not be a game of hide and seek. Let us be clear: UN resolution 1441 places the obligation on Saddam Hussein and Iraq to show that they are not developing weapons of mass destruction. The obligation is not on the inspectors; they are there to verify claims made by Saddam Hussein, and we need to ensure that we support the inspectors, and that the threat from Saddam Hussein is dealt with.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): The Minister will be aware that resolution 1441 requires the Iraqis to supply an accurate, full and complete declaration of all aspects of their programme to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Does he agree that American interference in the distribution of the Iraqi submission will undermine the United Nations process, weaken the international consensus against the Iraqi regime and offer Saddam Hussein a completely unnecessary propaganda victory?

Mr. O'Brien: Frankly, what the hon. Gentleman has just said is complete nonsense. The Americans have not interfered; at the request of the presidency of the Security Council, they have assisted it in distributing the material. As far as we are aware, and according to the evidence available to us, that has been done entirely properly. We have a copy of the documents here in London, and the suggestion that this constitutes American interference that will somehow weaken the coalition is complete and utter nonsense.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Despite my hon. Friend's reply, surely it is US insistence—under the guise of assistance—that has limited access to the Iraqi declaration to the five permanent members of the Security Council. The entire Security Council voted for resolution 1441, and the rest of the world will undoubtedly see this as the exercise of undue influence by the US Government, who still seem absolutely determined, regardless of the evidence, to go to war against Iraq.

Mr. O'Brien: There is concern about proliferation information that may be contained in the declaration: in other words, concern exists that Iraq will be supplying information on the whereabouts of materials, equipment and other issues—dual use or otherwise—that may be of interest to terrorists or to other countries. The view has therefore been taken that the five permanent members—they are nuclear powers—should have a full copy of the declaration. On that basis, distribution is being examined to see whether the material can be passed to members of the Security Council that are not nuclear powers, and to ensure that, if appropriate—this issue has yet to be determined, but the Security Council will look at it—some of the material in the declaration is not widely distributed. The concern is proliferation, not any attempt by the Americans or anyone else—as far as we are aware, there has been no such attempt—to prevent proper application of the terms of resolution 1441, or of the wishes of the UN Security Council.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): If there are discrepancies between Iraq's declaration of last weekend and the Government's dossier of 24 September—in connection, for instance, with the existence of the 20 al-Hussein missiles, the L29 jet trainer or of VX nerve agent, all of which were mentioned in the dossier—is the onus on Iraq to prove that the dossier was wrong, or on the Government to show why their dossier should be believed? Do the Government consider that the assertions in the dossier would be sufficient, under paragraph 4 of resolution 1441, to constitute a material breach, if omitted from the declaration?

Mr. O'Brien: Paragraph 4 of resolution 1441 requires that, for there to be a material breach, the declaration should be false and there should be a failure to co-operate. So far, Iraq has put forward a declaration, which we are examining. That will take some time. It is true that Saddam Hussein has a record of lying, so we should be sceptical about the information that he provides. However, we will examine seriously the documentation that he has provided, and see how it stands up to the information that we have received from various sources. We will then consider how to proceed. Obviously, it is for the inspectors to examine whether Saddam Hussein and Iraq continue to possess weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Ancram: I must press the Minister further. Surely he stands by the dossier that he published on 24 September? He told us that there was evidence that the weapons that I mentioned were in existence. If those weapons are omitted from the declaration made by the Iraqi Government on Saturday, is that a material breach? If the Minister insists that his information is correct, there must therefore be an omission from the declaration and, under paragraph 4, that would constitute a material breach.

Mr. O'Brien: The right hon. Gentleman does not seem to have listened to what I said. Paragraph 4 of

resolution 1441 contains a requirement that, for there to be a breach, the declaration of information must be false and there must be a failure to co-operate. We shall examine the contents of the declaration seriously. The Government certainly stand by the contents of the dossier, but we also know that there is some recent information that Saddam Hussein has been seeking to hide weapons of mass destruction. If the right hon. Gentleman is asking whether the fact that the items that he mentioned are not in the precise place specified in the dossier proves that Saddam Hussein does not have them, my response is that we must look at all the evidence. We must consider all the intelligence information and look at the detail of the dossier. That must be done carefully. These are serious matters and they need to be dealt with seriously. This is an attempt to avoid going to war yet achieve the end of ensuring that Saddam Hussein does not have weapons of mass destruction. That is an end that we will achieve.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is there not a danger that our rightly firm resolve to make Saddam blink may leave us unable to recognise our success? If there is no material breach or nothing disclosed, can we remind the US—and, indeed, the Opposition here—that that should be a cause not of disappointment but of rejoicing? Will my hon. Friend the Minister say what is pencilled in the diaries of my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary to ensure that discussions are held with the US before that country fires off its judgment without consulting its very loyal and patient allies?

Mr. O'Brien: I assure my hon. Friend that we are in full consultation with the US. We will look at the declaration and consult on the issues that it raises with the US and other permanent members of the Security Council, and indeed with other members of that council. If it were found that the declaration was genuine and full, and that the inspectorate was able to carry out its inspections completely unhindered and for a prolonged period of time, that might represent some evidence that Saddam was prepared to follow the pathway to peace.

I hope that we can avoid war and that we will find a pathway to peace. I know that the choice rests with Saddam Hussein.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Minister refers to the pathway to peace, and I am sure that we all agree with that. If there is an alleged breach of resolution 1441, will the Minister confirm that it remains the Government's view that any further action should be a matter for the Security Council, because many in the United States Administration view resolution 1441 as the pathway to war, not to peace?

Mr. O'Brien: Resolution 1441 does not stipulate that, for example, there needs to be a second resolution to authorise military action. It says that the UN Security Council must be given the opportunity to consider any report or other information. As the Foreign Secretary has said, in the event of a material breach, the Government's preference is for a second resolution. So far the Security Council has, as Kofi Annan said, faced up to its responsibilities, and we believe that it will continue to do so. However, we must reserve our position in the event that it does not. Iraq should be in no doubt that the message of resolution 1441 is clear and that any failure to comply will have serious consequences.

Afghanistan

3. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What recent discussions he has had with representatives of allied countries on extending the mandate of the international security force in Afghanistan; and if he will make a statement. [84322]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): On 27 November, the UN Security Council agreed to extend the ISAF mandate until 20 December next year. The area of operations remains Kabul. We are discussing with other coalition members ways of getting what is called an ISAF effect in areas beyond Kabul.

Mr. Mullin: What role are the Americans playing? Are they still floating around the country handing out bin bags full of dollars to warlords and shooting up wedding parties, or has it been possible to engage their attention in nation building?

Mr. O'Brien: I am pleased to report that the Americans are very much engaged in nation building, in that they are putting substantial amounts of aid money into Afghanistan and are looking at ways of improving the security situation. The US has recently proposed having small civil military teams of 40 to 60 strong to work with the Afghan national army regional leaders and non-governmental organisations to help to improve security in areas outside Kabul. Substantial sums are going into Afghanistan from the United States and the US is working with other countries to improve the security situation. It is also working closely with President Hamid Karzai's Government. I visited President Karzai recently and he was very grateful for the help that Britain as well as the United States has provided to Afghanistan.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): May I, through the Minister, congratulate the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) on asking one of the great, classic, perennial parliamentary questions? Does the Minister recall that when the viceroy of the day posed the question to the great Lord Salisbury, the Foreign Secretary advised the Viceroy's Council to study Afghanistan on a larger-scale map—a piece of advice that is of general application today?

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) welcomes the hon. Gentleman's advice. I, too, will ensure that I study all the maps that I need to study.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I think that my hon. Friend is aware of the concerns of the NGOs and their workers outside Kabul. However, does he know that one of Mercy Corps' veterinary surgeons was shot dead in Kandahar province when he was attending to his duties as a livestock support worker and that three other Afghans working for Mercy Corps have been

kidnapped? Fortunately, they have now been released, but that has led them to consider whether they can continue their operations. When will a demilitarisation programme begin in Afghanistan?

Mr. O'Brien: As I have already indicated, the coalition is looking at ways of extending the ISAF effect to improve security in the provinces beyond Kabul. We need to demobilise and disarm the militias, build an accountable Afghan national army, create an effective police force, stamp out the drugs trade and construct a legal system. We are in the process of nation building, and I cannot tell my hon. Friend that we will achieve that overnight. I wish that we could do it more quickly, but these things need to be built brick by brick. It takes time, but doing it properly will lead to more effective and solid results for the long-term future of Afghanistan. Rushing to judgment and being too quick to put in mechanisms that do not work could be detrimental and counter-productive.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): We are not asking the Minister to achieve anything overnight, but we have heard both from him and from his colleague the Secretary of State for International Development that the ISAF remit might extend beyond Kabul. Does he agree that, for every delay, there is an increase in heroin production in Afghanistan, which has a direct impact on the amount of drugs available on the streets of the United Kingdom? The Minister must make the connection between the power of the territorial warlords and the failure to tackle them. When can we expect positive action?

Mr. O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is quite right: there is a link with the disorder in Afghanistan—a country ravaged by war for 25 years. We are in the process of re-establishing law and order in parts of Afghanistan around Kabul and in some other regions. That will be done over a period of time. However, it is wrong for a Government to say that, in a massive country such as Afghanistan, we can make changes within a few days or months, or even a year. The programme does not only address issues with regard to poppy production, which means providing alternative lifestyles for people who grow poppies and using a forced eradication programme. We are supporting such policies not only because they are right for Afghanistan but also because, if they are successful, they will prevent people from dying on our streets. However, we cannot promise to do that overnight; it will take time. I suspect that poppy production will rise before it falls, because we need to establish substantial controls and building an Afghan national army requires time, effort, resources and facilities. It cannot be done overnight.

Terrorism

4. **Mr. David Chaytor** (Bury, North): What links he has identified between Iraq and al-Qaeda. [84323]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We know that al-Qaeda operatives have been in Iraq. It is not clear what links they have with the Iraqi regime.

Mr. Chaytor: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. Does he agree with the United States Government that military action against Iraq would be part of the war against terror? If so, does he think that war can provide the solution to terror?

Mr. O'Brien: The objective of our involvement in Iraq is to ensure that Saddam Hussein is prevented from developing weapons of mass destruction. That is clearly the objective set out in UN resolution 1441. We know that, in the past, Iraq has supported terrorists such as the Abu Nidal group and Mujahedin-e Khalq—the MEK—and that Saddam Hussein gave money to the families of suicide bombers in Israel and Palestine. Saddam Hussein has been involved in terrorism, but whether he is involved with al-Qaeda is another matter.

We hope that the removal of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq can be achieved by peaceful means. I hope, too, that we can deal with the problems of terrorism worldwide, but I fear that it is possible that our means may not always be peaceful.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Will the Minister keep in mind when exploring those links the fact that many of us will have great difficulty in finding a proper moral justification for war against Iraq unless we can properly invoke the principles of self-defence, which can be properly invoked only if the threat to ourselves or our allies is both grave and imminent?

Mr. O'Brien: It is our view that resolution 1441 provides a legal basis for ensuring that the inspectors go into Iraq. We seek to provide a way to ensure that Saddam Hussein does not create the circumstances in which war happens. Our objective is to achieve disarmament. We shall work towards that end.

Resolution 1441 was good enough for Syria, France, Russia and all the members of the Security Council. I am not sure why it is not good enough for the right hon. and learned Gentleman.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I would not have fancied being an al-Qaeda representative in Sunni Iraq. Will the Minister put the names of those operatives, if he has them, in the Library?

Mr. O'Brien: No.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Is it not clear from all the Minister's answers that there is no link between al-Qaeda and the regime in Iraq and that, whereas there is a perfectly good case to pursue terrorists, such as al-Qaeda, and there is probably an equally good case to pursue the Iraqi regime, to link the two together simply does a great disservice to truth?

Mr. O'Brien: The right hon. Gentleman obviously knows more than those who are a lot better informed than him. It is not clear that there are links between the Iraqi regime and al-Qaeda. We are still examining some

evidence that is available to us. We know that al-Qaeda operatives have been in Iraq, and we also know—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) should not shout at the Minister.

Mr. O'Brien: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

We know that there have been al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. We are not sure what the links are, so it is right to investigate them. The right hon. Gentleman makes an assertion that there are no links, but I could not possibly make that assertion based on the evidence that I have.

Sudan

5. **Mr. Harold Best** (Leeds, North-West): What help he is offering to further the reconciliation process in Sudan. [84324]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): In 2002, there is a new window of opportunity for peace in Sudan and a new round of peace talks led by the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development. The United Kingdom has played a major role in the peace effort so far, through its role as international observer at the Machakos talks. This year, we have committed about £10 million to support humanitarian work and the peace process itself.

Mr. Best: I am very pleased to hear the report from my hon. Friend the Minister, but does he share my concern about the damage that might be done to peace in Sudan if war were to break out in Iraq? That seems not to be the kind of development that most of us who are interested in peace in Sudan would want to see.

Mr. Rammell: Our aim in Sudan and Iraq is to secure peace and security. In Iraq, we face a threat from weapons of mass destruction. We are trying to resolve that issue peacefully. Saddam has the opportunity to do that by complying with resolution 1441. Although I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, I do not believe that we would sustain human rights in Sudan by failing to stand up and ignoring the very real danger that exists in Iraq.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): May I address the question itself? Although I recognise that the key to resolving the conflict in Sudan lies mainly in achieving an equitable sharing of power and wealth between the north and south, does the Minister agree that the lasting solution must also depend on trust and respect for human rights? Is not one of the grave human rights problems facing the people of Sudan the incidence of slavery? Will he therefore agree that that issue must be addressed during any future negotiations? What are the Government doing to try to ensure that that happens?

Mr. Rammell: I wholly agree with the right hon. Gentleman on that matter. We have much contact with the Committee for the Eradication of the Abduction of Women and Children, which is making significant progress. Already, more than 600 abductees have been returned. We are concerned, however, that a market may be created by paying for the return of abductees, but that is a real issue, which must be taken into account in the eventual peace settlement.

Brazil

6. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on Britain's relations with Brazil and the election of President Lula. [84325]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Before I specifically answer the question, I am sure that the whole House would want to join me in expressing our concern and sadness at the news that 36 people have been killed overnight by a mudslide in Brazil.

We congratulate President Lula on his convincing victory in Brazil's fully democratic elections, and we look forward to working closely with him and his Administration to deepen further our excellent relations with Brazil.

Lawrie Quinn: Given the important trading relationship between the United Kingdom and Brazil—I think that we are the eighth largest exporter to Brazil—will the Minister outline to the House what he will do to encourage that relationship, make sure that we increase the trade opportunities for British companies, and assist in the continuing development of Brazil, the fifth largest economy in the world?

Mr. Rammell: I thank my hon. Friend for that question and for his keen interest in our relationship with Brazil. We certainly believe that Brazil is a good place to do business. It is the UK's largest export market in Latin America, and, so far this year, our exports are up by some 16 per cent. Indeed, over the last year, more than 100 British companies have invested in Brazil, indicating strongly that they regard Brazil as a good place to do business. We will continue to support those efforts.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): While I welcome the Minister's response, will he confirm that fears that the new President might change the economic pattern of Brazil are unfounded, and that he is continuing to lead his people to a better way of life?

Mr. Rammell: I certainly feel able to do that. Whatever initial concerns existed, the whole international community is now reacting favourably to the way in which President-elect Lula is forming his Administration. Indeed, the recent International Monetary Fund delegation to Brazil reacted very positively to the developments that are taking place.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Despite the Government's substantial efforts since 1997 to encourage British business to engage more readily with Brazil, it is fair to say that the response has not always been as good as that for which we hoped. Business often cites the complexity of the regulatory regime in Brazil as off-putting. When the Minister has the opportunity to

discuss these matters, will he make that point to his counterparts, and will he also encourage them not to be tempted down the route of protectionism?

Mr. Rammell: The point is well made. As I said, the 16 per cent. increase in exports in the last year is very positive. I am visiting Brazil next week, and I will meet representatives of the British business community there. I look forward to discussions within that forum.

Health Service Workers (Sub-Saharan Africa)

8. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): What recent discussions he has had with governments of sub-Saharan African countries about the import of their skilled health service workers into the UK. [84327]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): The recruitment of staff for the national health service is the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and his Department.

Nevertheless, I can tell the hon. Gentleman that, in October 2001, the Department of Health published a code of practice for NHS employers who are involved in the international recruitment of health care professionals. The publication provides a detailed explanation of the processes that must be carried out when recruiting from overseas to ensure that those developing countries suffering significant staff shortages of their own are not targeted.

Dr. Harris: Surely the Minister understands that his Government's view that this is simply a matter for the Department of Health shows that there is an unethical black hole in the middle of their foreign policy. South Africa, which has already requested this country not to recruit its hard-trained nurses and doctors, has seen the number of its staff recruited by this country increase from 393 in 1997 to 2,114. As for Malawi, 43 out of the 235 nurses that it trains per year are now working here. Surely foreign Governments have told him and his colleagues that that is unacceptable. Until the Government keep an exact record of the extent to which we are destroying the capacity of foreign countries' health care systems, and offer to put something back, we will not be behaving ethically in this area.

Mr. Rammell: With the greatest respect, to describe that as an unethical black hole is exaggeration even by the standards of Lib Dem "Focus" leaflets. We are firmly committed to ensuring the protection of developing countries. That is why we have developed the code of practice, in which we are ahead of the game—no other country throughout the world has done that. On what the hon. Gentleman says about putting something back, through the Department for International Development, we invest £30 million a year, 30 per cent. of which goes into the South African health system.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): It is, however, possible, as my hon. Friend will accept, to provide proper training and assistance to African nations while not denuding them of desperately needed staff. Real problems exist in southern Africa, particularly in relation to those groups affected by AIDS, and it is essential that they are not deprived of their health care professionals.

Mr. Rammell: My hon. Friend makes an important and serious point. AIDS is the scourge of southern African. Through the Department of Health, we have constructive programmes that we are developing with the South African health department. We will do everything that we can to help. On the specific issue that has already been raised, the code of conduct offers the best protection available for the recruitment of health care professionals from developing countries.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): This is truly disingenuous. The national health service does not have to recruit these nurses, because they are recruited by agencies. If the Minister wants to see hell on earth, he should visit the Lilongwe general hospital where practically every nurse who was trained last year was stripped out to come to work for agencies in this country. The Minister's answer was accurate but totally disingenuous.

Mr. Rammell: Agencies and organisations working with the NHS have to comply with the code of practice that we have established. We take the issue seriously, and we would all want to operate in an ideal world. The fact remains that the code of practice that we have already established is the most advanced in the world. The Government will not apologise for the fact that we are expanding our capacity in terms of the number of nurses in a way that the Conservative party consistently failed to do.

EU Enlargement

9. **Mr. Eric Joyce** (Falkirk, West): If he will make a statement on the forthcoming enlargement of the EU. [84329]

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I hope that we will complete enlargement negotiations with 10 candidate countries at the Copenhagen European Council this week. That will allow us to meet the aim, first set by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, of reuniting Europe in time for the European Parliament elections in 2004.

Mr. Joyce: My hon. Friend will be aware of the enormous contribution that Turkey has made to the security of Europe over the years. Does he agree that the best way to encourage human rights and the Europeanisation of institutions in Turkey is to give it as soon as possible the beginnings of a move to a start date for negotiations on its entry to the European Union?

Mr. MacShane: Very much so. Turkey is at the crossroads. It can look west towards Europe to modernise and democratise its institutions and political processes, and that is why my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government have been in the

van of arguing within Europe that Turkey should be given at Copenhagen later this week a clear and proximate date for the start of entry negotiations.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): I am mindful of the concerns of some accession countries about securing support for entry in referendums, but will the Minister tell the House if and what the Government's objections are to the latest Danish financial and common agricultural policy proposals? Does he agree that new flexibility on direct farm payments would be advantageous to the accession states?

Mr. MacShane: No, because the accession states have negotiated in good faith under what is called the Berlin ceiling, which was the package set. That means that all of them will be better off once they are inside the EU. They have to absorb the money as part of a process of reform and modernisation. That it is precisely why, in the *Financial Times* today, four Prime Ministers have argued the case for a yes at Copenhagen and for the reuniting of the European family of nations.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): My hon. Friend referred to the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and to Turkey. Does he agree that it is also important to consider the enlargement of the EU in 2007 when I hope that Bulgaria and Romania will join?

Mr. MacShane: Yes, indeed. I am keeping my fingers crossed that, at Copenhagen, we will also confirm 2007 as the target date for Bulgaria and Romania. That is the new Europe of the 21st century, united as a zone of peace, prosperity and democracy.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Does the Minister share the concern of many of my constituents in fishing communities that the Copenhagen summit, which is rightly trying to expedite the enlargement of the EU, does not have the fishing crisis on its agenda? Will he explain to my constituents what efforts the UK Government are making to ensure that fishing is on the agenda at the summit, or do the Government think that the crisis is not important enough for them to press for the issue to be on the agenda in the first place?

Mr. MacShane: No. No Government have done more to raise the plight of their fishermen than Her Majesty's Government. Of course every one of the 15 EU member states will have pressing problems that it will want to place on the agenda at Copenhagen. What is important is that the Fisheries Council deals with the matter and that the reform of both the common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy is maintained. For the first time in 20 years, this Government are doing something about that in a serious, professional and coherent manner.

Middle East Peace Process

10. **Dr. Desmond Turner** (Brighton, Kemptown): What assessment he has made of the implications of the policy statements made by the new leader of the Israeli Labour Party for the peace process. [84330]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): It is for Israeli voters to decide which party's policies are most likely to bring them peace and security. We look to the next Israeli Government, whoever leads it, to engage with the Palestinians and the international community in the implementation of the Quartet road map within the time frame set out by President Bush on 24 June.

Dr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the emergence of Mr. Mitzna offers us new hope for restarting the middle east peace process and for withdrawal from illegal settlements on the west bank? Does he also agree that whether Mr. Mitzna becomes Israel's next Prime Minister or the leader of the Opposition, this Government should do their utmost to support his efforts towards a peaceful and political settlement in the middle east?

Mr. O'Brien: We certainly want a peaceful settlement of the middle east conflict. Our policy on settlements is clear. They are illegal under international law and are an obstacle to peace. Israel should freeze all settlement activity, including road building, because it is creating facts on the ground. It breaks up Palestinian territory throughout the west bank and makes the possibility of a negotiated settlement much more difficult to reach. We have consistently called on both parties to refrain from unilateral acts which prejudice the outcome of the permanent status negotiation. Each brick in a settlement is a barrier to peace between Israel and the Palestinians.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Mr. Mitzna said that if he were Prime Minister, he would immediately begin talks without condition. Whichever candidate wins the forthcoming Israeli elections, does the Minister agree that with attention largely focused on Iraq, the international community, especially the United States, must actively re-engage in pushing for a resumption of the middle east peace process? Does he agree that a continuing stand-off is simply not acceptable and that there is a moral compulsion on all parties to make every effort to engage in dialogue based on a genuine desire to reach an agreement? Who is he in touch with on each side who might actually be prepared to talk to each other?

Mr. O'Brien: It is the case that we need to resume the talks. The process would be enhanced if the suicide bombings stopped and the Israelis were able to remove their forces from the large areas of the west bank that they occupy, which disrupts activity among Palestinians, so atomising that society. We are in regular contact with both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Indeed, this week I met Palestinian representatives and this afternoon I will meet the Israeli ambassador. We are also obviously in contact with representatives of the Quartet who are working hard to create the road map that we hope will be the basis on which a peace process will be constructed. A great deal of discussion is going on and there are many contacts between various Israeli and Palestinian groups. It is important that we

encourage a process of dialogue because it is only through negotiation and dialogue that we will secure peace.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Have the British Government made representations either to the new leader of the Israeli Labour party or Mr. Sharon on the illegal building of the great Israeli wall? It is illegal from end to end because it is built 6 or 10 km within Palestinian territory, thus confiscating 10 per cent. of the total land.

Mr. O'Brien: Only a small portion of the wall is built. I have seen photographs of it, but I have not been to see it. The wall is clearly wrong. We have made strong representations to the Israelis that it should not be constructed. Israel has a right to protect itself from terrorist activity, but, frankly, building barriers and walls is not the way to go about creating long-term security for Israel. The Israelis will get long-term security when there is a negotiated settlement with the Palestinians and when a middle east peace process brings about a two-state solution—a state for the Palestinians, but also a secure and peaceful state for Israel.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Endorsing what the hon. Gentleman has just said, has the Foreign Secretary told the leaders of both major parties in Israel that the constant flouting of UN Security Council resolutions is not conducive to peace in the middle east?

Mr. O'Brien: Both parties are well aware of our view that resolutions 242, 338 and 1397 are the basis on which any peace process needs to go forward. We have made it clear that flouting or ignoring those resolutions is not acceptable, but we also know that those resolutions require a peace process. That is why the discussions in the Quartet are important—they will provide the road map to peace. We hope that both parties—Israel and the Palestinians—will work with the international community to ensure that that road does lead to peace.

Colombia

11. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire): If he will make a statement on the political situation in Colombia. [84331]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): The new democratically elected Colombian Government face enormous challenges, particularly in their fight against terrorism and the illegal drugs trade, as well as over human rights and Colombia's humanitarian crisis. We support their efforts to tackle all those issues.

David Taylor: The United States of America has earmarked $1.3 billion for Plan Colombia, of which 80 per cent. is destined for the military and the police and a pathetic 1 per cent. for the peace process. Can the Minister reassure the House that the millions of euros pledged by the EU nations will be used for the search for an economic, political and social solution to the complex difficulties in Colombia, which have worsened with the endemic violence in that country and the ambivalent attitude of President Uribe to the trafficking of heroin and cocaine?

Mr. Rammell: I thank my hon. Friend for his interest in those issues. I should make it clear to him that the British Government and the EU more generally have no involvement in Plan Colombia. The British Government are committed through the EU process to a package of €330 million to support humanitarian development, the peace process and, particularly, projects involving the rule of law and the defence of human rights. I heard what he said about President Uribe and his alleged past associations. However, despite exhaustive investigations, no evidence to support those allegations has been produced. Nevertheless, we constantly urge Uribe to tackle paramilitaries, collusion and impunity, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Will the Minister give the Government of Colombia, who have been democratically elected—there is nothing better than the rule of law throughout the country—the fullest possible support, especially in the war against terrorism? Is he aware that hundreds of distinguished Colombian citizens—bishops, priests, mayors, congressmen, judges, senators and countless others—have been kidnapped or have lost their lives as a consequence of terrorism? Can he therefore assure the House that, on behalf of the Government, he will proscribe FARC and the ELN in both Colombia and the EU? Without the elimination of those organisations, the drugs trade will not be eliminated and peace will not be restored.

Mr. Rammell: We have already introduced a number of the measures that the hon. Gentleman has called for. I very much share his view that we are dealing with a true humanitarian crisis. The statistics show that 2 million people are displaced, 60 per cent. of whom are under 16. More trade unionists were killed in Colombia than in the rest of the world put together last year. The crisis is appalling, and we must support President Uribe's Government. On the point about democratic legitimacy, we certainly take account of the fact that Uribe got 53 per cent. of the vote and has a 70 per cent. approval rating, so there is clearly support for the measures that he has introduced to tackle the crisis. At the same time, however, he must respond to legitimate concerns, especially from non-governmental organisations engaged in the country.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): Is my hon. Friend aware of the proposal from human rights organisations for an exchange of kidnapped people for political prisoners in Colombia? Would the Government consider and support such a proposal?

Mr. Rammell: I am not aware of that, but if my hon. Friend speaks or writes to me about it, I would be more than happy to discuss it.

Al-Qaeda

12. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What assessment he has made of co-ordinated al-Qaeda activity against British interests abroad. [84332]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We constantly monitor the threat to British interests posed by all terrorist groups worldwide. All the intelligence that we receive is sifted and carefully assessed by the intelligence agencies. All the resulting threat assessments are then passed to policy makers.

Dr. Lewis: Given that the Australian Government managed, nearly a fortnight before the event, to pass on a specific warning to their holidaymakers about the threat of a terrorist attack in Mombasa, why did the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office, with access to the same intelligence, fail to pass on a similarly specific warning to our holidaymakers in the area?

Mr. O'Brien: There was no specific intelligence of an attack being planned in Bali—[HON. MEMBERS: "Mombasa."] I am sorry; Mombasa. As far as we are concerned, there was no specific intelligence. If there had been, we would certainly have made that information available.

As the Prime Minister recently said, hardly a day goes by without a terrorist warning of some kind. Indeed, each month the security services get between 300 and 400 pieces of information about terrorist activities. Of those 300 to 400 pieces of information, usually none results in a predicted incident. Some of the information is partial, imprecise, unreliable or deliberate disinformation; rarely is it precise. It is a matter for the intelligence services to give professional advice on their assessment of the quality of that information. The intelligence services are not infallible, but they make the best professional judgment that they can. We support the way in which they analyse that information. Other countries may take a different view about the way in which they give warnings and analyse information. We believe that our intelligence services are doing the best that they reasonably can to ensure that they assess the information in a professional way.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): My hon. Friend is aware that for many years a large number of British people have been going on holiday to Kenya. He will also know that last week the British embassy there had to be closed on security grounds. Can he reassure constituents who contacted me last week that he will further consider updating the website that gives advice about the situation whenever circumstances change so that people do not have to rely on press reports or radio broadcasts when they are about to go on holiday and, understandably, anxious about whether they should cancel it, even if they are going to a part of the country far from the incident?

Mr. O'Brien: We amended all our travel advice on 18 October to warn travellers of the increased threat from international terrorism. The fact that that was a global warning should not detract from its relevance. Travel advice is kept under constant review in the light of all the information available to us. It was changed on 28 November to reflect the implications of the Mombasa attack and the risk of terrorist groups carrying out further attacks in east Africa.

We cannot guarantee that anywhere is completely and totally safe. What we do know is that al-Qaeda is a threat and that there are other terrorists at large in the world. There is therefore a need to be vigilant. We try to assess professionally all the information that we get and make a good judgment about it. We are currently reviewing the way in which we make those decisions to ensure that we improve wherever possible the way in which that intelligence information is assessed and to ensure that we provide information of the best possible quality to members of the public when they travel abroad.

Burma

13. **Vera Baird** (Redcar): What advice he gives to British companies with joint investments in Burma with the military junta. [84333]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): We do not encourage trade or investment with Burma. We do not offer support of any kind for companies to pursue trade or investment with Burma. Companies that seek advice are told of the appalling human rights situation, corruption and dire economic situation that exist there.

Vera Baird: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. He will be well aware that almost the only British company still in Burma is British American Tobacco, which jointly owns a cigarette factory with the military junta and clearly generates considerable profit and tax revenue thereby. When challenged, the company says that, in effect, corporate responsibility requires it to stay in Burma to sustain employment—

Mr. Speaker: Order. A supplementary question must be very snappy, but that is not a snappy question. Will the Minister try to deal with that point?

Mr. O'Brien: I have made it very clear that, as far as we are concerned, Burma is not a place where we encourage any companies to invest. At least, I am not aware of BAT being given any encouragement to continue to operate there and I shall certainly ask officials to identify any information of the sort that my hon. and learned Friend suggests has been given to it. The economic situation in Burma is deteriorating and the Government of Burma abuse human rights on a substantial scale. I spoke yesterday to Aung San Suu Kyi about our wish to ensure that the Government of Burma carry out a process of modernisation and democratisation as quickly as possible. Only then will the economic problems of Burma be resolved and will we have a roadway leading to a process whereby Aung San Suu Kyi and those who represent democracy can feel that Burma truly has an opportunity to rebuild itself after the tragedies of recent years.

Transport Investment

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, I should like to make a statement about the next steps in implementing our investment strategy to improve Britain's transport infrastructure.

Our roads and railways are facing increased demands. We are one of the largest economies in the world, and in the past five years we have got more than 1.5 million more people into work. People are better off and travel more often. As we meet the challenges that come from economic success, we are at the same time dealing with the problems resulting from decades of under-investment in our transport infrastructure.

If we look at other countries' successes in transport and ask what they have done, we see that the common factor is sustained investment year on year and over decades. Over this decade, more than £180 billion in both public and private money will be spent on transport, and because we have built a strong economy we can sustain that investment even in the face of today's uncertain and difficult times.

In the past few months, I have announced additional spending on our railway infrastructure, as well as measures to tackle congestion on the roads. Thirty-seven major road schemes have been completed in the past five years, and even before today's announcement we expect to complete about 30 new schemes in the next five years. Work includes major construction on the A1 and the M25, which will start next year.

Today, I am announcing the next stage of our investment programme—measures costing £5.5 billion, including the local transport plan settlement for 2003–04, together with my decisions in relation to five studies set up to examine pressures on the strategic road network. I announced the transport settlement for London last week. Our objective is to improve Britain's rail and road network as well as to make use of existing infrastructure, in a measured and balanced approach between road and rail and public and private transport. That includes improvements to tackle congestion, improve reliability and make journeys safer, together with measures to improve the environment and quality of life. The majority of journeys are local trips of less than five miles. Our plans allow for sustained expenditure and a doubling in real terms of local spending. That addresses the consequences of decades of under-investment and stop-go funding.

I can today announce the details of the local transport plan settlement for 2003–04. In December 2000, we announced that we would invest £8.4 billion to implement local transport plans over five years. Today's announcement is the third instalment. It builds on the £1.36 billion and £1.58 billion announced in the past two years. In total, the settlement gives local authorities a further £1.6 billion to improve local transport.

First, let us consider light rail schemes. In Greater Manchester, Metrolink has proved safe and reliable. Last year, it carried more than 18 million passengers, many of whom would previously have travelled by car. Its success means that I can confirm today funding approval for three new lines, which should more than double the number of passengers carried. Construction is planned to start next year.

Subject to statutory procedures, a major light rail line will be built in Liverpool. Merseytram will create better access to the city from Kirkby, contribute significantly to regenerating Liverpool city centre, and boost jobs. In Nottingham, the first phase of the express transit system is under construction and is due to open next year. I accept the east midlands study's recommendation that plans for a second phase should be developed.

Buses remain central to the local public transport system, with nearly 4 billion passenger journeys a year. The local transport settlement will enable local authorities to make important improvements to the bus infrastructure, including providing new bus stations with better links to railway stations and other facilities as well as improving access for people with disabilities. The settlement will fund bus priority measures, thousands of road safety improvements and another 900 safe routes to schools schemes.

Next let us consider road maintenance. Improving the quality of local roads is vital not only for the three quarters of adults in this country who drive, but because most public transport depends on them. Tackling the investment backlog on local roads is therefore essential. We are making available more than £600 million of capital to add to local authorities' resource spending on road maintenance next year. In total, local authorities will be able to spend £2.6 billion on road maintenance. That is more than at any time in the past decade.

I am also approving 12 major local road schemes. Those improvements to local roads will tackle congestion, improve road safety and provide much needed bypasses to remove traffic from towns and villages.

Details of the local transport plan allocations will be placed in the Library, and details of my decisions on all the schemes, including light rail, will also be made available to hon. Members.

We are committed to investing in our strategic road network and making better use of the existing infrastructure. The strategic road network carries one third of all traffic and two thirds of freight traffic. In recent months, we have considered five strategic routes in the light of recommendations from studies of the M6 corridor from the midlands to the north-west, the M1 corridor in the east midlands, the A453 between Nottingham and the M1, the A1 north of Newcastle, and routes from London to the south-west and south Wales.

Most of those motorways were built 30 or 40 years ago. Since then, traffic on them has increased to levels that were never anticipated. However, the strategic routes, both road and rail, are critical to our economic prosperity. As the economy grows, pressure on the roads continues to grow.

We are currently spending on rail, and more passengers and freight are being carried by rail since 1997—but we must also spend more on improving the strategic road network. It is inevitable that large-scale developments take time to plan, design and deliver. We therefore need to make decisions in principle now.

The M6 is a vital link between the midlands and the north-west. When it was built in the 1960s, approximately 75,000 vehicles a day were anticipated. However, today, some stretches carry as many as 150,000 vehicles a day. We have already announced a

major £10 billion upgrade for the west coast main line. That is an essential part of our strategy to relieve congestion on that critical transport corridor, allowing for faster trains and increasing capacity for passengers and freight.

The M6 toll road around Birmingham is already under construction and due to open in 2004. The link north of Carlisle to the M74 is being upgraded. With continued economic growth, and given the route's strategic importance, I have accepted the study's recommendation to widen to four lanes the M6 between Manchester and Birmingham, together with junction improvements and safety measures.

The study also considered replacing the A556 in Cheshire by linking the M6 and M56 with a new dual carriageway. I am worried about the environmental consequences of such a new road, and I have therefore asked the Highways Agency to examine the alternative of widening the existing motorways and improving the junction between them.

The M1 corridor links the south-east with the midlands, Yorkshire and the north-east. The Strategic Rail Authority has already announced improved frequency and faster trains on the Midland Mainline from 2004 as well as other measures to improve rail links. This is a strategic route, and vital to our economy. I have, therefore, decided that the M1 should be widened to four lanes through the east midlands, with climbing lanes for lorries and improvements to junctions. I am asking the Highways Agency to work up proposals for both the M1 and M6, including associated environmental measures, as quickly as possible. We are on course to deliver the objectives for road widening set out in the 10-year plan.

The A453 study looked at problems between Nottingham and the M1. Large-scale widening of this road in suburban areas would have had serious consequences for the local community and environment, so I accept the recommendation to dual from the M1 to Clifton, with a smaller-scale widening through Clifton itself.

The study on the A1 north of Newcastle rejected the case for dualling the A1 to the border, and the Scottish Executive do not intend to dual all the road north of Berwick. The safety record at a number points causes major concern, however, so I am asking the Highways Agency to develop proposals for significant safety improvements. These include completing the widening of the A1 between Morpeth and Alnwick, rather than widening it to Berwick as the north-east regional assembly proposed. Also in Northumberland, the Highways Agency will add to the roads programme the Haydon Bridge bypass on the A69.

I also have to announce decisions on the routes to the south-west and south Wales. First, I have accepted recommendations to add climbing lanes and to improve junctions on the M4 and M5 around Bristol, which will tackle one of the most congested parts of the motorway network. Secondly, much of the A303 is already a dual carriageway, and I am accepting recommendations to dual the remaining single-carriageway sections east of Ilminster. As well as relieving congestion, these improvements will make journeys safer and more reliable.

It is essential that proposals to tackle congestion and improve reliability are consistent with our wider environmental obligations. I have had to consider whether I could accept the south-west regional assembly's recommendation to build a dual carriageway on the A303 and A30 through the Blackdown hills, which are designated as an area of outstanding natural beauty. I believe that there must be a strong presumption against building new roads in such areas, so I am asking the Highways Agency to consider the feasibility of an alternative proposal to widen the A358 from Ilminster to the M5 at Taunton.

As the House will know, an extremely busy section of the A303 runs through the world heritage site at Stonehenge. The original cheaper cut-and-cover solution had substantial environmental drawbacks, so my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and I have decided that a 2 km tunnel should be bored beneath the site at an additional cost of £31 million—a sum that I believe is justified by the environmental gain. This will allow major improvements at this world-famous site. We have a clear duty to protect our heritage and environment.

The five studies made a number of other recommendations, and my full response is being placed in the Library. Some recommendations are for local authorities to develop, and my response makes it clear that far more work needs to be done on a number of other proposals, to establish their feasibility and affordability. I also make it clear that not all of them will go ahead. For example, some proposals, such as the one to widen the M6 to five lanes, will not be taken forward. Further studies will look at the following strategic corridors: from London to the south midlands; along the south coast; from London to Ipswich; on the M60 around north-west Manchester; on the M25; through Yorkshire; through the west midlands; around Hull; and on Tyneside. I expect to report on my decisions on these in the spring. I shall also announce further investment in transport infrastructure at other locations during the course of next year.

The Government are spending more on rail and road to tackle congestion, to improve reliability and to make journeys safer. Under this Government, that investment will be sustained year on year, because it is an essential part of building our economic prosperity and improving our quality of life. I commend this statement to the House.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): I thank the Secretary of State for his customary courtesy in providing an advance copy of his statement. His announcement of the widening of some roads will be widely welcomed. Businesses, motorists and communities in the midlands, the north and the north-west will undoubtedly welcome the widening of the M1 and the M6, and the south-west has desperately needed the full dualling of the A303 for a long time. His words about light rail, buses and trams will also be welcomed by many.

Does the Secretary of State accept, however, that given the warnings last week from the Strategic Rail Authority that the 10-year transport plan is now effectively in tatters, few will believe that such projects are certain to happen? Does he accept that even after this announcement, his Government plan to spend less

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on roads in each year of the 10-year transport plan than the average level of spending under the last Conservative Government?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that his Government have travelled a long way from where they started on the issue? In 1998, his right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"Everyone now acknowledges that we cannot build our way out of congestion; the days of predict and provide are over."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 786.]

Does the Secretary of State remember that? Will he admit that today's statement is a U-turn from that position? Does he remember that the Deputy Prime Minister said:

"I will have failed if in five years time there are not...far fewer journeys by car."?

Will the Secretary of State acknowledge that there has been a failure and that that approach has been scrapped?

Four times on this morning's "Today" programme, the Secretary of State refused to say that reducing traffic is still Government policy, so will he state clearly that Ministers have definitively abandoned that target? Does he also realise that other parts of his statement provoke a strong sense of déjà vu? He boasts of the amount to be spent. In 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister told the House:

"Let no one say that we are not putting our money where our mouth is. We have made a £1.7 billion increase in public investment for transport over the next three years".

All that time and money, but nothing achieved.

The Secretary of State said today that he would work with local government to improve transport. In 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister said of local government:

"This major new initiative will be backed by £700 million, which will enable the development of 150 local transport strategies over the next three years."

Does the Secretary of State remember that? All that time and money, but nothing achieved. He rightly noted that business is worried about congestion. In 1998, the Deputy Prime Minister said that he would take action and told the House:

"The Confederation of British Industry complains of the £15 billion cost of congestion."—[*Official Report*, 20 July 1998; Vol. 316, c. 784-88.]

Does the Secretary of State remember that? I have news for the Government: today, the CBI complains of the £20 billion cost of congestion. All that time and money, but nothing achieved.

Does the Secretary of State accept that we have had five and a half shamefully wasted years in which motorists have been lectured, penalised and massively taxed; the highest fuel duties in the western world have paid for the smallest road building programme since the second world war; and the average motorist has endured a 16 per cent. rise in journey times and a 50 per cent. rise in motorway congestion while Ministers and their chauffeurs sail past in the bus lanes that other people are penalised for using?

Does the Secretary of State really expect motorists to be grateful for his decision to put back in the road programme schemes that Labour should never have axed in the first place, many of which might have been finished by now if the Government had not got it so badly wrong? Last year, they added not a single inch of tarmac to the national road network—a shocking failure. Is he ashamed of that?

Does the Secretary of State expect the public to believe that he will build the roads that he has promised today when last week the Government had to admit that they could not deliver the rail improvements that he promised only a few months ago? Has he not proven today that, with Labour, all we ever get is the promise of jam tomorrow and the reality of jams today?

Mr. Darling: I do feel sorry for the hon. Gentleman. Clearly, one of his biggest problems is that he does not have a transport policy. He said at the Tory party conference that he would announce that policy before the end of the year, but I note that there are only 10 more announcing days till Christmas, so time is running out.

The hon. Gentleman has another problem. The general thrust of his rant is, I think, that we ought to be spending more, yet I note that the leader of the Conservative party—I know that the hon. Gentleman has difficulties with him, or at least did in the past—said as recently as 8 December:

"We've already said we are not matching the Government's spending plans."

So, whatever else the hon. Gentleman says, he cannot get away from the fact that he would not have the money to spend on any such measures, let alone those that I have announced today.

The hon. Gentleman raised two points that are worthy of reply. First, he complained that there were more people travelling around than there were five years ago. In many ways that is a good thing, is it not? There are 1.5 million fewer unemployed people now. People are moving around: they are better off because of the strong economy. Our job must be to ensure that the transport system enables people and goods to move around. Ours must be a measured and balanced approach. That is why we are investing in both road and rail.

Secondly, the hon. Gentleman mentioned the Strategic Rail Authority and rail expenditure. Richard Bowker, the SRA's chairman, made the obvious point that the industry needs to get a grip on its projects and costs. It never did that under Railtrack. It did not do it under privatisation, when the whole system virtually fell to pieces. Richard Bowker was absolutely right: we must keep a tight control on expenditure to ensure that money is spent properly.

As for the rest of the hon. Gentleman's remarks, I think that, rather like his policies, they are best forgotten.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for giving notice of his statement. Although it has already been announced, may I begin by welcoming the money provided for local transport plans? My local authority will be delighted.

Does the Secretary of State acknowledge that local plans often provide the most balanced and measured solution to the scourge of congestion and pollution on our roads, not least by focusing on improving public transport? If so, why has he not applied the same

measured and balanced approach to major national projects? Why, within days of the announcement that many of the major rail improvement projects were to be shelved and that no money was available for the rail items in the multi-modal studies, are the Government returning to the old failed predict-and-provide approach on our roads? Did the multi-modal studies not show that without matched road pricing and equal action to improve public transport, major road building simply generates more traffic, increases congestion and harms business and the economy?

Why, when we are about to hear more news of train delays and cancellations, has the Secretary of State not reconsidered the balance of Government funding between road building and public transport? What exactly did he mean when he said back in June:

"Britain isn't big enough for us to be pouring more and more concrete over its green and pleasant land"?

Has he not simply given up? Surely all we can look forward to now is worsening public transport and longer and wider traffic jams.

Mr. Darling: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's welcome for our proposals, but he says that we should be spending more on rail. Indeed, I saw him on television earlier saying exactly the same. Perhaps he should have a word with the Liberal Democrats' finance spokesman, who has given a warning about Liberal Democrat spending plans. He said that his colleagues could no longer assume that spending pledges could be funded unless they satisfied five tests. Where have we heard that before? The tests include the following: the pledges must be value for money, they must be funded within current budgets, they must be a priority for scarce resources, and—wait for it—the Liberal Democrats must decide whether the pledges could not be better delivered by the private sector. My word! I look forward to that being debated at next year's Liberal Democrat conference.

The hon. Gentleman made a fair point in saying that investment must be balanced and must be measured. That is why we are spending far more on the railways. As I told the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) a moment ago, Richard Bowker's point last week was not that there was a lack of substantial sums. The point is that we cannot return to the situation that was arising with Railtrack, which simply thought of a number and doubled it, which had no control over its costs and which did not get a grip on its projects. Of course we must ensure that money is spent properly, whether it has come from the private or the public sector; but a substantial amount is being invested. The west coast main line is a case in point.

The hon. Gentleman went on to say, basically, that he was opposed to everything I announced today about road improvements. Is he really saying to his colleagues with constituencies in south-west England that the A303 should not be dualled, or to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) that he should not argue for upgrading the A1, as he did at a recent Question Time? Does he not want the M4-M5 around Bristol to be improved? He knows in his heart of hearts that Liberal policy on transport can be a trifle muddled at times.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): The Secretary of State will be aware that his decision to put a lot of money into light rail will be most warmly welcomed. The decision to improve roads, where bypasses are needed or where safety demands that the quality of a road be upgraded, will also be welcomed. However, he will, I think, accept that we cannot build our way out of congestion and that without some commitment towards inter-urban charging or some suitable change in Government policies, this road building programme will not provide the improvement that we expect. Will he please tackle the fact that, over the next 10 years, public transport will become more expensive and motoring cheaper?

Mr. Darling: I agree that transport policy has to be balanced. We have to invest in sensible road improvements—although nobody is suggesting that we should return to the widespread motorway programmes of the 1960s—but we also need to invest in public transport. I am glad that my hon. Friend acknowledged that.

I have said on many occasions since I started doing this job that road pricing needs to be debated—it is a subject that people tend to shy away from. There are two problems. The first is whether it is a feasible proposition, as we are talking about nearly 25 million cars, and nowhere in the world has such a proposition been tackled. The second is whether it would be technically possible. I have enough experience as a Minister with large IT projects to be very wary of people who come along and say, "Don't worry, it'll be all right on the night." It does not quite work that way.

I agree that a transport policy should be measured and balanced, and that is the policy that I have been pursuing over the past six months and that I intend to pursue in future.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): My former pupil, the Secretary of State, has scored good marks on this test. Although I regret that he has not seen fit to build a Salisbury bypass, he has taken the right decision on Stonehenge. The fact that there is to be a deep-bore tunnel will put at rest the minds of many archaeologists, for a start. I hope that we can now speed up the process. Is he confident, however, that the unseemly row between English Heritage and the National Trust over the tunnel can be resolved? I will be happy to oblige if I can help. Can I take it at face value when he says that the A303 east of Ilminster will be dualled—and that that will include bypasses not only for Winterbourne Stoke but for Chicklade?

Mr. Darling: I remember that the hon. Gentleman tried to teach me geography for a short time, but I cannot remember whether Stonehenge was included in the syllabus. I am grateful to him for his welcome. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport had a meeting with the National Trust this morning and explained that the Government, having discussed the matter with all the interested parties for some time, have come to the concluded view that a 2.1 km bored tunnel is the right way forward. I very much hope that the National Trust, and everybody else involved, can now accept that and get on with it. Any one who has been to Stonehenge will be amazed that, in this day and age, we still have a busy road

[Mr. Darling]

running right through a world heritage site. If the hon. Gentleman can encourage people to get on with it, so much the better.

I want to ensure that the rest of the A303 is dualled. We are now asking the Highways Agency to work up proposals. Clearly, plans will need to be developed and planning consents sought, but I want to get on with it as quickly as possible. As the House well knows, because of the fact that there are many people along the route who will want to have their say, getting planning permission can be a complex business.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): The whole House should welcome this major public investment in road and rail. I recognise the point that my right hon. Friend made about the strategic road network carrying about two thirds of our freight, but will he reaffirm the Government's commitment to major investment in rail freight? I am sure that he agrees that rail freight should not be seen as the Cinderella of the railway business. Will he confirm that the Government will continue to invest and to take all measures that they can to get freight off the roads and on to the railways?

Mr. Darling: The Government are determined to ensure that more freight is carried on rail—indeed, the amount carried on the railways has gone up by about 28 per cent. in the past five years. I certainly agree with the sentiments that my right hon. Friend expresses on rail freight, not least because of the fact that I am speaking at the Rail Freight Group's Christmas lunch tomorrow.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I welcome the Secretary of State's commitment to expanding capacity on both roads and railways; that is sorely needed and it is a good idea. When looking at the need for capacity between the Thames valley and London, will he consider favourably noise-reducing surfaces and noise barriers along any sections of widened motorway that are close to human habitation? On the railways, will he look at better braking and signalling technologies to enable more trains per hour to run at peaks? We desperately need more peak rail capacity, and there is no room for extra track.

Mr. Darling: I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman says on improving the quality of road surfaces. As existing roads come up for renewal, different surfaces are being applied to them to reduce noise, and new roads also have surfaces that cause a lot less noise. That makes a dramatic difference for drivers and, importantly, for people living alongside such roads. As the right hon. Gentleman may know, about a month ago the Strategic Rail Authority announced major changes to the franchising system. There will be one franchisee for most principal London stations, which will help to deal with some of the hold-ups that are currently encountered. Also, one objective of the review into railway capacity and making better use of railways is to ensure that we make more sensible use of train timetables. I hope that that, together with the gradual upgrading of signalling, will lead to a system that is far more reliable than the current one.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): May I welcome the Secretary of State's announcement concerning the metrolink extensions in Manchester? As a result, the light rail system will come to my constituency for the first time, saving thousands of car journeys, particularly to local hospitals and to Manchester airport. Does my right hon. Friend agree that these additional routes will lead to other routes such as that through to Stockport via Didsbury being considered much sooner than would otherwise have been the case? Such routes will be welcomed by all the people of south Manchester.

Mr. Darling: The Manchester metro is an excellent example of what can be achieved by investing in public transport and providing a good alternative, so that people leave their cars at home and travel by metro. I am very glad that we were able to reach agreement with the various councils in Greater Manchester on additional funding to ensure that the three new routes are properly served. If the service works well and is delivered efficiently, I hope that we can move on. Where an existing metro is in place and substantial public investment has already been made, it makes sense to develop it further, if and when we can. However, the most important thing is to ensure that the new investment goes in, and that the new system works as effectively as possible.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Surely the Secretary of State cannot be satisfied that the main strategic road from eastern England to his own city of Edinburgh still has such a long and dangerous stretch of single carriageway. If he rests his case for that on the multi-modal study, why is he so lukewarm about the rail improvements contained in it, and why is Railtrack still blocking the reopening of stations such as Belford, which could take traffic off the road?

Mr. Darling: I am rather surprised to see the right hon. Gentleman on his feet, given the injunction imposed on him by the Liberal Democrats' finance spokesman, who said that they must stick to current budgets. The multi-modal study considered whether the A1 should be dualled to the Scottish border. It came to the view that it should not, but it did agree that a number of improvements were necessary. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned my home city of Edinburgh, and one of the things that may have influenced the study is that the Scottish Executive do not intend to dual the A1 north of the border. If we dualled it south of the border, the odd situation would arise of the road reverting to single carriageway the minute the line was crossed.

In fact, for many people living in Scotland's central belt, the principal route to the south is now down the M74 and the M6, rather than down the A1. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has a long-standing interest in calling for that road to be improved. It will be improved, and the Highways Agency will keep the whole matter under review in years to come, but I do not want to hold out false hopes, because that would not be fair to the right hon. Gentleman or his constituents. However, he should acknowledge that substantial improvements are on the way for the section to which I referred, and for the junctions, which I hope will be made safer.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on producing

what I consider to be a balanced set of proposals, and in particular on agreeing to fund the Merseyside tram project, or light rail system, as he called it. The project will link Kirkby in my constituency with Liverpool city centre and, just as importantly, will go through some of the most deprived communities on Merseyside. Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating Merseytravel on bringing the project to the point where it is now a reality?

Mr. Darling: I agree on my hon. Friend's final point. Merseytravel has put a lot of work and effort into the project, and I am glad that we were able to agree the funding. The key thing is to get the link constructed and operating. I hope that the fact that we are giving the go-ahead for Merseytram will encourage others to invest in the city and secure the improvements that we want, not least by ensuring that more people are in work and helping to increase the city's prosperity.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The widening of the M6 through my constituency will be received as a mixed blessing, but there will be bitter disappointment that we still do not have a decision on the A556M. When will a decision be made about either improving junction 20 or building the new motorway? Enormous planning blight has been caused in my constituency for the people whom I represent.

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman has craftily refrained from telling us which side he is on in that great debate. I have made it clear that I am concerned about the environmental impact that building a new road would have—and the road would be a new one, as it would not follow the line of the existing road. As I have said today and on other occasions—indeed, I said it as soon as I took up this job—we must consider long and hard whether new roads can be justified. I want to make a decision as quickly as possible, as I recognise what the hon. Gentleman said about blight. Clearly, the Highways Agency has to look at the feasibility of upgrading junction 20 to see whether there might be an alternative. I have asked the agency to look at the matter objectively and come up with an alternative. I hope that that is what happens.

Mr. Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley): I welcome the report, although I am a little disappointed that the Blyth and Tyne rail link, which runs through my constituency in south-east Northumberland and into Newcastle, has not been mentioned so far. Will my right hon. Friend keep an eye on that link in the future?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will know that the link is one of the matters covered in the report. As I made clear in my letter of response, the SRA will want to consider the matter, but I do not want to tell my hon. Friend, "Not to worry, that link is just down the road." We must be realistic, and we are spending a lot of money on transport. My hon. Friend will know that the costs of running the railway have gone up dramatically—not least because we now have a far clearer idea of the state of the network. I am afraid that we never had that under Railtrack or even under British Rail, and it has complicated matters.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The section of the A358 between Ilminster and Taunton is a legitimate candidate for dualling, but that should not happen as an alternative to dualling the A303 from Honiton to Ilminster. When the Government came to office, that piece of road had been subject to a full public inquiry. The very important environmental issues had been considered, and the contract was due to go out to tender. The economic arguments for another arterial route in and out of Devon are overwhelming. The CBI and the Devon and Cornwall Business Council support the project but, more importantly, so does every parish council along the route. If the Secretary of State is going to listen to local people, will he listen to parish councils and their elected representatives?

Mr. Darling: I drove along that route recently to see what the position was. As the hon. Lady may know, I spoke to representatives of industry in the south-west, so I know people's feelings on the matter. However, as I said in my statement earlier, the location has been designated an area of outstanding natural beauty. Successive Governments have taken a view on the environmental benefits of such designations, and we must think long and hard before agreeing to build a new road through the area. That is why it is right to determine whether the alternative through to Taunton would be better. As I told the hon. Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), Governments have a duty to have regard to the environmental consequences of what they do. They must think long and hard before committing to projects that could have an adverse effect on the environment.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I warmly welcome the statement, and the news on the A303 will be widely welcomed in the west country. It is an example of the Government delivering for Cornwall. Our periphery means that it is critical that we have first-class road and rail links. I appreciate that my right hon. Friend needs to think long and hard about the Blackdown hills, but can I urge him to think more quickly, because we need an urgent decision?

Mr. Darling: Just a few moments ago I said that my preference as regards the Blackdown hills is to look at an alternative. However, my hon. Friend is right that the Government are doing a lot in Cornwall. A number of bypasses and road improvements are being worked on in Cornwall. It is important to ensure that road and rail links in all parts of the country are brought up to standard, and that those from the south-west to the rest of the country are improved. After all, it is not just a matter of quality of life and convenience—the economic prosperity of the south-west depends on its transport links.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): In welcoming the improvements in road links to south Wales, I draw the Secretary of State's attention to the fact that 90 per cent. of journeys in Wales are taken by car in contrast to some 84 per cent. in England, so investment in our rail infrastructure is vital for our economy and our environment. In that context, will the right hon. Gentleman take this opportunity to rule out the suggested 10 or even 20 per cent. decrease in funding for the Wales and borders franchise that is being discussed?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's welcome and I am sure that the improvements on the

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M4 and M5 around Bristol will also help traffic travelling to south Wales—at least, it should do, from my experience. On rail expenditure, as I said earlier, the Government are determined to ensure that we continue to invest in the railways the money that has been allocated. However, some people in the industry—operators as well as contractors—are approaching this as if they can simply ask the Government to write a blank cheque. No responsible Government could agree to that, so although of course we want to make sure that we achieve good quality and better standards than we have at present, we cannot accept a situation in which operators say how much money they want and we hand it over. That is no way to run a railway.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Although my right hon. Friend's statement is most welcome, particularly the improvements to the M6, does he agree that it is important to improve motorway link roads such as the proposed Heysham Port/M6 link road, which will bring massive benefits to my constituency when it is finally completed? Can he give me an assurance that when this scheme is submitted to the Government for funding, he will give it his careful consideration?

Mr. Darling: I always consider schemes, but my hon. Friend knows that I cannot go as far as to say that I will approve them. She is right that although it is of course important to improve our strategic arterial routes, the link roads to various parts of the country are equally important. All proposals will be considered carefully, especially those that ensure the continued economic development of certain areas or that benefit areas that are being opened up for additional development.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the south coast multi-modal study has concluded quite clearly that major improvements are necessary to the A27 between Lewes and Polegate and that they should be a priority? So why is he going to wait until the spring to make a decision?

Mr. Darling: Well, simply because we get these reports from the consultants; they then go to the regional assemblies; and various other people have to have their say before they come to me for consideration. I could have waited and looked at them all together, as some people urged me to do, but I thought it best to deal with them in sensible groups. If I jump the process, I fear that somebody will head off to my learned friends in court—as I found out only too recently—and I do not want to repeat that experience too often.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Will my right hon. Friend accept from me a guarded welcome for the M6 proposals? Major projects such as the widening of the M6 have an enormous impact on local sub-regions such as north Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent. Does my right hon. Friend therefore share my concern that the multi-modal study did not consider the potential of such rail links as the Crewe-Derby line, which runs through the whole of the north Staffordshire sub-region and into south Cheshire? Will he undertake to review that serious omission so that the potential for passengers and freight on that enormously important sub-regional line can be considered?

Mr. Darling: The SRA will no doubt want to look at a number of rail projects throughout the country. As I pointed out earlier, the cost of running the railways in this country is greater than was anticipated—mainly due to the state of the track, although other factors are also involved.

In relation to the M6, I am grateful for my hon. Friend's "guarded" welcome, but regardless of our ability to get more people to travel by train, that road was built between 30 and 40 years ago, when not too much attention was paid to the environmental consequences, and it is in need of improvement, so the improvements that I announced today would have been necessary in any case.

The SRA will of course look at particular railway lines but I do not want to tell any right hon. or hon. Member that funding is guaranteed. We shall look into such matters, but we have to operate under constraints.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): I welcome the Secretary of State's attempt to change the M6 from a car park—as it sometimes is—into a working road. However, one aspect of that endeavour was missing from the right hon. Gentleman's statement: there was no sense of the time scale. When is work timetabled to begin on the improvements and will it be funded by a public-private partnership? Does the Secretary of State have any thoughts about tolling the road when it is completed? Finally, when he considers links between Lancashire and Yorkshire, will he be studying plans for an extension of the M65 through the Aire valley to open up another trans-Pennine crossing?

Mr. Darling: In relation to the right hon. Gentleman's question on the M65, the answer is not at the moment. However, it might be helpful if I write to him to let him know where we stand on that matter.

The right hon. Gentleman should not assume from anything that I said today that the road will be tolled. That is not one of our proposals. We need to examine whether it should be funded conventionally or through a public finance scheme. It might be helpful for the right hon. Gentleman and the House to know that the Highways Agency will work up specific proposals and we shall then have to seek planning permission as almost all of them will involve additional land take. The length of that process is not entirely in our hands but we can speed it up by ensuring that the design, environmental considerations, engagement of contractors and so on are telescoped. We are starting to do that, so the process will be quicker than might otherwise have been the case.

As I said in my statement, we cannot begin such projects tomorrow morning; it will be several years before the work is started and completed. I want to get on with things as quickly as possible. The M6 needs that additional capacity as soon as possible. However, I have not the slightest doubt that in future many Members sitting in the Chamber today will raise the legitimate concerns of their constituents about the environmental impacts of the road—we have to marry up the two objectives.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): As the Secretary of State is aware, a senior member of his Department,

Mr. Leslie Packer, last night attended a formidably well-researched presentation by the Motor Industry Research Association and British Nuclear Fuels Ltd at the Parliamentary and Scientific Committee on hydrogen fuel cells and their future use. As the British Government are good at handling situations when only one Department is involved, but perhaps less good when several are involved, such as—in this case—the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department of Trade and Industry, will my right hon. Friend, as the lead Minister, pay some attention to the serious proposals, made by serious people, on the non-fanciful development of hydrogen fuel?

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. In fact, my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary chairs an inter-ministerial group that is considering that work. I strongly believe that the Government should encourage the development of hydrogen fuels, and we shall do everything that we can, either directly or indirectly through the efforts currently being undertaken by the industry. Unfortunately, I suspect that it will take time to develop a proposition that is commercially exploitable, but I am sure that most Members will agree that we should be looking into such alternative forms of propulsion. There are huge environmental gains to come and my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) has my assurance that we will do everything that we can to expedite that work.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I think I can give a wholehearted welcome to something that the right hon. Gentleman said this afternoon, but will he confirm whether what he said about the A303 means that the on-line safety improvements on the Sparkford to Ilchester stretch in my constituency will now take place? Those plans have been in place since 1996; they have gone through a public inquiry and have been agreed. If that is what the right hon. Gentleman is saying, may I thank him on behalf of all those in the local communities who have been making representations not because they want to increase capacity, but because they want to save lives?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his wholehearted welcome. I think we have now had from the Liberals one maybe, one against and one in favour: that sums up the Liberal party quite nicely.

In relation to the A303, we have considered the recommendations and taken a decision in principle to go ahead with the dualling, so we will now ask the Highways Agency to work up proposals. Discussions will have to take place with various people locally, who will have strong views on precisely what is planned, but I am quite happy to set out the procedure in relation to the hon. Gentleman's specific points if he would like me to do so, as that would probably help him to talk to his constituents about them.

Phil Sawford (Kettering): I thank my right hon. Friend for this statement. I welcome news of the £12.7 million investment to build the A43 Corby link road, which will bring great relief to the village of Geddington in my constituency. In view of the volume of traffic, particularly heavy vehicles, and the number of fatalities and serious injuries, will my right hon. Friend do everything that he can to expedite that project so that it can begin as quickly as possible?

Mr. Darling: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those remarks. Yes, the A43 Corby link road has been approved and, yes, I will do everything that I can to bring forward those things as fast as I can. I should just repeat, however, that approving such schemes is the easy stage in some ways; the most difficult thing is to reach agreement on the precise configuration and layout, so I hope that all those hon. Members who have spoken in favour of such things this afternoon will apply their minds to addressing the undoubted difficulties that sometimes arise when people say that they are in favour of a road in principle but do not happen to want it just where we had in mind. I hope that my hon. Friend can help us with that as well.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): When this Government came to office and declared war on the motorist in 1997, the Deputy Prime Minister cancelled a whole series of important road schemes, including the Bisley bypass in my constituency. Now that the present Secretary of State has belatedly seen sense, will he agree that I can bring to see him or one of this ministerial colleagues a delegation of my constituents to raise the issue of the Bisely bypass and a matter that I have raised at two previous meetings with his junior Ministers: the resurfacing and noise barriers that are needed on the M3, which bisects my constituency? At the moment, only one carriageway has been resurfaced. That does not help to reduce the noise pollution from which my constituents suffer, and the Highways Agency tells us that the other carriageway cannot be resurfaced for several years. That is nonsense. Logically, all the work should have been done together.

Mr. Darling: In relation to whether the hon. Gentleman can come to see one of my colleagues, there is never any difficulty with right hon. or hon. Members seeking to see Ministers in my Department. As we are here to represent our constituents, we ought to be able to do that in one-to-one meetings, as that suits most hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is aware of the representations to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's first, rather ungracious, comment, I simply make the point, since he raises the issue, that what we need in this country is Governments who are able and determined to maintain spending year on year, decade on decade. It would be very useful if the hon. Gentleman would back that, although it would put him at odds with the rest of his party.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement today, but does he realise that he will create a problem on the M6? I welcome the four-lane motorway up to the south of Manchester, but there will be a gap north of Warrington to the south of Preston, where it will have three lanes and become a bottleneck. There is a short span of four-lane motorway between Preston and Blackpool. I wonder whether my

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

right hon. Friend will consider finding the funds to ensure that we have a four-lane motorway all the way through Lancashire.

Mr. Darling: I have already spent quite a lot of money today, and I will be careful about offering to spend more. I know the stretch of road to which my hon. Friend refers, and the Highways Agency will keep the matter under review.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): Do the Government have a policy on reducing road traffic?

Mr. Darling: Let me make two points to the hon. Gentleman. First, if the economy continues to grow, and if, therefore, more people have more money and more reasons to travel, and if we get more people into work who must therefore travel to work, it follows, does it not, that people will move around more. Secondly, one of the reasons why more people are moving around today than were doing so 10 years ago is that, 10 years ago, we were in the teeth of a recession. Surely it cannot be any Government's policy to try to lock people up in their own homes. Our priority is not to stop people moving around but to make sure that we tackle congestion, improve the reliability of journeys and improve road safety. That is the Government's policy, and it will continue to be our policy.

Clive Efford (Eltham): Does my right hon. Friend accept that the price of owning and running a car has gone down in the last year? If we are to tackle congestion on our roads, especially in relation to inter-urban transport, we must address that issue. I accept my right hon. Friend's statement that the introduction of inter-urban congestion charging is a very difficult task, but we need to find other methods to encourage people to leave their cars at home. When he comes to consider the M25 review, it should not just deal with congestion and road size but with transferring people from their cars to public transport. It must also consider major park-and-ride schemes for the London area.

Mr. Darling: I agree with some of what my hon. Friend said, as where it is possible to get people out of their cars and into public transport, our transport policy ought to back that. That is why we have announced funding today for the metro light-rail schemes. In relation to London, for example, my hon. Friend will know that I am anxious to make sure that there are improvements to the Thameslink, and that a workable, affordable and deliverable Crossrail project is worked up. He will also know about extensions not just to the tube but to the docklands light railway. At the risk of raising a sore point, we have, of course, announced large sums of money going into the London underground. My hon. Friend is right that money must go into public transport because people must be given a sensible alternative. Without that, we do not have a coherent public transport strategy. I agree with that, and I also agree that some of these issues are difficult and take time to see through.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Can the Secretary of State tell us how long it will take to make a judgement about the A358 route from the A303 through to the M5 at Taunton? When does he expect to make a decision on that important issue, on which I think he is heading in the right direction? Can he also say whether he remains committed to dualling the rail line between Exeter and Salisbury?

Mr. Darling: In relation to the link through to Taunton, I cannot give the hon. Gentleman a precise time. What is important is that we look at all the implications before coming forward with a final worked-up proposal. I do not want to mislead the hon. Gentleman by giving him an artificial time plucked out of the air.

The rail improvements are matters for the SRA to consider, and I cannot give the hon. Gentleman an undertaking on that at the moment. What I can say is that it is particularly important to make sure that the SRA and First Great Western concentrate on achieving a reliable service between the south-west and London.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): While I realise that today's announcement is restricted to England and Wales, I wonder whether my right hon. Friend has had any advances made to him from the Scottish Executive in relation to similar additional funding being made available for roads north of the border.

Mr. Darling: Well, no, because the Scottish Executive must fund its roads programme from the sum devolved to it. Many hon. Members would be surprised if the national Government offered to hand over more money. Road policy within Scotland is devolved. We do, of course, have a clear interest in working with the Scottish Executive in relation to rail policy and aviation policy, much of which are national responsibilities.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Some years ago, the Government promised to resurface concrete roads. The A50 is one of the concrete roads that deserves and needs to be resurfaced. There has been no mention of that in what the Secretary of State has said today. A promise was made, so when can the people of Doveridge expect the A50 to be resurfaced?

Mr. Darling: I am not sure whether the hon. Gentleman was in the Chamber when the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) asked a similar question and I said it was the Government's policy to replace such surfaces. That is part of a rolling programme that will take some years to carry out, because some surfaces are relatively new and the policy is relatively recent. I certainly undertake to write to the hon. Gentleman about the stretch of motorway that he mentioned. However, I remind him and all Conservative Members that, if the work is to get done, it will require sustained public spending. It is an awful pity that the Conservative party's policy is not to match us on that spending. If we return to stop-go policies, all the things about which hon. Members have complained today will continue.

Orders of the Day

European Parliament (Representation) Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

4.31 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The Bill has two clear purposes. The first is to enable us to play our part in supporting the enlargement of the European Union and the participation in European parliamentary democracy by the new accession states. Secondly, it will enfranchise Gibraltar in the European parliamentary elections. Together those purposes will form a major step towards fulfilling UK responsibilities arising from the widening of the European Union democracy to include new member states, and towards ensuring fair representation for those entitled to vote in elections to the European Parliament.

I welcome the fact that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) is here to reply to this debate for the Opposition. We had understood that his colleague, the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), might lead on this issue, and I confess that that had surprised me. Given the fascination of the hon. Member for Stone for all things European, I would have been a little startled if anyone had managed to prise him away from a Bill that had Europe in the title. Nevertheless, for all the hon. Gentleman's history on matters European, I hope that this is one Bill on which he and his party can agree, as I believe that its provisions should command all-party support.

Both main aspects of the Bill are about allowing those who are not currently represented in the European Parliament to vote in European elections and to be represented in the European Parliament. Part 1 establishes a mechanism by which the number of UK Members of the European Parliament can be altered to allow space at the European Parliament for new accession states.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Lord Chancellor's press release of 9 December refers to the notion that Gibraltar should become part of the Welsh region for the purposes of representation in the European Parliament. There is also talk of Wales having four seats instead of five. Will the Minister explain the reasoning behind that?

Yvette Cooper: We have not specified that Gibraltar should be part of the Welsh region. We have made it clear that the Electoral Commission must come forward with a recommendation as to which region Gibraltar should be part of. That could be one of the English regions or the Welsh region.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Although it is most welcome that Gibraltar will have representation in Europe, is the time not now right for Gibraltar also to have representation in this Parliament at Westminster? Would my hon. Friend like to comment on that?

Yvette Cooper: The position of Gibraltar is complex and has evolved over many years. Very few areas of Westminster legislation affect Gibraltar because much of its legislation is made in the Gibraltar Assembly. That process is important and I know that it receives the support of the people in Gibraltar. Therefore, I do not propose a change at this time. However, I shall come to the issues regarding Gibraltar's franchise under the European elections. That issue has also been discussed in the European Court.

Part 2 sets out a provision to enable the people of Gibraltar to vote in European parliamentary elections and to have their interests directly represented in the European Parliament for the first time. We intend to bring both changes into effect by the time of the 2004 European parliamentary elections. Both parts of the Bill reflect the United Kingdom's international obligations under the treaty of Nice and the European convention on human rights.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The Minister lays great stress on the need to ensure that the electoral system is working as best it can for all citizens. Does she accept that the system that the Government use for the elections—the so-called closed list system—is supported only by the control freakery tendency in the Labour party? Why is she not taking the opportunity offered by the Bill to reconsider the system so that we can have open lists that give each elector a real influence over the outcome of the election?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman knows that Parliament has debated open and closed lists extensively. We have no proposals to change the system. A series of other countries in Europe use the closed list system, which has the advantage of being clear, simple to operate and easy to understand. It also delivers a proportionate result.

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Did the Minister note the suggestion in the European Scrutiny Committee's report in June that it would be better to return to the first-past-the-post system for European elections rather than relying on proportional representation?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman has a long history of arguing about such things. He knows that the provision for proportional representation is supported across Europe and, as I said, has been extensively debated in the House and the other place. We have no proposals to use the Bill to change the voting system for European elections.

Part 1 changes the total number of UK MEPs. The House knows that the European Union is preparing for the accession of new member states. The treaty of Nice was signed on 26 February last year by all EU member states and provides for the EU to be enlarged, eventually to include 12 new nations, so bringing the membership to a total of 27. EU enlargement will bring immense benefits in terms of regional stability, economic security, the economy and the environment.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I am surprised that the Minister has so far glossed over the allocation of the seats. She must be aware that the number of MEPs allocated provisionally to each country is a matter of controversy and dispute. Not all member states have accepted it. So why, according to the explanatory notes,

[Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory]

does clause 4 accept that the European Commission will inform the UK of its representation and that the Lord Chancellor will then act on that information? Indeed, he can anticipate the numbers required. That appears to remove from the House the ability to debate the number of MEPs that we should have. I am aware that we will be invited to agree to an order, but why is the House not given an opportunity to debate and agree the number allocated to the United Kingdom when the procedure starts to roll under the Electoral Commission?

Yvette Cooper: I have been on my feet for about six minutes, in which time I have taken about four interventions. I intend to deal with the number of seats in just a few paragraphs, if the hon. Gentleman will be patient, and I hope to address his concern then. To suggest that I have glossed over the allocation is a little premature.

The benefits of enlargement will flow across Europe. We should strongly welcome the gains that that will bring for the accession states, which have worked hard to meet the criteria for joining the EU. Enlargement is in the direct interest of the UK as well. The widening market will bring long-term economic gains for British companies and British investors, and the environmental benefits that will result from accession states tackling pollution will be experienced here too. The benefits of regional stability have direct consequences for UK citizens as well as people across Europe.

Drawing the accession states into the EU means ensuring that they have proper involvement in European institutions and decision making. In particular, for the purposes of the Bill, it means ensuring that they have fair representation in the European Parliament. During preparations for EU enlargement, it was agreed by the treaty of Nice that an enlarged European Parliament with a maximum 732 MEPs was necessary. Existing member states are obliged to make reductions in the number of MEPs to make space for accession states and ensure that they have fair representation, while keeping the European Parliament at a manageable size.

The Bill sets up a framework for reducing the number of MEPs representing the UK to a final maximum of 72—a reduction of 15 seats from the current 87. The current number of British MEPs is specified in the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002, which is amended by the Bill. Along with France and Italy, the UK will continue to have the second-largest number of MEPs in the European Parliament.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Can my hon. Friend confirm that the change in the number of MEPs to 732 is a great opportunity for us to move away from Strasbourg once and for all? We could have one location that was not expensive, inefficient and a waste of time and resources.

Yvette Cooper: As my hon. Friend will be aware, there are strong views in other European countries about that. It has been debated extensively across Europe, and I do not anticipate progress on the matter in the near future.

The number of seats that we have in the European Parliament will not be reduced all at once. It was agreed by the treaty of Nice that the reduction in existing member states' representation will take place as new states accede. It is intended to implement some reductions to account for the accession of the first group of accession states—probably 10 of the 12 candidates—in time for the 2004 election. Final decisions about which countries will accede and the number of seats to which each existing member state will be entitled with the first tranche of accessions will be made later this week at the European Council in Copenhagen.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I guess the Minister's refusal to answer the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) about our influence over the matter is a reflection of the fact that the Government have no influence. Does she agree with the Portuguese Government that as long as we stay outside the euro, we cannot possibly hope to provide a lead on or influence over such issues?

Yvette Cooper: Is the right hon. Gentleman advocating early membership of the euro? That would certainly be a startling change. I sense a shifting position—any minute now, the right hon. Gentleman will be telling us that the five economic tests have been met. As I have explained, the issues are decided by negotiation across Europe. Opposition Members must accept that that is the case—discussion and negotiation are essential. We must ensure that the European Parliament is an effective size and does not grow ever larger with the accession of each new country. It is important that it is of manageable size and that there is fair representation for all members of the European Union. Opposition Members seem to be suggesting that our Parliament should be able to pick numbers out of a hat and toss them at the European Parliament and that every other country should do the same. However, it is important that the issues are debated.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Instead of caricaturing our position, I wish that the Minister would answer my question. These matters are occasionally the subject of controversy and dispute, as she knows, under the Nice allocation. Why, therefore, does clause 4, according to explanatory notes, allow the commission to inform the United Kingdom what its allocation will be? Apparently, we have to accept that allocation without a debate or decision in our Parliament. I urge the Minister to amend the clause to give member states additional influence over that important matter of democracy. That is a rather modest request. I hope that she accedes to it in the light of her Government's professed desire to give member states' Parliaments additional authority.

Yvette Cooper: As I have made clear, the proposal for a reduction to a final maximum of 72 seats was part of the negotiations of the treaty of Nice. There will be further discussions at the Copenhagen European Council later this week to discuss which states will accede to the European Union this week. It is important for us to recognise that the pace of change towards that maximum of 72 seats will be determined by the pace of accession of other countries. That needs to happen and it will depend on the discussions that take place across Europe, not just this week, but in future.

There is an important issue about how those reductions are to be incorporated into the European parliamentary election system. We believe that the

fairest way to decide where the reductions should occur is to ask the independent Electoral Commission to examine the issue and make recommendations. The commission will report to the Lord Chancellor the results of its review and present recommendations about the new distribution of MEPs across the UK. Clause 2 establishes a mechanism for such reviews. It gives the Lord Chancellor the power to require the Electoral Commission to undertake them within a specified period, and according to the number of MEPs necessary at that time.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): There is a great deal in the Bill about the Electoral Commission and Government Ministers, but there is nothing which states that the Electoral Commission must refer the matter to the boundary committee for proper scrutiny and due process. Will that be the case? There may be disputes among regions about the number of seats—on grounds of sparsity, for example. Does the hon. Lady expect a proper process to be undertaken?

Yvette Cooper: Certainly, we would expect the Electoral Commission to conduct a proper review. We are not proposing to alter the boundaries of the electoral regions to account for the change as part of the process or as part of the Bill. It is right that the independent Electoral Commission should make recommendations on the matter. We have specified factors that the Electoral Commission needs to take into account—for example, in order to ensure proportionality across the 12 electoral regions, we have set out in the Bill the requirement that each electoral region should have a minimum of three seats, irrespective of voter numbers, to provide reasonable scope for proper representation for each region. Clause 2 ensures that while carrying out the review, the commission takes that into account, and that thereafter the proportion of MEPs to electors should be as equal as is practically possible across the regions. Within those parameters, the Electoral Commission can make any recommendations that it considers appropriate.

Clause 4 gives the Lord Chancellor the power to make a draft order to implement, in due course, the reduction in the total number of MEPs and any recommendation made by the Electoral Commission. The Lord Chancellor will not be able to make an order to change the distribution of MEPs other than one that implements the recommendations of the Electoral Commission, or one that has the consent of the Electoral Commission. The draft order will be placed before both Houses of Parliament for endorsement by affirmative resolution before it can be made and come into effect.

In addition to those specific reviews, which are necessary as a result of the enlargement of the EU, clause 6 and schedule 1 provide for the commission to undertake periodic reviews of the distribution of MEPs.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Will my hon. Friend confirm that the process is basically a simple numerical exercise? We used to have 87 seats, along with France and Italy, and the Germans had 87 until East Germany came in. The number of our seats is going down to 72, and France and Italy will have 72. The number of MEPs for each region will be determined by the size of the electorate.

Yvette Cooper: My hon. Friend is right. The number will be determined also by the recommendation of the independent Electoral Commission, to ensure that the distribution across the country is as fair as possible.

Mr. Cash: Can the Minister reconcile her statement with the fact that, under the proposals, the percentage of votes that the United Kingdom will have drops from 13.9 per cent. to 10.1 per cent.?

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman must realise that the premise of all the changes is that new countries will be joining the EU. That is the starting point for the Bill. It is important that those countries' voices are heard and that they are represented in the European Parliament. The shadow Foreign Secretary said that the Conservative party was passionately in favour of enlargement, but perhaps he should have pointed that out to the hon. Gentleman before this debate.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Yvette Cooper: I shall give the hon. Gentleman one more go at this subject.

Mr. Cash: I am grateful. I would be very interested if the Minister could find a single reference in any of my speeches or writings about this subject suggesting that I am not in favour of enlargement. The situation is quite the opposite.

Yvette Cooper: I am very glad to hear that the hon. Gentleman is in favour of enlargement, but he must also will the means and recognise its consequences. Newly acceding member states will need a voice in the European Parliament.

Let me turn to the second part of the Bill, which deals with enfranchising Gibraltar for European parliamentary elections by 2004. In 1999, in the judgment on the case of Matthews *v.* the UK, the European Court of Human Rights ruled that the people of Gibraltar should be able to participate in elections to the European Parliament and that the UK should take the necessary steps to put that ruling into effect. The UK accepted the judgment of the Court, and the Bill is the means of fulfilling that obligation.

The Bill will enable the people of Gibraltar to have their interests directly represented in the European Parliament for the first time. We want to achieve that by including Gibraltar as part of one of the existing electoral regions. Gibraltar's electorate consists of about 20,000 voters, while the average electoral region in the European parliamentary elections has 3.7 million, so it would clearly be disproportionate for Gibraltar to form a region on its own. Clause 8, therefore, provides for Gibraltar to be combined either with one of the nine English electoral regions or with Wales, which forms its own region, in what we would call the combined region. We believe that that provides a wide choice of regions with different defining features.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Does my hon. Friend's Department take any view about which region would be

[Mr. Lindsay Hoyle]

more suitable to join Gibraltar and is it aware whether any other overseas territories have made noises or applications with regard to joining the EU?

Yvette Cooper: I know that my hon. Friend has expressed interest in that issue for a considerable time. The Lord Chancellor's Department has not taken a view about the region with which Gibraltar would best be combined. Many hon. Members will have their own views, but we believe that it is appropriate for a recommendation to be made by the Electoral Commission to ensure fairness throughout the country. The judgment to which I referred does not apply in the same way to areas such as the Channel Islands, which have a very different relationship with the EU.

Tony Cunningham: At the moment, the Isle of Man has to accept various EU directives as it is trading in the single market, but it has no EU representation whatever. Would it be possible for the Isle of Man Government to have representation if they so wished?

Yvette Cooper: If the Isle of Man Government wanted us to discuss that possibility with them, we would certainly be happy to do so.

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Will the Minister give way?

Yvette Cooper: I need to make a little progress; I shall give way in a few minutes.

Clause 9 gives the independent Electoral Commission the task of considering with which region Gibraltar should be combined. The commission will report its conclusions with a recommendation to the Lord Chancellor by 1 September next year, in time to enable everyone to prepare for the elections the following summer. After consulting the Electoral Commission, a draft order establishing the combined region will be laid before both Houses.

We welcome the fact that the Electoral Commission wants to consult widely before reaching its conclusions in the United Kingdom and Gibraltar, although the Bill requires formal consultation with only the Governor and Chief Minister before a recommendation is made.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will the Parliamentary Secretary give way?

Yvette Cooper: I shall as I have not taken an intervention from a Liberal Democrat Member so far.

Simon Hughes: The Bill provides for consulting the Governor and the Chief Minister. No one can argue with that. Does the Minister's statement about the Electoral Commission's consultations imply that the people of Gibraltar, the political parties and other interest groups will have a chance to express their views? Perfectly proper debates are taking place and, given the small size of the electorate in Gibraltar compared with those of the regions, it is surely better to do what the people of Gibraltar would wish as well as what would suit our electoral planning.

Yvette Cooper: The hon. Gentleman makes important points. The Electoral Commission is keen to consult widely and not restrict itself to the Governor and the Chief Minister. I shall ensure that the Electoral Commission is made aware of the hon. Gentleman's comments.

Mr. Rosindell: Everyone will be pleased to hear that proper consultation will take place with the people and the elected Government of Gibraltar. Does the Parliamentary Secretary accept that Gibraltar is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom, not only of England and Wales? Why, therefore, are only England and Wales being considered?

Yvette Cooper: That is a good question. Consideration is confined to England and Wales for a purely practical reason. To ensure that the secondary legislation is effected in time, and bearing in mind devolution to the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly, it was simpler to limit consideration to England and Wales. That ensures that everything will be in place by 2004.

Mr. Rosindell: Will the Parliamentary Secretary give way?

Yvette Cooper: If the hon. Gentleman is keen to have more detail, I am happy to supply it. Clearly, the matter can be discussed further in Committee. I am also happy to provide more information in summing up, but I must make progress now.

Lady Hermon (North Down): I am most grateful to the Parliamentary Secretary for giving way to an Ulster Unionist this time.

Northern Ireland has a special relationship with the people of Gibraltar in that many Gibraltarians were evacuated to Northern Ireland during the second world war, and some electors on the Gibraltar electoral role were born in Northern Ireland. Would the Parliamentary Secretary therefore consider amending clauses 8 and 9 to enable the Electoral Commission to include Northern Ireland in the regions with which the Gibraltarian electorate could vote?

Yvette Cooper: I acknowledge the hon. Lady's points. Nevertheless, there are different legislative arrangements in Northern Ireland and Scotland for elections and judicial matters. They mean that the inclusion of Northern Ireland and Scotland would be considerably more complicated and that it would be difficult to prepare the secondary legislation in time for the 2004 elections. If the outcome of selecting an electoral region could be Scotland or Northern Ireland, it would not be possible to begin preparing the secondary legislation until the decision had been made. That would mean waiting for the Electoral Commission to report, and waiting until next September to begin implementing the necessary secondary legislation for Gibraltar to be covered for the 2004 elections.

That would make life considerably more difficult for those who organise the election in Gibraltar because a series of practical changes needs to happen.

The underlying principle for combining Gibraltar with a UK electoral region for European parliamentary elections is that Gibraltar should be treated as if it were as much a part of the region as any other area in it. That means that UK electoral law as it applies to the European Parliament elections must apply as equally as possible throughout the combined region. That is no simple feat because UK electoral law does not currently apply to Gibraltar.

The Bill therefore makes provision for the application of a number of pieces of legislation—the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002; the Representation of the People Acts; and the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000—and of many of the statutory instruments made under those Acts, modified as necessary. Modification is necessary to ensure that the law makes practical sense in Gibraltar. Specific circumstances such as location and time difference have to be catered for, and we also need to ensure that there is equality and consistency between the arrangements for conducting European Parliament elections in Gibraltar and in the rest of the combined region. We believe that the most appropriate approach is for this law to be modified for the purposes of Gibraltar by orders and regulations, and the Bill includes enabling powers to provide for that.

The Bill therefore addresses the key issues in much in the same way as the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002 does, leaving the complex detail for regulations. Thus, clause 13 sets out the requirement for Gibraltar to maintain a register of electors for the European Parliament elections, and clauses 14 and 15 cover the franchise and the entitlement to be registered. On the franchise for voters in European parliamentary elections in Gibraltar, we want, as far as possible, to enfranchise those resident in Gibraltar who would be entitled to vote in UK European parliamentary elections if they lived in the UK. Correspondingly, entitlement to be registered on the Gibraltar register is intended to be very similar to that for the UK register, with a slight exception to reflect certain specific conditions, such as the Gibraltar Immigration Control Ordinance.

This legislation is consistent with the United Kingdom's international obligation, and the changes that the Bill is designed to enact are important. They will allow new member states their voice in the European Parliament, and enable the people of Gibraltar to vote for the first time in a European parliamentary election. We believe that the approach set out in the Bill is both appropriate and sound, and that it will support enfranchisement and greater participation in democratic institutions across Europe. I urge all hon. Members to support it.

5.1 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone): Given the intensely controversial nature of the Gibraltar issue, I have to admit to being somewhat disappointed by the way in which the Minister has introduced the Bill, because, in all fairness, she did not really give us an explanation of what lies behind it. For the most part, she gave a mere recital of its provisions, rather than an explanation of the principles that led to its Second Reading today.

The Bill is like a curate's egg: it is good in parts. However, it must be set against a background of two main issues. The first is the reduction of the number of MEPs for the United Kingdom, the principle and method of which raise some disturbing questions. The second issue is that of Gibraltar. However welcome are the proposals to join Gibraltar with one of our existing electoral regions, they also illustrate the lack of proper consultation—at the level of insult—of the Government and people of Gibraltar.

On the reduction in the number of MEPs for the United Kingdom, the Minister has not yet mentioned the fact that the Bill does not specifically refer to reductions—I refer hon. Members to its long title, and to the relevant clauses—although this is implicit in the legislation implementing the treaty of Nice. The Bill refers merely to the enabling of alterations to the number of Members of the European Parliament. Indeed, the explanatory memorandum to the Bill states:

"The European Commission"—

that famously democratic body—

"will inform the UK what their representation will be (the total number of UK MEPs) for the European Parliamentary elections in 2004, and subsequently."

Of course, the words "that famously democratic body" are my own. I merely interpolated them to explain the matter as clearly as I could.

The Conservative party voted against the Nice treaty, and my comments on this Bill are without prejudice to that position. I called for a White Paper during the proceedings on the Bill to implement the Nice treaty, which was supported, on a three-line Whip, by my party. I am glad to say that it was even supported by the Liberal Democrats, on a vote. One of the most alarming features of the Government's position on the Nice treaty—which is now coming to fruition in this Bill—is the wholly mischievous and unwarranted claim, made by a succession of previous Ministers, that, under the treaty, Britain's influence has increased in the European Parliament, not to mention in the Council of Ministers.

Mr. Redwood: Did my hon. Friend notice that when I asked the Minister a perfectly good question, which she was quite unable to answer, she made an entirely false allegation about me changing my view on a crucial subject, which was not implied by what I said? Clearly, she had no chance whatever of answering the point on the Government's complete lack of influence with their European partners on any of those matters.

Mr. Cash: I am bound to concur with my right hon. Friend. Indeed, on the realities of influence, one has only to look, for example, at what has been going on in the defence field over the past few days to realise just how little influence the United Kingdom is able to exercise in relation to European matters. That will continue.

As I pointed out in an intervention, under the Nice treaty, Britain's share of Members of the European Parliament is to crash down from 87 out of 626 from 15 member states, which is equivalent to 13.9 per cent. of the votes, to 74 out of 732. That is a paltry 10.1 per cent., taking into account all the applicants and, barring accidents and democratic decisions if those are made in referendums, the anticipated new total of 27 member states.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): The hon. Gentleman told us that he is in favour of expansion, but is he suggesting that he favours expansion with a bigger and more costly Parliament with more and more Members?

Mr. Cash: No, I am not. I am saying, very simply, that there is an extremely strong case for maintaining our number of seats and that the European enlargement process, irrespective of whether it takes place, is not a reason in itself for such a reduction. Indeed, as I shall explain, the Government's official position in March 2000 was that there should not be more than 700 Members. They were explicit about that, but, of course, they gave way over an increase to 732.

There are also, I may say, uncertainties about the extent to which the enlargement will take place. Irrespective of whether one is in favour of it, the reality is that we cannot be certain of how many Members of the new Parliament there could or should be. One has only to read today's newspapers to see, for example, that there are serious political and constitutional difficulties with regard to the Polish position.

Simon Hughes: I am honestly very confused about the hon. Gentleman's position. If he does not oppose enlargement—he said that he is a supporter of it—there are only two options: either have a bigger European Parliament with more Members, although I have always heard him and his colleagues argue for smaller European institutions rather than bigger ones, or reduce the relative proportion for each existing member state. There is no other way forward. If, for example, Poland does not join, the numbers would not increase by as much and we would not lose as many Members relatively. I need to know which of the two views he supports—a bigger Parliament with the same number of British Members and more Members in total or a smaller Parliament, in which case we would have to take a smaller share.

Mr. Cash: I am simply making the point, which I shall repeat, that there are grave uncertainties as to how the proposals will operate in practice. Originally, the Government said that they wanted everything to be done in one fell swoop and that they were against the two-stage operation that we now have. I am afraid that I attribute a lot of the difficulties that arise in relation not only to the Bill, but to the whole enlargement process to the fact that the Government have failed to acknowledge the realities of the position and the uncertainties that go with it.

I shall proceed by repeating another point that I made earlier: the Government said in March 2000 that the ceiling should be 700 MEPs, which they of course failed to insist on. They were also originally opposed to a two-stage transition to a lower limit for the number of MEPs, on which they again failed to deliver, particularly given the new powers of co-decision in the European Parliament and the increasing centre of gravity that is Berlin, which causes a further marginalisation of British influence.

As I pointed out in the pamphlet that I wrote in July 2001, which even the then Minister for Europe described in flattering terms in a letter to me, that represents a fundamental geopolitical shift in the balance of power and the tectonic plates of Europe. The policy of gradual emasculation of British influence and democracy cannot hide the true long-term nature of the new and harsh political landscape that is being engineered.

The decrease in British influence in the European Parliament is inversely proportional to the increase in the power of that Parliament at the expense of national Parliaments. That is made plain by many of the proposals that are now flooding the convention on Europe.

In its report this year, the European Scrutiny Committee called for a return to the "first past the post" election system. I mentioned that in an earlier intervention. It reflects concern about the degree of centralised power for the party leaderships in the member states which goes with the rations of party lists, and also the disconnection with constituencies, a tendency to political corruption and a decline in deep-rooted democratic representation.

Under clauses 2 and 4, the Lord Chancellor effectively becomes king. I would describe clause 4 in particular as "Cardinal Wolsey's revenge", because it goes even further than the Henry VIII clauses to which we have taken exception for many years. It goes beyond giving Ministers power to amend or repeal enactments of primary legislation by order. Although this would be subject to affirmative resolution, in the real world the Lord Chancellor would have a greatly enhanced power to reduce the number of MEPs in conformity with European Community law—as it is expressed in the Bill—not only now but in future. The Bill does not specify what changes would be made, and under what European Community laws they would be made.

Lady Hermon: Is the hon. Gentleman's understanding of clause 4 and the new powers to be given to the Lord Chancellor that, despite the reassurance that each electoral region will be allocated at least three MEPs, Northern Ireland's allocation could be reduced from three to two, or even one?

Mr. Cash: That is one of the matters that cause us great concern. Many of the powers are so open-ended, vague and uncertain, and indeed so great, while the means of redress is so little, that it is essential for us to consider them in detail and table amendments in Committee.

The Bill does not even tell us which Community law would apply. While we must assume for present purposes that this would be done under the Nice treaty, at any rate for the time being, that does not take account of whatever may emerge from the European convention and/or any subsequent intergovernmental conference or treaty. There is a strong case for ensuring that any decisions made by any such bodies are subject to full democratic consent.

The mere fact that the Lord Chancellor is obliged to consult the Electoral Commission does not provide any satisfactory safeguard. When I communicated with the commission on 5 December, I was told that it had not been involved in advising on the powers for the Lord Chancellor, and that this was an initiative orchestrated by him and his department. I am paraphrasing, but that is what it boiled down to. It seems ironic, to say the least,

that a decision affecting the influence of the United Kingdom in respect of such an important matter should be made by an unelected Member of the other place.

Mr. McCabe: Would the hon. Gentleman care to reflect on his answer to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon)? He said that Northern Ireland's allocation could be reduced to one MEP. Does not the Electoral Commission stipulate that there must be three per region?

Mr. Cash: It certainly does, but we are dealing with the Bill, and also with the extremely extensive power to be given to the Lord Chancellor by order. In Committee we will be able to consider the extent to which the hon. Gentleman is right. If he would like to be on the Committee, I am sure that his membership would benefit us all.

It is because the range of powers is so wide that I described clause 4 as Cardinal Wolsey's revenge. I trust that both Houses of Parliament will be sure to exercise their powers under clause 5 with determination and tenacity. Indeed, a Henry VIII clause at least focuses on one Act, whereas these provisions are open sesame for the entire remit of what is commonly regarded as supreme Community law. I trust that the extent and range of the powers will be fully scrutinised in Committee, and thereafter in another place, where there is a Committee that we do not have in this place, the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee, under the capable chairmanship of Lord Dahrendorf.

The Lord Chancellor will acquire significant power under clause 2 in relation to the distribution of MEPs in the electoral regions, but there is no proper explanation of the boundaries problems that could arise. The total number of MEPs involved is not specified, and we have to rely on the conclusions of the Nice treaty, combined with the outcome of discussions that are to take place on 12 and 13 December at Copenhagen. As the explanatory notes say, the number will be agreed at European level, or as anticipated by the Lord Chancellor.

Furthermore, it is the Electoral Commission—which is unelected, as is the Lord Chancellor—that will recommend the distribution, following the Lord Chancellor's specification, and the power is exercisable with a view to implementing any specific change or anticipated change under Community law in the total number of MEPs for the United Kingdom. What is unacceptable, among other things, is that there is no requirement for the recommendation by the Electoral Commission to the Lord Chancellor to be debated, once published by the Commission—it need merely be laid before Parliament by the Lord Chancellor. I will be grateful if the Minister says that, as I hope, these matters will be not merely laid before Parliament but be subject to a substantive debate.

There is no specific provision under the clause for any such recommendation to be exercisable by the mechanism of a statutory instrument subject to affirmative resolution. Will the Minister explain the mechanics of the arrangement, including in the context of clause 4?

We welcome the proposals on Gibraltar, not least because the Government have utterly failed in their relations with the Government and people of Gibraltar, whom they have treated with contempt. The Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, in agreeing in principle to shared sovereignty with Spain, were, and probably still are, perfectly prepared to ride roughshod over the democratic will of the people of Gibraltar, irrespective of the 99.8 per cent. vote in the referendum in November.

I have to say, with regret, that the Liberal Democrats were no less prepared to sell Gibraltar out.

Simon Hughes: We should not get into the whole debate here, but I refer the hon. Gentleman to the motion passed by our party conference with an overwhelming majority. I know that his party, like the Labour party, has not had a debate in which the membership could take part. If he reads the motion, he will see that we support the people of Gibraltar and believe that it is time for the Brussels process talks to be brought to an end.

Mr. Cash: I would be extremely glad to read anything that the hon. Gentleman would like to give me, but I must say that there seems to have been less than enthusiasm for the idea that Gibraltar should be given the opportunity, under the arrangements that we have proposed, to ensure that the democratic will of its people is properly adhered to. No doubt we will hear from him later on that.

There has been a total lack of meaningful consultation by the Government, and the introduction of the Bill has provided further proof that they are recklessly negligent when it comes to consultation with the Government of Gibraltar. Conservative Members would be happy for Gibraltar to have representation in the European Parliament—if it will do it any good—but it is clear that the only reason why these provisions are in the Bill is that the Government were driven to include them in order to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights on 18 February 1999, by a massive vote of 15 to two, following the declaration of the Commission on Human Rights on 6 April 1996.

I say all this without prejudice to the unhappy history of the previous Government in relation to the Denise Matthews case, which appears to have been coloured by an over-enthusiasm for accommodating the wishes of Spain on the part of sources that some might identify. I wonder whether the reality of what happened then will emerge in the debate in another place in due course. Notwithstanding that, right has prevailed and the Bill at last gives Gibraltar democratic engagement in the European Parliament.

I would add one general word of warning, however, in respect of the uncertain and uncharted waters that lie ahead under the proposals for the federalisation through the convention and beyond. I urge all those with an interest in democracy in Europe to be vigilant about any future attempt to unscramble the Bill's provisions by majority vote, and to bear in mind the words of T.S. Eliot in "Murder in the Cathedral":

"The last temptation is the greatest treason:

To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

We cannot yet know to which region the combined engagement will apply, but it is suggested that it could well be the south-west. Given that the Spanish rejected the British request for an amendment to the 1976

[Mr. Cash]

legislation on direct elections, the Government were driven to take unilateral action in order to comply with their own commitment to the European convention on human rights. This Bill is the result. How uncomfortable it must have been for the Prime Minister to have to choose between Spain and his commitment to the European ideal.

There are further criticisms—I shall make them now—of the United Kingdom's position in respect of this Bill, which sits uneasily between the Rock and a hard place. Why has the United Kingdom failed properly to consult with the elected authorities on the Rock? Gibraltar's self-government is devolved to a considerable extent. Where does the Minister draw the line between the governmental roles of the United Kingdom and of Gibraltar itself—particularly in respect of electoral and constitutional law—in so far as Gibraltar's own circumstances could justifiably be accommodated without infringing fundamental principles of electoral law? After all, there will be a need for legislation in Gibraltar to authorise the requirements of the Bill. Given that the United Kingdom Government were prepared to come to terms with having to comply with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights, surely they could also have accepted that some of the Bill's provisions could be legislated in Gibraltar itself.

In particular, too much emphasis is placed on the view of the Governor of Gibraltar, and not enough on those of the elected Government of Gibraltar and their Ministers, notably the Chief Minister. Furthermore, it is the Electoral Commission that will be given the power to recommend which electoral region of the UK will combine with Gibraltar. Will the Minister be good enough to tell us today how the consultation process will involve all the interested parties in Gibraltar, and particularly its elected authorities? I heard what she said in reply to the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), but it is not just the Electoral Commission that should be engaged in proper consultation across the board; so should the United Kingdom Government and their Ministers, including the Lord Chancellor.

I censured the Government about the mechanics of part 1 of the Bill, which gives greatly increased powers to the unelected Lord Chancellor and to the unelected Electoral Commission. Similarly, the unelected Governor of Gibraltar—and, rightly, the elected Chief Minister—will be consulted. Why should there not be wider and more substantial consultation in Gibraltar, particularly in the light of clauses 11 and 12? They include, subject to affirmative resolution, an alteration in the law of Gibraltar by the United Kingdom Parliament that could be regarded as sensitive, contentious or even oppressive.

During my research into the draft proposals for a new constitution for Europe, I discovered a provision that, if adopted, would inhibit the tax regimes of Gibraltar, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, and which would bring any such territories within the overarching ambitions of the new European superstate, and within the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. I trust that the Minister will assure the House today that the Government have no intention of adopting any such proposals. I say that because, although we can understand the reason behind the provisions in the Bill relating to Gibraltar and to certain other arrangements, the overarching question remains of the extent to which the whole matter will be wrapped up in the convention, with potential changes that could unscramble the arrangements now going through. Because of the intense controversy that attends the question of Gibraltar, there is no reason to suppose that those powers would not be manipulated in future, with a view to unscrambling the arrangements. We need to be extremely vigilant on that issue.

I understand that the Chief Minister is to meet representatives of the Lord Chancellor's Department on 17 December, along with the new Minister for Europe. Why was no meeting held between the Lord Chancellor and the Chief Minister before the Bill was introduced? I am not aware that there was a meeting with any other Minister. Perhaps the Parliamentary Secretary herself has had a meeting with the Chief Minister, but I have not heard anything about it.

The in-depth consultation that should have taken place already—it may yet happen—must include not only the combined region but the application of electoral law to Gibraltar under clauses 12 to 21. We intend to examine those clauses closely in Committee, and to seek to amend them, as with so many other provisions in the Bill.

Only the other day, the Foreign Secretary spoke disparagingly of the UK's colonial legacy. He, the members of his Department and now the Lord Chancellor are making a pretty good fist of acting like imperial panjandrums in relation to the democratic rights of the people of Gibraltar. If that is an example of the Government's post-colonial, ethical foreign policy—especially following the referendum on the Rock—they stand charged with behaving like the very people from our imperial past whom they have excoriated. If that is new Labour's imperial face, God help the member states of an enlarged Europe under a new Labour president.

The Parliamentary Secretary will have understood from my speech that we intend to scrutinise the Bill thoroughly in Committee. I should welcome her response to the points that I have raised and the questions that I have asked before the end of proceedings today.

5.27 pm

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): My brief contribution to the debate concerns the overarching question of expansion. We have talked about that often enough, and there is a simple choice to be made. People can believe that expansion will be good for the EU overall, in that it will boost gross domestic product in a number of countries, not least out own. It will also be good in that it will create more jobs right across Europe, and that is something that we all want just now. Expansion will certainly strengthen our capacity to fight international crime and terrorism, and I think that most hon. Members would agree with that. Despite what has been said about Poland, expansion offers the chance of securing peace and stability across Europe. In all those respects, the argument for expansion should be supported by a great many of us.

It is self-evident that, after expansion has taken place, some changes or movement will have to be made to accommodate the other countries. I have no problem if that means a reduction in the number of parliamentary seats. That process seems relatively straightforward. If Britain were ultimately to lose 15 or 16 seats, we would still have the second largest number of seats in the European Parliament, alongside France and Italy. That would not cause me to lie awake at night sweating about percentages. Instead, I would say that Britain would be part of a rather large voting block, especially when we combined with some of the other countries.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I am grateful to the hon. Member for giving way, and I am sorry that I am able to ask this question not of an elected Scottish Labour party MP, but of an exile Scot. Will the hon. Gentleman reflect on the Bill's likely effect in respect of representation for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland? He may be aware that Scotland, with a population of 5 million, has only half the representation of Denmark, whose population is the same size. The proposals mean that that disparity will get worse, to the extent that there may be no proportionality between the various parties in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Mr. McCabe: My answer may explain why I am an exile: from my point of view, in terms of Europe, Scotland is not a separate country. I think of it as part of the United Kingdom and I expect that that is why it has its given number of seats.

I think that we should be prepared to accept some reduction in representation. I will admit to some parochial interest, and I do not think that I am alone in this. It is conceivable that the number of seats for the west midlands could go down to six. Given that the population is about 5 million and, as the Minister said, the average size for a region is a population 3.4 million, I would be a bit worried if our seats were reduced to reflect the latter figure. However, that is a matter for the Electoral Commission. When we established it, some of us, if not all, recognised that we would have to address that issue in the future.

I noticed that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) was slightly disparaging about the Electoral Commission, and he told us that it is not even an elected body. He is absolutely right, and I am delighted about that. The object was to create an impartial body, independent of Government and political parties, to supervise the administration of elections. The hon. Gentleman may recall that its establishment was recommended by the Hansard Society, the Jenkins commission and the Neill Committee. In fact, we voted for it in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The hon. Gentleman's Government, or, rather his party—that was a Freudian slip, as a Tory Government will be a long time coming—

Mr. Cash: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. McCabe: Yes.

Mr. Cash: My points about the Electoral Commission were not meant to deny that it has an important function to perform. However, in the context of these arrangements, as we are dealing with orders in Parliament and the constitutional process, they would much better be dealt with by a proper democratic process through Parliament.

Mr. McCabe: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I simply repeat that his criticism is that the Electoral Commission is not an elected body, while my point is that that is because we said that we needed an impartial body to deal with such issues. There is a choice, but voting for something and then rejecting it the first time that it is put to the test says something about our commitment.

I am also struck by the hon. Gentleman's position. He told us that he had never written or spoken against expansion, and I am happy to accept that. However, I cannot understand why he cannot tell us whether he wants a bigger and more expensive Parliament or he wants to scupper expansion through preventing a parliamentary readjustment across Europe. Or does he believe that everybody but Britain should play their part, while we should not bother? That is central to his argument at the outset. If he does not know what he wants or why he wants it, why is he telling us what he wants in the first place?

On clause 2, I think that there was a fundamental error in the hon. Gentleman's response to the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). It is clear that the Electoral Commission must make sure that there are at least three MEPs per region. On that basis, Northern Ireland would not lose any of its MEPs under the Bill. We could discuss this in Committee, and I am sure that amendments will be put down to that effect, but it will be time wasted, because we know what the position is before we start. I am tempted to say that if we are not against expansion—if we have never written or spoken against it—why do we want to waste time on matters that we know are unnecessary?

As for Gibraltar, strangely enough, I have a slightly different recollection, because it seems that the Bill is trying to deal with the consequences of the European Court of Human Rights ruling. Hon. Members will recall that under that ruling the then Tory Government found that they were in breach of their obligations under the treaty, but failed to do anything about it. Strangely enough, the Bill tries to address that problem.

Opposition Members may tell us that they are not happy about the Labour Government's approach but they had the option to do something when they were in government and chose not to. They chose instead to put themselves in breach of the treaty and when that was pointed out to them they chose not to remedy it, so we were left to deal with the matter and are doing so in a relatively simple, straightforward and pragmatic way.

Between 17,000 and 20,000 people in Gibraltar have the right to vote in European elections and we have to find a way of making that possible. Because that number is too small to form a constituency on its own, the Government's proposal is that we should pair Gibraltar with another region in order to enfranchise its people. I can see no problem with that—except that, unlike other hon. Members, I am not absolutely in love with Gibraltar or the Gibraltarians, so I am willing to be up front about the fact that I do not desperately want them to be paired with the west midlands.

[Mr. McCabe]

We should reflect on what the Electoral Commission said.

Mr. Rosindell: Will the hon. Gentleman explain to the House and to the people of Gibraltar his comments about not being in love with them? They are British people. Does he not agree that they should be treated fairly, decently and in a democratic way—as he would expect for his constituents? Will he also explain to the House why the Government are so enthusiastic about allowing the applicant countries of eastern Europe to join the EU and have representation—as is right—but do not display the same enthusiasm for the British people of Gibraltar, who have been members of the European Union for 31 years?

Mr. McCabe: I shall deal with the first part of the hon. Gentleman's question in due course. On the second part, I repeat that the Labour Government have not denied the people of Gibraltar the opportunity to participate in elections. It was the previous Tory Government who were in breach of their agreements under the convention. They failed to find a remedy and that is why we are holding this debate. I hope that point is clear to the hon. Gentleman.

There are questions about how the Electoral Commission will address the problem. One of the commission's stated aims is that, as well as trying to find electoral equality, it should reflect community identity and interests when determining regions. I am not quite clear as to the connection between Gibraltar and the west midlands although I am aware that the Conservative MEP, Philip Bradbourn, is very keen on it. However, that may be partly down to a simple electoral calculation. I hope that I am wrong but I suspect that if we were to examine the current situation in the west midlands, Mr. Bradbourn might have a pressing reason for wanting Gibraltar paired with the region.

In reality, it is difficult to imagine how the Electoral Commission will deal with the problem. However, we have some guidance. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs that he thought that the south-west region had the most in common with Gibraltar and might be the most obvious choice. Interestingly, the Gibraltarians who gave evidence to that Committee made the same point. They made it clear that their preference was to join up with the south-west region, so the solution may be simple.

If for any reason that proposal falls through, I urge my hon. Friend the Minister to bear in mind, when the Lord Chancellor finally reflects on the matter, the clarity with which the hon. Member for North Down demonstrated her desire that Gibraltar should be paired with Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: The hon. Gentleman may have the good fortune to serve on the Standing Committee that considers the Bill, so may I help him with some additional information? The tallest building in Gibraltar is known as Ballymena house—not Paisley house or Trimble house—which, as the hon. Gentleman will know, is a well known town in County Antrim. The Gibraltar Government's principal representative in the United Kingdom is a gentleman who was born during the war and was evacuated to Northern Ireland.

Mr. McCabe: With every seductive statement, I am more and more persuaded by the hon. Lady's case, and I totally agree that we should treat it seriously.

I said earlier that I was not in love with the Gibraltarians, which obviously caused some distress to the hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell). Let me flesh out what I am saying. If the Gibraltarians want to sign up to the European Parliament and be represented in it, should they not agree to sign up in total? Why should they be exempted from the Community customs area or the common agricultural policy?

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend is making a very interesting statement, but I am sure that he will recognise that countries such as Spain, Holland and France also have overseas territories with completely different fiscal regimes from that in the EU, so we will not be creating something new, but copying a right that already exists in the EU.

Mr. McCabe: That is absolutely right. I was brought up in a regime that said, "No taxation without representation." I would equally turn that on its head and say, "If you want representation, you should be prepared to co-operate with the tax regimes that other people are subject to." I take a rather different view from that of the hon. Member for Stone, who referred to inhibiting Gibraltar's tax regime. I do not know why Gibraltarians should be exempted from the Community customs area, the CAP or the VAT regime. They are less than enthusiastic about signing up to the EU tax code of conduct or the OECD's harmful tax competition code, which, I presume, the hon. Gentleman had in mind.

In fact, the Gibraltar Government said that they will not implement or comply with any voluntary code. I am sure that most hon. Members know that the OECD code, which is voluntary, deals with harmful competition. What is the point of being part of the EU and asking to be represented in it if people do not intend to co-operate with its main tenets, one of which involves avoiding harmful, unfair or unreasonable competition?

In addition, one of the things that I do not love about Gibraltarians is that they continue to enjoy mortgage interest tax relief when no taxpayer in this country is given that benefit. Of course they pay no capital gains tax. In fact, it is the perfect place to go when people want to stash away lots of money. I want to mention another thing that I do not like. I believe that representation should engender fairness and equality. I am happy—

Simon Hughes: Before the hon. Gentleman gets carried away and becomes too happy, may I ask him whether he remembers how much the United Kingdom Government subsidise Gibraltar? The answer is nothing. If he believes in devolution in the United Kingdom, as I hope he does, surely he also accepts that Gibraltar's domestic policies, including those on tax, should be determined by the Government of Gibraltar, not by the Government of the United Kingdom.

Mr. McCabe: I was happy until I took that intervention. I think that the hon. Gentleman refers to

direct subsidy. I accept what he says about that, but it could be argued that Britain contributes to Gibraltar's economy in a number of ways. I certainly accept that the Gibraltarians are entitled to set their own tax rates, but if people sign up to and demand representation in a club, it is reasonable to expect them to abide by the same rules as the other members of that club. Hitherto, the people of Gibraltar have shown enthusiasm only for the benefits that they will derive, but none of the costs that they might be obliged to pay.

Simon Hughes: I do not want to distract the hon. Gentleman from the main thrust of his argument, but some taxes have EU-wide implications, such as VAT, the money collected from which goes into the EU-wide kitty. I understand that there is a case for everybody who has representation paying into that kitty. Capital gains tax, however, has no EU-wide obligation. It is entirely a domestic matter. I assume that he, like us, believes that such issues should continue to be left to domestic Governments to determine and should not be imposed by the EU.

Mr. McCabe: If I did not make it clear earlier, let me make it clear now: I was making a specific point about European tax obligations. In passing, I referred to the differences between the experiences of taxpayers here and taxpayers in Gibraltar. I hope that that is sufficiently clear.

We should all be in favour of EU expansion. If there is a cost in terms of a reduction in our overall number of seats to accommodate our new partners, every sane person should recognise that that is the only way forward. As we are under an obligation to admit Gibraltar, I am happy to go along with that and to leave it to the good judgment of the Electoral Commission, which I hope will have heard the comments of the hon. Member for North Down. I am happy to leave it to the commission to make the decision.

5.46 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I share the pleasure of the Parliamentary Secretary at seeing the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) leading for the Conservatives. There was a real worry that the hon. Gentleman had somehow been parked in a siding for this Bill, and I am glad that that was not the case.

As has been explained, the Bill is in two distinct parts, both of which the Liberal Democrats welcome in broad terms: in the case of Gibraltar, because the measures are long overdue; in the case of the European Parliament, because the proposals move towards the necessary adjustments to allow for enlargement, although we would argue that other adjustments need to be made, and that the Bill does not go far enough in that respect. I have a slight quibble with the architecture of the Bill, as the two parts are the wrong way round. Part 2, which deals with Gibraltar, contains consequent amendments that have implications for part 1, although only in marginal terms. Given that one part is contingent on the other, I would have drafted the Bill the opposite way round. I shall follow my own logic by dealing with Gibraltar first.

The people of Gibraltar have been disfranchised in terms of the European election. As Gibraltar constitutes part of the territory of the European Union, and is subject to at least part of the acquis communautaire, it is disgraceful that it has been disfranchised for so long. That it was necessary for an individual citizen of Gibraltar, Mrs. Denise Matthews—whom I warmly commend—to take a case to the European Court of Human Rights to secure any Government interest in the matter, either from this Government or their predecessor, is deplorable. That it is has taken this Government nearly four years, since 18 February 1999, to legislate, all the while protesting the legal impossibilities of enfranchising the people of Gibraltar, is regrettable. Having said that, we now have a Bill that will do the job as far as the people of Gibraltar are concerned. That is to be welcomed, and I believe that it will be warmly welcomed in Gibraltar.

We have covered this territory many times before in debates. The hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay), who is unfortunately not present tonight, led the charge with his private Member's Bill back in 1997. In 1999, the Foreign Affairs Committee, of which I was then a member, produced a report that was very stringent in its proposals, and made it clear that it felt that the Government were letting the people of Gibraltar down.

We also had a debate in 1998 in which I led for the Liberal Democrats. An amendment was tabled that would effectively have brought about the change in status of the franchise of the people of Gibraltar that we are debating now. Unfortunately the Government rejected it, but not before cogent arguments had been advanced on both sides. I remember arguing that the people of Gibraltar should form part of what was then the Devon and Cornwall European constituency—it has now been absorbed in the south-west region—on the ground that Gibraltar logically formed part of the western approaches. I do not take a dogmatic view of that. In the west country, we have experience of dealing with islands—for example, the Isles of Scilly—promontories and peninsulas, so there may be logic to my proposal. However, that is properly a matter for the Electoral Commission to determine.

Mr. Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that the issue has something to do with the difficulties between Sir Francis Drake and the Spanish?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman may have a point. Indeed, it is perfectly possible to argue that the problems of Gibraltar go back to the treaty of Utrecht. The draftsmen's lack of foresight in working out future relationships in Europe and the possibility of Gibraltar being returned to the Spanish crown have dogged us ever since.

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend makes the perfectly valid point that the Liberal Democrats do not have a view about the region or part of the United Kingdom to which Gibraltar should be linked. We believe that the Electoral Commission should come up with a recommendation. Bids have been made from those representing the capital city and there is logic to them. However, I am also sympathetic to the view that Northern Ireland and Scotland should be included as options. The reasons for not including them do not

[Simon Hughes]

outweigh the fact that the Electoral Commission should have an entirely open choice. We can then all do our own bidding and lobby the commission.

Mr. Heath: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no logical reason why the commission should not consider any of the regions of the United Kingdom.

Simon Hughes: Or the countries.

Mr. Heath: Indeed, or the countries. On the suggestion of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), the specific concerns of the political parties in Northern Ireland may put members of the electorate in Gibraltar in a difficult position, but there is no reason why the political parties in Northern Ireland should not take on a Gibraltarian dimension to their policies. Furthermore, there is an added advantage in that Northern Ireland has a superior electoral process for the election of Members of the European Parliament. That process is exclusive to that region and is unfortunately not available in the rest of the country. I shall return to that point.

The position of Gibraltar has been dogged with ambiguities because of successive Governments' lack of interest in securing a proper status for Gibraltar in accession treaties or in subsequent European treaties to which we have been party. That is entirely regrettable.

I agree with the hon. Member for Stone about the lack of consultation with the representatives of Gibraltar. That is not unusual in the British Government's relationship with the Government of Gibraltar. It has been a characteristic of recent years. The relevant parts of the Bill should make explicit the need to consult the House of Assembly in Gibraltar and the wider community there about the Bill's consequences. Specifically, when the Electoral Commission draws up the rules for registration and the electoral process, it must consult the political parties that are currently constituted in Gibraltar in exactly the same way that it would routinely consult the political parties in the United Kingdom. The fact that that point is not made explicit in the Bill is regrettable, but it may be dealt with in Committee.

The representation of Gibraltar in this House was raised earlier. What we decide has a great effect in Gibraltar, but it has no access even to the Bar of the House and there is no representation for the people of Gibraltar here. The House and the Government need to address that point. We must also consider the future status of Gibraltar in the European Union. If we consider the position of the French Territoires et Départements d'Outre-Mer, the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla, the Dutch external territories and the Faroes, we find that Gibraltar is an anomaly that needs to be addressed.

I want to deal with the extraordinary comments of the hon. Member for Stone about the Liberal Democrats. I do not think that there is any room for ambiguity in the many words that my hon. Friends and I have uttered on the subject. We have argued that the people of Gibraltar should determine their future status.

Mr. Cash *rose—*

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene. If he does, I shall describe to him the Liberal Democrats' position as decided in the assembly that determines our policy.

Mr. Cash: I shall be happy to learn the official position, but I have a couple of quotations from the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell), who is the Liberal Democrats' foreign affairs spokesman. When referring to a referendum, he said:

> "It's plain daft to have a referendum on proposals which have not yet been finalised. Mr. Caruana would have served the interests of the people of Gibraltar much better if he had participated in the talks over its future, rather than carping from the sidelines."

The right hon. and learned Gentleman described concerns over Anglo-Spanish talks as "hysteria". That is what I had in mind. Having said that, I think the hon. Gentleman's remarks today make an awful lot of sense.

Mr. Heath: Because the hon. Gentleman has couched his remarks in those terms, I find it hard to maintain a grudge against him. It is entirely possible to reconcile my right hon. and learned Friend's remarks with what I have said. Although there may have been good political reasons, it did not make sense to hold a referendum on proposals that had not yet been formulated. However, it makes absolute sense to hold a referendum that is binding on all parties once proposals are on the table. Our policy makes that clear. We are determined that, in accordance with liberal and democratic principles, the status of Gibraltar will be determined by the people of Gibraltar. We shall always put their interests first. That is explicit in our policy, and I think the hon. Gentleman now accepts that.

Lady Hermon: I wish to pick up on a point that the hon. Gentleman made about the candidates for whom the electors in Gibraltar could vote if they were aligned with Northern Ireland as a region. I assure him that the Liberal Democrats' sister party, the Alliance party, fields candidates in the European elections along with the traditional parties, such as the Ulster Unionist party and the other Unionist parties. The Conservative party might just manage to save its deposit if it too fielded a candidate in the European elections in the region. There is a broad sweep of political parties in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Heath: If the hon. Lady is seriously suggesting that saving a Conservative party deposit is an argument in favour of the proposal, I must say that it is a difficult concept for us to swallow. None the less, I accept her point.

Let me deal with the reduction in the number of MEPs. There is an orthodoxy that hon. Members on both sides of the House welcome enlargement. However, that breaks down when it comes to putting in the necessary preparatory work to allow enlargement to take place. Concerns about that have been explored and

I do not need to repeat the arguments. There is a long-standing commitment to reduce or cap the overall size of the European Parliament. The hon. Member for Stone referred to the figure of 700, which he claimed was produced by the British Government. Knowing his scholarly love of the subject, I am surprised that he did not recognise that the figure was spelt out in article 189 of the treaty of Amsterdam, about which we seem to have forgotten. The consensus was that that should be the approximate figure for the European Parliament within the enlarged Community. Every current member state must contribute to the reduction to reach that target.

The EU has not reached the figure of 700. It has listened to the pleadings of the small countries, which believe that there is an irredeemable minimum number of representatives that they should have so that they are properly represented. That touches on what the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said when he compared Scotland with other small nations that are member states. We need to recognise the imbalance.

Angus Robertson: On that point, does the hon. Gentleman agree that neither the Bill nor the Electoral Commission will deal with the problem? Slovakia, which is likely to be a new member, has the same population as Scotland, but it will have 13 seats, whereas Scotland will probably have only five. Lithuania, which has broadly the same population as Wales, will have 12, whereas Wales may only have four. Northern Ireland, which can be compared in population terms with Estonia, may go from three to two seats, whereas Estonia will have six. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the only answer to the problem is for all three nations to have the status of normal member states of the EU if they so wish?

Mr. Heath: The hon. Gentleman makes his point. It is self-evident that what he describes is true, but the only remedy—no doubt one that he would advocate—is to split the United Kingdom up so that it is no longer a nation and a member state. It is clear that no one else in the EU will accept the proposition that we count ourselves as four small countries rather than one large one and can therefore have a larger number of representatives. If I thought that the number of MEPs was critical to this country's representation, I would be more exercised by the proposal than I am. I happen to believe that the quality of representation is not entirely proportional to the numbers who are sent to Brussels and Strasbourg. I accept that there is an anomaly, however, and the hon. Gentleman is right to point it out.

My difficulty is that the Government have not addressed the remaining obstacles to enlargement. I would not expect the Bill or the Minister to deal with those, but until the common agricultural policy is right and we sort out some of the institutional changes, there are obstacles to enlargement and the effective working of the EU after enlargement. Subsidiarity, which we have discussed so often, is more a myth than reality. It is time that we proposed, on behalf of the British people, an effective solution to some of those problems.

The reform of the European Parliament itself is also an issue. Many hon. Members will be saddened and not a little distressed by the rejection yet again of the reform of the expenses and pay arrangements in the European Parliament. That was rejected by an unholy alliance of Christian Democrats and Socialists. Although the British Conservatives did not join them this time, no doubt they still have sympathies with that cause. Until reform is in place, the criticism that MEPs are on a gravy train will persist. It is time that we put that house in order.

However, it is right that overall representation is reduced if we are to avoid an unwieldy and over-large institution. It is right that the Bill presents the Electoral Commission with that responsibility, and I have two substantive issues to raise on the way in which the commission carries out its work. The first concerns the minimum number of three Members for each region. The figure of three works well in Northern Ireland because of its electoral system, which is not available to the rest of the country. In the case of a party list system, however, the smaller the number of Members on the list, the less proportional it becomes. This is not a selfish argument because on current voting intentions, it would make little difference to us in the regions as they are constituted.

The north-east runs the risk of reducing from four to three Members. That would markedly reduce the proportionality of the result in that area. While we have the party list system in the regions of England, Wales and Scotland, the Electoral Commission must have regard to the outcome of that system in terms of the minimum number. To provide for a region in which only three Members are elected will produce a perverse outcome.

Angus Robertson: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Electoral Commission should take into account the fact that two parts of the United Kingdom have a four-party rather than a three-party system? Before the argument is put that that is special pleading for the Scottish National party, let me make it clear that if the number is reduced in Scotland, the Liberal Democrats and the Labour will lose MEPs, not us.

Mr. Heath: The Electoral Commission should take that into account. We could discuss how the figures might work out in a future election, but that is immaterial. What matters is the principle of having a proportional system.

My second concern relates to the system of election. Although the Minister pre-empted my comments by rejecting that as part of the Bill, I still intend to explore it further. It is time to instruct the Electoral Commission to review the operation of the list system. We argued strongly, with others, that a closed list system was not the right way to introduce proportional representation to this country. We thought an open list preferable and the single transferable vote better still.

Back in November 1997, we had a great deal of fun discussing the different electoral systems of d'Hondt, Sainte-Lague, Hagenbach-Bischoff and Hare-Niemayer which the then Home Secretary, now the Foreign Secretary, was keen to discuss. At the end of the day, however, he closed his mind and the result was a closed list, which goes against proper accountability. My colleague Nick Clegg is testimony to that. He is an MEP for the East Midlands and has declared his intention to seek election to this House because the system of closed

[Mr. Heath]

lists within a regional context makes it difficult for him to establish the close relationship with his electorate that ensures proper accountability and democracy.

It is an opportune time to review the situation, especially as I think that the previous Home Secretary intended to provide such a proliferation of different systems at different levels and in different areas because he wanted to bring the whole electoral system into disrepute. That is the only reason I can find to explain why he introduced different systems for the devolved Governments, for local government and for different parts of the UK. I hope that we will shortly discuss arrangements for the upper House. I shall argue strongly that if we have an elected upper House, its Members should be elected by single transferable vote or, alternatively, an open list system. A closed list is not a good method of selection. I hope that we can put that to the Electoral Commission so that it can make recommendations to the House.

Finally, like the hon. Member for Stone, I am unhappy about the Lord Chancellor, an unelected Minister in another place who holds a position in the justiciary, having responsibility for those matters. I would be perfectly happy for a Minister in the Lord Chancellor's Department—the Minister herself or her fellow Parliamentary Secretary, the hon. Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton)—to make those decisions, but I have strong misgivings about the matter being left to the Lord Chancellor, who holds a Government position about which I have grave doubts anyway. Clause 23 makes the powers exercised by the Lord Chancellor concurrent with those of the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State's Department is not specified—perhaps the Minister can help to identify which Secretary of State would have powers and in what circumstances. These matters are of great concern to Members on both sides of the House, impinge on the democratic process, and are properly the responsibility of Ministers who are accountable to the House. I hope that we will examine them during consideration of the Bill, which I broadly welcome. However, there are details at which we must look very closely indeed.

6.11 pm

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): First, I am sure that the House is well aware of my interest in Gibraltar. I was a member of the delegation that observed the referendum there.

Geraldine Smith: May I take the opportunity to add that I, too, was an observer in Gibraltar? I should have made that interest clear when I intervened on the Minister.

It is strange that we can go anywhere in Europe up to three times a year without making a declaration, but cannot visit Gibraltar, where British people live, undeclared. It will be interesting to see if that changes now that Gibraltar has European representation.

Mr. Hoyle: My hon. Friend is right—it is rather absurd that people from EU member states have the right to visit other EU countries three times a year without making a declaration. It is therefore rather obscene that one cannot visit Gibraltar even once without making a declaration. That fact needs to be taken on board in the future.

I congratulate the Government on introducing the Bill, which will guarantee a basic human right to Gibraltarians that has been denied them for decades. I am pleased that the case of Matthews *v.* UK, which went to the European Court of Human Rights, ensured that that right was included in the Bill. The Government promised in 1999 that a Bill would be introduced to allow the people of Gibraltar the right to exercise their democratic vote in European elections in time for the 2004 elections. We all believe in democracy, and we have an opportunity to demonstrate that in the Bill.

The Bill raises some interesting questions about the logistics of a referendum and Gibraltar's future, particularly the issue of the region to which Gibraltar should be aligned. Many people have expressed their views, including the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and members of the Scottish National party. I would like to point out that the north-west would benefit from the voters of Gibraltar voting with it, but that is for the Electoral Commission to decide. I hope that it will take on board Members' views before making a decision.

The Foreign Secretary has said that the south-west is the most obvious candidate. I agree that it has the strongest case of any of the contenders. I accept that Northern Ireland has historical links with Gibraltar, but Navy ships travel between the Plymouth dockyards and Gibraltar, so the south-west option makes sense. Sir Francis Drake's connection with Spain has been mentioned. I am not sure that that is the best reason for alignment—[*Laughter.*] I thought that the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) would not be able to resist that little kick at Spain. The Golden Hind Society held a referendum in Plymouth, which showed that the people there believed that the people of Gibraltar should have the right to self-determination, and that they did not believe in joint sovereignty either. My heart tells me to go for the north-west, but I know that the south-west is the obvious choice. Hopefully, the Electoral Commission will allow us to express our preferences, but I am sure that it will make the right decision and listen to all the views expressed in the House.

Political parties must also consider how the proposals will affect their regional list system. That has already been mentioned, and I trust that the Minister will deal with it later. We should be aware of the change and what enfranchising the people of Gibraltar might mean. Earlier, I raised with the Minister the question of other overseas territories. Who knows, the Falklands or other overseas territories may come forward, although I accept that they have no wish to do so at the moment. France, Holland and Spain, as has been said, have enfranchised the residents of their overseas territories. Will the Minister tell us whether the Bill would allow us to consider such an application from one of our overseas territories or, if not, how we would deal with it.

As I said, I went out to Gibraltar to observe the referendum on 7 November. The clear result was that its people have no wish for joint sovereignty, so the question is: what next for Gibraltar? We were told by the Foreign Secretary that the status quo is not an option, so we must look for something else. As joint sovereignty was rightly rejected, we must look at alternatives such

as integration with the United Kingdom and representation of Gibraltar in the House. It has been said that Gibraltar has no elected Member in Parliament, but perhaps we should consider that in future. Independence may be an option or, alternatively, we could consider maintaining the status quo, if that is what the people of Gibraltar wish. Reducing the Governor's powers in Gibraltar and ensuring that there are more powers for its Government may be another way forward. However, we have made a start in looking at issues that need to be considered more carefully in discussions about the future of Gibraltar.

Whatever we may think, this is a matter for the people of Gibraltar. We need to hold a debate with them on which options should be considered by the House. Eventually, they should be able to vote on them in a referendum. However, it is up to the Gibraltarian Government to make a decision about what they wish to do next—I am sure that the people of Gibraltar will ensure that their Government are aware of what they think. In the Bill, we are recognising the democratic rights of the people of Gibraltar and enfranchising them. We believe in human rights and the right to self-determination. The Bill allows Gibraltarians to have a say in Europe, and moves Gibraltar a step closer to the UK. I hope that it acts as a catalyst for discussions about the future status of Gibraltar. We should ensure that its people have the right to vote in European elections and are aligned with a suitable region. I am sure that we can build closer links with Gibraltar, because our Government have failed it in the past. We have been at loggerheads with the people of Gibraltar, but the time has come to reflect calmly on what happened in the past. We in the House must move forward with the best interests of Gibraltar at heart. Successive Governments have kicked Gibraltar around, instead of respecting what it has done for the United Kingdom.

I cannot think of any other territory that put itself at risk during the second world war, the Falklands war and the Gulf war, and will do so again, whatever happens next in respect of Iraq. Gibraltar has always supported the United Kingdom. Whenever they have been called upon in times of trouble, the people of Gibraltar have always volunteered first. It is important that they now get the recognition that they deserve. We have the opportunity to show our full support. Instead of putting them at loggerheads again with a British Government, let us move forward in unity.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I apologise for missing the earlier part of my hon. Friend's contribution. What would he say to my constituent, a Gibraltarian who has moved permanently to live in the United Kingdom, Mr. Olivares of St. Denys crescent, Ibstock, who has the qualities that my hon. Friend just described? He demonstrates the utmost loyalty to this country and is deeply disappointed by some of the events that have taken place in recent months. Should he be more encouraged by what my hon. Friend perceives will happen over the months to come?

Mr. Hoyle: I welcome that intervention because my hon. Friend is right to draw attention to his constituent. It is important that we build close links with the people of Gibraltar for their benefit, not to appease the Spanish Government. It was too easy to sell out the people of Gibraltar for new access within the EU, using Italy and Spain. I believe that we will never treat people in that way again, and I hope that we will recognise our previous mistakes and look after those loyal people of Gibraltar, who are part of the United Kingdom. We are therefore their representatives in the House, and I hope that from now on we can ensure that we work for the benefit of the people of Gibraltar and safeguard their interests.

6.22 pm

Mr. David Ruffley (Bury St. Edmunds): I welcome the Bill because of the enfranchisement of Gibraltarians for the purposes of European parliamentary elections. It is long overdue and has been rejected by Ministers in the House several times before.

The Bill is significant for two reasons. First, for all of us who believe in the effective parliamentary supremacy of this place, the very existence of the Bill as it relates to Gibraltar demonstrates what a Government can achieve if they decide to go down the route of unilateral action in the EU arena. Ministers have effectively threatened to take unilateral action to ensure that Spain does not block the enfranchisement of Gibraltarian citizens for European parliamentary elections. Ministers should mark well the precedent that they have set.

Secondly, the Bill is significant because of the strong message that it sends to the Spanish Government. The passage of the Bill in this place makes it clear that the House sees a more important role for Gibraltar in the life of this country. It certainly represents a move towards closer integration. I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is a doughty campaigner and articulate prosecutor of the cause of Gibraltarian democracy. I hope that Spanish representatives listening to the debate and looking at the Bill's provisions will understand the message that is being sent to them in respect of any future negotiations that they may have with Her Majesty's Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

I mention the importance of the threat of unilateral action to allow the Bill to go ahead. History shows some spinelessness on the part of Ministers in previous Governments, as well as the present Government. At the commencement of direct voting for the European Parliament in the 1970s, the Gibraltarians were excluded from any possibility of direct voting. A rather strange distinction was drawn between Gibraltar and the overseas territories of France and Spain, which were seen to be closely integrated with those countries. As citizens of those territories can vote in national elections, there was no problem including them in European parliamentary elections. Even though the people of Gibraltar have strong historical links with this country and are a part of Europe geographically, they were excluded.

With the increasing importance of co-decision making under the treaties of Amsterdam and Nice, it is little wonder that Ministers in Gibraltar want European parliamentary representation. Remedies for the wrongs done to the people of Gibraltar have been attempted before, as we have heard. The first bold attempt was made by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) in his private Member's Bill in 1997. At that time, the

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Labour Government argued that the enfranchisement of Gibraltarians by the means of adding Gibraltar to a UK constituency was not possible because it would involve amending Annex II of the EC Act on Direct Elections 1976. That would have had to be ratified by all member states, and Ministers at the time did not believe that the Spanish would allow it. That is essentially why that Bill fell.

The second attempt was made during the passage of the European Parliamentary Elections Bill in 1997 and 1998. On Second Reading in another place, the Minister, Lord Williams of Mostyn, raised legal objections to legislating unilaterally to amend the EC Act. He said:

"If we tried to amend it, it would not be within our domestic competence and it would be open to change at the European Court."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 April 1998; Vol. 588, c. 900.]

That was an extraordinary example of spinelessness, no doubt not just at the behest of legal advisers, but at the behest of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Thus, the second recent attempt came to naught.

It is ironic that we needed a claim under the human rights legislation to break the impasse—the obstacle of European Union law, as perceived by Ministers. The human rights claim made in the Matthews case in 1996 came to grief in the first instance, when it was before the Council of Europe's European Commission of Human Rights. On the first attempt, Her Majesty's Ministers countered that the 1976 Act fell within the European Community legal order and was therefore not an Act for which the UK could be held responsible under the Council of Europe convention. Even at that stage, Ministers were not interested in the human rights claim, but happily in February 1999, when proceedings commenced in the European Court of Human Rights, the Court found in favour of Matthews, stating that the British Government were in violation of the ECHR and that they had not made proper arrangements to enable the people of Gibraltar to vote in elections to the European Parliament. At that stage, rather late in the day, Her Majesty's Government acted on the basis of a human rights claim rather than on any robust position on EU law and committed themselves to taking action. It was only at that stage that they showed the moral gumption that I wish they would show in EU negotiations more generally.

The first sign of any determination to say that we were not going to allow Spain to veto parliamentary will and the desire to enfranchise the people of Gibraltar came when the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers put it to the UK that it had two ways of ensuring conformity with the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The Committee suggested that the UK could give effect to the Matthews judgment either by amending the 1976 Act to require the unanimity of EU states—a proposal that was never going to be much of a runner, given the previous attitude shown by Her Majesty's Ministers in not even attempting to take such a route in EU negotiations—or by taking national action. That would involve independent national action—I like the sound of that—using domestic legislation without prior amendment to the 1976 Act. There would also be no requirement to ask Spain whether it would consent—something that we all know was never going to happen.

When the Foreign Office sees such things happening, it can either take a sensible course of action or make life difficult for itself. On this occasion, it appeared to advise the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), now Secretary of State for Wales and the relevant Foreign Office Minister at that time, to take the route of unilateral action. My point is that all that happened late in the day, but none the less, much to my incredulity, in *Hansard* on 10 December 2001, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"The content of this legislation is a matter for the UK alone".

Amen to that. He went on to say:

"it does not require the approval of other member states. There will be no additional EU legislation. Consultations are already underway between the Government and the Government of Gibraltar on the practical arrangements."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2001; Vol. 376, c. 632W.]

Those arrangements have issued forth substantially in the Bill, which illustrates a very important point: it is significant because it shows the importance of unilateral action.

I should like the Minister to deal with a puzzle that arises from the provisions on Gibraltar. The point was well made by the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, which, like me, applauded the use of unilateral domestic legislation instead of any faffing around in fruitless negotiations to try to ensure unanimity among various EU partners. The Select Committee said in its report of July 2002:

"By acting unilaterally, the British Government will enable Gibraltar citizens to vote in elections without prior amendment of the 1976 EC Act".

However, the Committee was puzzled by a statement made to it previously by the now Secretary of State for Wales:

"Spain has dropped its opposition to our insistence on giving the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in the European elections. That is why we have been able to proceed."

I share the Committee's puzzlement and I would be grateful for elucidation from the Minister on how Spain ever had a veto if we could take such unilateral domestic action anyway, without its consent or that of any other EU member?

Mr. Cash: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Ruffley: I am most happy to give way to my distinguished hon. Friend.

Mr. Cash: A thought occurred to me as I was making my speech and also just now as my hon. Friend advanced his lucid arguments. To some extent, were not both the United Kingdom Government and the Spanish Government more impressed by the necessity of complying with the Court's ruling and the feeling that it would be invidious, difficult and embarrassing for them not to do so than by the wholly understandable and justifiable position of unilateral action?

Mr. Ruffley: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. My assessment is that if Her Majesty's Government had shown at an earlier stage a desire to take unilateral

action—I am sure that he will agree that they had an opportunity to do so in 1997—the matter could have been resolved more rapidly. As he suggested, the single cause may not have been the Government's threat of unilateral action, but reticence on the part of other countries about being taken to the European Court of Human Rights. I prefer the interpretation suggesting that an independent member state was acting in its interests on the basis of the threat of unilateral action. I am sure that that approach should have been taken earlier, but it sent out an unmistakeable sign, albeit late in the day, to show that if this Parliament and the UK Government dig in, are lucid and clear and draw a line in the sand, they can often get more out of negotiations than by acting in a supine way and relying on the feeding of lines by various pin-stripe-suited types in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

The significance of the Bill is the effect that it will have on Spain. I join the hon. Member for Chorley and other speakers in drawing attention to the referendum result. I hope that the Foreign Office will consider that result and the way in which the people of Gibraltar will embrace their voting rights in 18 months' time and put a stop to any sell-out or mealy-mouthed negotiations that are consistent with neither the British national interest nor that of the overseas territory of Gibraltar.

The Bill contains an important lesson. Not only in this aspect of European policy, but in others, if Ministers want to do something that might upset some other EU partners, they should do it, because it is remarkable what they can achieve when they keep the British national interest in mind when negotiating in the EU arena.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we should consider pursuing our interests by returning to a system of first-past-the-post elections to the European Parliament, rather than by having it decided for us that we should have some crazy system of proportional representation?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The Bill is about representation, rather than methods of election.

Mr. Ruffley: Hon. Members may not have noticed that I was about to finish my peroration, but I shall briefly be tempted down the path laid out by the hon. Gentleman. Widespread concern has been expressed in all parts of the House throughout the debate about the nature of the closed list system. I know that the Liberal Democrat spokesman has flagged up to the Minister the suggestion that there may be some mechanism to raise that matter in Committee, although when I look at the title of the Bill, it seems to me that that may be rather difficult. Surely, it must be a matter for the House to debate in the near future. In my view, it is inimical to democracy to have a closed list system ruled by party claques, apparatchiks and control freaks, and I am glad that he and other colleagues in all parts of the House steadfastly set their faces against such an approach. I look forward to hearing from the Minister about that point.

6.39 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Several hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), mentioned our debates on the European Parliamentary Elections Act 2002. The Foreign Secretary, in typical fashion, presented his best case for the change in the electoral system, which the Bill seeks to effect. One of his central arguments was that a list system would increase turnout. The House of Commons briefing shows that Great Britain managed a turnout of 23.1 per cent. We should at least mention the total and abject failure of that central objective—engaging the British people—of changing the system. Like many Members, I believe that it would be better if we returned to first principles and considered reintroducing first past the post.

Earlier, I mentioned the process for reducing representation throughout the regions and nations of the United Kingdom. It is important to consider that. Under current arrangements for the House, the Electoral Commission's boundary committee goes through a special process. First, it sets a quota for England; secondly, it sets quotas for unitary authorities or counties and then it draws up boundaries for seats. Individuals can write in and object. If 100 individuals in a local authority or major political party write in, an inquiry is held.

Although the process takes time, there is an input from many organisations into the precise boundary and representation for each area. That tradition has existed since 1945, and it has also applied in local government, which had boundary commissions. Local government undergoes a similar process when change occurs.

In recent years, the Government have tended not to refer electoral matters, especially those that involve proportional representation, to the proper scrutiny of a boundary commission. Instead, they have simply consulted the Electoral Commission. I am worried about that because I am not sure whether proper representations can be made in such circumstances.

For example, the Greater London Authority Act 1999 provided for twinning boroughs and the list system. It was debated in Committee, but it did not undergo the same scrutiny in the country or through an inquiry. The Regional Assemblies Bill involves a similar process. The Government will simply consult the Electoral Commission, but the Bill contains no proper procedure for dealing with the size and precise nature of the electoral boundaries.

The Bill covers what may prove to be party-political, contentious issues. It was claimed earlier that we were simply considering arithmetic and therefore an uncontentious matter, but that is incorrect. The size of a region and the electoral quota required to win a seat can determine representation between the parties. Although southern Ireland has the single transferable vote system, which the Liberal Democrats dearly love, the size of the multi-Member constituencies and whether they are odd or even numbered determine which parties take specific seats. In the Irish system, increasing or reducing the boundaries and seats can determine political representation.

It is clear that if one subtracts, for example, nine seats from a specific region, that can have an impact on political representation. It may have a disproportionate impact on one political party. The Bill clearly states that the exercise is numerical. I welcome that principle. If one tries to apportion seats, it is probably best to do that on a numerical basis. However, what happens when two

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regions make an equal claim, or in the case of quotas that are extremely close? How does one determine in a tie-breaker who will get and who will lose the extra seat? That will cause some debate in a system under which the number of constituencies is fixed.

The Bill does not provide for sparsity. If two regions have an equal claim, sparsity might be a factor. Our first past the post system takes account of it. One presumes that there will be a single enumeration date for the regional electorates. However, some regions are growing rapidly and others are losing population. Will that be a factor in the decision between specific regions? Will Gibraltar be the tie-breaker? That is unclear.

Assigning Gibraltar to a region could determine whether the region gets an extra seat and another loses a seat. There is a political calculation in that, for example, if the south-west had seven rather than six seats, it would be contentious. The Bill does not provide for an inquiry or some means for political parties, local authorities or people in the regions to make representations. Reference is made only to the Lord Chancellor and the Electoral Commission.

The Electoral Commission has a general remit to consult, but the Bill does not specify what sort of consultation. I hope that even if that does not appear in the Bill, the Government, through the Parliamentary Secretary's reply or in Committee, will set out the process. Even if there is no controversy in the first round of reducing seats, perhaps it will arise next time. The process will continue as Europe is enlarged. The ground rules need to be clearly set out so that members of all parties know how to respond to a redistribution of seats. I am uneasy about matters being conducted purely between the Lord Chancellor's Department and the Electoral Commission. We are considering matters that are more political than numerical. If that is acknowledged, we can get through the process more easily.

I welcome the fact that the Gibraltarians will be able to vote. Many hon. Members have spoken about that, and I shall not say much more. As a member for the south-west, which, as I have often argued, is not an especially natural region, I suspect that it would be the most logical region to combine with Gibraltar, given the links between them. The Cornish tend to perceive themselves as somewhat different, and the south-west could probably absorb the Gibraltarians easily as we would also have the Cornish. That is my bid for the Gibraltarians to be combined with the south-west.

I have anxieties about the Bill. It is a small, technical measure, but that does not mean that it does not raise political questions and arguments.

6.48 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I am pleased to have an opportunity of speaking in the debate. I want to raise three specific issues. The first is about human rights, especially in relation to other overseas territories. The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is not in his place, raised that point. Secondly, I want to consider the Electoral Commission and the role of the Lord Chancellor. My third point is about the operation of the combined region and proportional representation.

We are discussing the matter today because of the European Court of Human Rights and its judgment. The Parliamentary Secretary said that the Matthews judgment did not apply to the Channel Islands. However, the Bill and the other documentation suggests that the point about the Matthews case is nothing to do with the wishes of the Gibraltarian Government or those of any other Government of a British overseas territory. Two questions are relevant. Had the British permanent representative to the Council of Europe, who makes a declaration about the European convention on human rights, declared specific territories to be within the ambit of convention? Did any of those territories have the right of individual petition before the European Court? So long as both of those conditions are satisfied, and despite the stance, whatever it might be, of the Government of the Channel Islands—the Bailiwicks of Guernsey or Jersey, for example—it might be open to a citizen to petition the European Court, just as it was open to Denise Matthews to do so. Presumably, in the same circumstances, if the convention were applicable and there were a right of individual petition before the European Court, the Court would reach the same decision again. I would be grateful if the Minister would expand on that, because she did not go into the matter in detail earlier.

My next point relates to the Electoral Commission and the powers of the Lord Chancellor. Many hon. Members have commented that the Bill gives too many powers to the Lord Chancellor. My view is that any man who compares himself with Cardinal Wolsey probably deserves fewer rather than more powers, and that the House should not consider passing any Act of Parliament that might enhance his power in any way. The Bill says, however, that the Electoral Commission has to consider which of the existing electoral regions in England and Wales should be combined with Gibraltar and, before determining what recommendation to make to the Lord Chancellor, consult with the Governor and the Chief Minister of Gibraltar. Under the Bill, the Lord Chancellor also has an obligation to consult the Electoral Commission.

That raises a number of questions, which I would be grateful if the Minister could answer. First, what weight will the Government give to the opinion of the Gibraltar Government—by which I mean the Chief Minister and the Government, in particular, and not simply the Governor? The reason that I ask the question in that form is that a press release of 22 November—the day on which the Bill was published—from the Gibraltar Government makes it plain that the United Kingdom Government gave no weight to the opinions of the Government of Gibraltar when they presented the Bill to the House of Commons. The press release states:

"The Government"—

that is, the Government of Gibraltar—

"has examined the European Parliament (Representation) Bill published today by the British Government, upon the text of which the Gibraltar Government has not been consulted."

There are two reasons why that is strange. The first is that the British Government have made a commitment to more pre-legislative scrutiny—that is, more pre-consideration of Bills, so that they will be in better shape when they come before the House.

Secondly, given the thorough Horlicks that the British Government have made of their relations with the Government of Gibraltar, one might have thought

that, on a Bill of this importance to Gibraltar, it might have been sensible to show the Gibraltar Government the finished text of the draft Bill before presenting it to the House, and to say, "Here is our draft text; what do you think of it?" According to the Government of Gibraltar, however, that was not done. An explanation from the Minister for that would also be helpful.

A further question that I would like to raise is on the nature of the combined region and how it will work in practice. With respect to what you said earlier, Madam Deputy Speaker—of course, I respect your ruling. The way in which the combined region that will include Gibraltar is to operate will involve the existing electoral system, and this will highlight the operation of that system more starkly than ever before. In my own electoral region for the European Parliament—the eastern region—there are eight MEPs. In the south-west—part of which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms)—I think that there are seven, and in Northern Ireland, three. I was particularly attracted to the suggestions made by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon); she made a very appealing case.

So far as I understand the Bill, the system will operate in exactly the same way in the combined region, once Gibraltar has been incorporated into it, as it does now in, shall we say, my own eastern region. Each of the eight MEPs for that region, technically, is an MEP for the whole region. Similarly, the seven MEPs for the south-west are all MEPs for all the south-west. Thus, whichever combined region incorporates Gibraltar, all its MEPs will represent Gibraltar. We already understand the difficulties that this causes in practice. In my own area, the MEPs have informally cut up the region territorially, just so that they can begin to get a grasp of the job. I would be grateful if the Minister could address this issue, specifically in relation to Gibraltar. How will this work? If all the MEPs from a region represent Gibraltar, will they all fly off there regularly? Alternatively, will they simply have to cut up their region and decide informally that only one of them should take responsibility for the territory? If so, which one, and from which party? This raises real concerns in relation to the operation of the combined region.

I am pleased to see the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) in his place and participating in this debate as a true Eurosceptic. I gather that, at a tea party in his constituency a few months ago, he said that he had always been against the single European currency. It is a great pleasure to participate in a debate on the Floor of the House with him, when he takes such an important position on such an important question. With respect to his position on proportional representation, however, I suggest that the question of how the combined region would operate throws into stark relief the catastrophe that is proportional representation.

6.55 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): Most hon. Members will be aware of my views on Gibraltar, and on how the British people of that territory should be represented at every level of government. It is a pity that they should have to begin by being represented in the European Parliament. I would much prefer the Minister to come to the House to state that she will also give the people of Gibraltar the right to make their own decisions on who will speak for them in this House as well. They are British citizens, and they should be treated equally and properly, as we would expect our own constituents to be treated.

I welcome this initiative, although it is sad that it has taken 31 years for the British people of Gibraltar to be given the right to vote in European elections. They joined the Common Market at the same time as the United Kingdom did, yet they were deliberately excluded from being able to vote in European elections from 1979 onwards. That was shameful, and created a democratic deficit that no party in government has addressed over a long period of time. I sincerely hope that the present Government will address the democratic deficit in relation to this place, and that my own party will consider this a future policy for the next Conservative Government.

I welcome the Bill, principally because it takes the first step in a long overdue move towards the integration of the British overseas territory of Gibraltar within the United Kingdom. I hope, however, that the concept of giving the people of our overseas territories the right to vote in elections will not end with this Bill. I want to correct one or two hon. Members who have spoken on the subject earlier. Gibraltar is a member of the European Union, via the United Kingdom, but that does not apply to the other British overseas territories or the Crown dependencies of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man; they are not part of the European Union. Lucky them! While Gibraltar remains part of the European Union, however, it should be given the right to vote and to choose its own elected representatives, and I am glad that there is consensus on that in the House.

The people of Gibraltar have been treated shabbily. It is regrettable that it has taken an action in the European Court of Human Rights to bring the matter to a head. It is a pity that Labour Members—with the honourable exception of the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle), who is just returning to the Chamber—are not enthusiastic about the Bill. Indeed, the hon. Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) said that he did not particularly like Gibraltarians, and had no time for them. He seemed reluctant to give them the vote in European elections. I wish that there were more enthusiasm. I cannot understand any British Member of Parliament being unenthusiastic about giving all British people the right to vote in all British elections. I find it appalling that there is a lack of such enthusiasm among those on the Government Benches. Indeed, the Government have been forced to bring the Bill to the House. They have not done so willingly, as one might have expected from a British Government in relation to their own people.

The explanatory notes make it clear that the integration of Gibraltar in a British region for representation in the European Parliament has come about through the case of Matthews *v.* the United Kingdom in the European Court of Human Rights. The referendum held on the Rock only last month—we all know the result, as 99 per cent. of people in Gibraltar

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decided that they want to stay British—clearly showed that the British people of Gibraltar want representation in the European Parliament and here.

Tony Cunningham: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman. Why did the House not pass legislation between 1979 and 1997 to give the people of Gibraltar the opportunity to vote in European Parliament elections?

Mr. Rosindell: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was not a Member of the House in that period and I cannot speak for a previous Conservative Government. All I can say is that, as a Member of the House today and one who will be a Member when the next Conservative Government are elected, I strongly believe that it is my party's duty to ensure that that wrong is corrected when we are back in power. The Bill will give the people of Gibraltar the right to vote in European elections, but they must also have the right to vote Members to this House. I look forward to that day.

Mr. Hoyle: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is as disappointed as I am that the franchise was not given to the people of Gibraltar between 1979 and 1997, and that he wants to express that disappointment.

Mr. Rosindell: I am disappointed that British subjects, whoever they are and wherever they may live, have not been given the right to vote in British elections. The previous Conservative Government could have given them that right. Obviously, other matters were on the agenda, but I have no doubt that a future Conservative Government will consider the issue and, as the hon. Gentleman knows more than most on the Government Benches, I am arguing strongly for that in my party. Our Government's attitude to the people of Gibraltar should involve not listening and walking away, but substance and meaning. They are British, as are all subjects in the British overseas territories, and they should be given the rights that are expected in our constituencies.

I urge the Government to send the people of Gibraltar the right signals. It is important that those in Gibraltar who are watching the debate today do not see a Government who are reluctant to introduce the Bill. I honestly believe that the attitude that they have displayed to the people of Gibraltar has done enormous harm, so this is an opportunity for them to make their peace with the people of the Rock, respect them and embrace their wishes. It would make such a difference if the people of Gibraltar were made to feel that they are wanted by the Government and wanted by the Members of this place.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend not think that, perversely and in some respects, that attitude may have done a lot of good? It has drawn the attention of the people of this country to how shabbily the people of Gibraltar have been treated. The British people have every reason to be concerned about how they are likely to be treated, for example when they are not given a referendum on the Government's proposal for a European constitution.

Mr. Rosindell: My hon. Friend is correct again. The Government have treated the people of Gibraltar shabbily, but that has highlighted the democratic deficit and the importance of giving the vote to the British people in our few remaining overseas territories.

After an Adjournment debate last week, the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Minister for Europe said to me, "If you give Gibraltar the right to vote in elections, they will all want it." It is as if we have millions of colonies that are all waiting to send MPs to the House. Of course, that is simply not the case. We have a small number of overseas territories—about 12 or 13—with small populations and none has asked for or seems to want independence. They all want to stay under the Crown and they wish to remain British.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the other aspect that distinguishes those territories is that they are not relevant to the Bill.

Mr. Rosindell: Thank you for reminding me of that, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was responding to points made by other Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) referred to referendums on European issues and I endorse everything he said.

The region in which Gibraltar should be included is a matter for the people of Gibraltar and the Electoral Commission. It should be an independent decision. There are strong arguments for the south-west region and arguments for Northern Ireland. I regret the fact that only England and Wales are to be considered, as I believe that Gibraltar is an overseas territory of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Therefore, I cannot understand how, in principle, it is right to exclude any part of the UK from consideration as to the region in which Gibraltar should be included.

Mr. Bacon: Does my hon. Friend agree that the reason given by the Minister for why that cannot be done—namely, that it is rather too complicated—is inadequate in view of the importance of his remarks about the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the fact that we managed to get a man to the moon in 1969?

Mr. Rosindell: My hon. Friend makes a fair point. That argument cannot be sustained and it is simply wrong on principle. If a British overseas territory is to be given the vote in British elections and if the Electoral Commission is to decide the region or constituency in which that territory is to be included, we must start from the basis that it can be included in any part of the UK. I cannot understand how it can possibly be argued that Scotland and Northern Ireland should be excluded from consideration.

I entirely endorse what my hon. Friend says and ask the Minister to reconsider. I am not arguing for Gibraltar to be included in Northern Ireland or in Scotland; I want the people of Gibraltar to make that decision with the Electoral Commission. The whole UK should be treated the same way in this respect.

Once again, it is shabby that the Government have failed to consult the Government of Gibraltar, Gibraltar's Chief Minister and the Gibraltarian people on the Bill. The Minister should understand how profound the matter is to the people of Gibraltar.

The Bill is not of minor consequence to them; it is of major significance to their lives. The European Union may not be particularly significant, but the fact that the people of Gibraltar are getting a vote in a British election for the first time makes the Bill incredibly important to every person on the Rock.

Members will be able to imagine the circumstances if a part of the mainland UK that had been excluded from voting in elections were suddenly able to vote. People would be very keen to ensure that they were properly consulted. That did not happen with Gibraltar, although it should have. I hope that the Minister takes note of the comments not just from me, but from many Members who made that point this afternoon. The Government should go to the people and the elected Government of Gibraltar and give them the right to be consulted on this very important issue, which affects their future.

It is a matter of principle, at least in my view, that all British people—whoever they are, and in whichever part of the world they may live—should be treated equally. This is, I trust, the first rather than the last step along the road to that end.

Let me remind the Minister that the people of Gibraltar are not just part of the European Union. In many senses, they are governed by the United Kingdom Administration. Tony Blair—sorry, the Prime Minister—may be Prime Minister of the United Kingdom rather than Gibraltar, but he makes many decisions about what happens there, as do the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for Defence. Similarly, in respect of higher education, health and many other matters, Gibraltar depends on our elected Government for decisions. That should be taken into account in this and future legislation if we are to deal with the democratic deficit that many of us have mentioned today.

I welcome the Bill, but I am sorry it has taken a court judgment to force the Government to act. I hope that the necessary measures will be taken speedily, and that the people of Gibraltar will be consulted fully. I look forward to the day when those people elect their own MEP, and indeed their own Member of Parliament.

7.11 pm

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): I apologise to both Front Benches, and indeed to all Members, for my absence during most of the debate. I was at the annual children's reception at 10 Downing street, following what will probably prove to be my only invitation to No 10 during the current Parliament.

In this vital debate, we have focused on the representation of small polities or territorial communities—principally Gibraltar, although I am glad that the Cornish were given a mention earlier. They would certainly say that the move to a list system has had a negative impact on their voice in Europe. I intend to concentrate on the representation of what might be called the natural regions of the United Kingdom. Wales and Scotland currently have 13 MEPs between them, but the number is to fall to 10. We are, in fact, to experience 20 per cent. of the cut in UK representation, although our population is only 15 per cent. of the whole. That is disproportionate.

I do not want to adopt a sectarian approach. Although we obviously have a nationalist perspective, Unionists should also be concerned. In a multinational state such as the UK, those who uphold the constitutional integrity of the Union should pay particular attention to the representation of smaller nations such as Northern Ireland at all levels, including the European Parliament. To an extent that is reflected in the fact that the devolved Assemblies, very rarely, are given observer status at the Council of Ministers, although they have no voting rights.

However, it is precisely because Wales, as a small nation, has no automatic right to sit in the Council of Ministers—and no representation in COREPER, the Committee of Permanent Representatives—that the voice of MEPs is so important to us. European Union policies have historically been very important to us in Wales, and indeed to those in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The current discussions of fisheries policies interest us greatly; agriculture is disproportionately important to both Wales and Scotland, along with coal and steel. The same could really be said of regional policy in general. That is why we need to maintain the current level of representation for those three parts of the United Kingdom.

The American political scientist A.O. Hirschmann spoke of the strategies that minority groups could employ in a political system. There were, he said, two strategies, "voice" and "exit". Either the system accommodated minority groups, allowed them to express their distinctiveness and listened to them, or the "exit" door was available. Some of us may wish to approach that door, but I think it is in all our interests, whatever our perspective, to ensure that minority nations in the UK, including Northern Ireland, are given adequate representation. We see that principle in federal systems throughout the world. Members will correct me if my geography is wrong, but I believe that Wyoming, whose population is about half a million, has the same representation in the Senate as California, whose population is some 20 million—or perhaps 40 million; I am not sure. This is not special pleading. I am talking about how we are to ensure political cohesion in a multinational state.

In the European Union there is, in fact, over-representation of small and medium-sized nations. It is called—this is another wonderful example of Eurospeak, or Eurobabble, depending on one's political leanings—the principle of degressive proportionality. It means the over-representation of smaller nations in per capita terms, in relation to both the weighting of votes—that will apply even under the new proposals, post-accession, in the Council of Ministers—and representation as such. It is important because the proportion of small and medium-sized members of the EU is increasing post-accession. The average population of the current member state is about 24.5 million, whereas after further accessions it will be 8.8 million. The question of how best to represent smaller nations is at the forefront of the enlargement debate.

Clearly, a rigid numerical per capita rule is not the answer. A more qualitative approach is needed to the representation of political and cultural diversity in the EU. Luxembourg, whose population is about the same as Cardiff's, will have six seats, while Ireland, with the same population as Wales, will have 12—three times as many as Wales. Denmark, with the same population as Scotland, will have 13, more than double Scotland's six.

[Adam Price]

According to the Bill a Welshman is worth a third of an Irishman, and a Scot is worth half a Dane. That strikes me as rather bizarre.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) is right. We are making an excellent case for full self-government—for Wales and Scotland to be members of the European Union in their own right, and to have the full panoply of advantages in terms of representation. We look forward to seeing the Liberal Democrats join us in supporting that principle at the next election.

Mr. Heath: That would be an excellent argument if the only question to be considered was the number of MEPs. I suspect that there may be other considerations.

Adam Price: Matters for another day, perhaps.

It is reasonable to discuss how the UK seats are to be allocated. The UK is, after all, a multinational state or polity. The EU gives due regard to how minority nations and provinces are given adequate representation; we need to enshrine the same principle in the Bill. Unfortunately, clause 2(4)(b) requires the Electoral Commission to ensure that

"the ratio of electors to MEPs is as nearly as possible the same in each electoral region".

That cannot be right. If we are creating separate regions for the nations and the Province, surely we need a different level of representation. I am a great supporter of English regionalism, but our history of political and cultural difference requires commensurate representation.

Tony Cunningham: Where exactly is the hon. Gentleman drawing the line? He talks about provinces. Would he give the Catalans, the Basques and the Bavarians greater representation, or is he talking only about nation states?

Adam Price: I am a great believer in self-determination, but I will not preach to the Spanish on how they should arrange their internal affairs. There is a discussion going on about whether, alongside the process of external enlargement, bringing in the nations of eastern Europe, we should have a process of internal enlargement, giving greater representation to the stateless or submerged nations of western Europe. We would advocate that, but I was making a slightly different point.

Clearly, if Wales was a member of the European Union in its own right, we would automatically have a right to greater representation. My point is about being sensitive to the political and cultural diversity of these islands when we allocate seats within the United Kingdom.

Tony Cunningham: Is the hon. Gentleman advocating that we take seats away from other parts of the United Kingdom or Spain, for example? How many MEPs would there be under the system that he favours?

Adam Price: My position is absolutely clear. I accept that, with enlargement, we have to reduce the number of seats for the United Kingdom, but I do not understand why Wales and Scotland should be disproportionately affected. Depending on one's reading of the Bill, it seems that Northern Ireland is protected and cannot go below the floor of three seats, and we would want the same to apply to us, although we accept that there must be some reduction.

If we are serious about maintaining the political integrity of this multinational state, there must be a certain amount of over-representation for the small nations, as otherwise they will feel dwarfed, whether in the European Union or the UK context.

The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) made the point that we have a more diverse party system in the smaller nations of the UK. In Wales, we have a fully fledged four-party system; in Scotland, we have a six-party system; and if my memory serves me correctly, there are 12 parties represented in Northern Ireland.

Lady Hermon: At least.

Adam Price: At least 12, and possibly growing by the day.

In that situation, we need to retain the existing level of representation.

Mr. Davidson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the individual nations of the United Kingdom are not in themselves homogeneous? In Scotland, there are substantial regional differences that are in danger of being submerged by its being a single political unit. Is not that an argument for breaking up Scotland into a smaller number of first-past-the-post constituencies for elections to the European Parliament?

Adam Price: The hon. Gentleman makes an interesting point, but—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have already ruled that the Bill does not cover the method of election.

Adam Price: It is bizarre that Gibraltar may be included in Wales but not in Scotland and Northern Ireland. The only reason that I can come up with is that Wales has a secondary legislative form of devolution. It seems that Gibraltar could be imposed on Wales but not on the other two parts of the UK. In fact, there will be plenty of difficulty imposing a settlement on the Gibraltarians, let alone imposing the Gibraltarians and the settlement on the people of Wales, even with the well-honed diplomatic skills of the former Minister for Europe, now Welsh Secretary.

We want to achieve representation for all parts of the United Kingdom, and we will certainly oppose any proposal that would result in less of a voice for what are already under-represented, stateless nations. We need a voice in the European institutions, and that is why we are against the Government's proposals.

7.25 pm

Mr. Cash: We have had an interesting, wide-ranging debate. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) made a thoughtful contribution, and we look forward to the amendments that will be tabled in Committee. We shall have to see to what extent we can

find common ground with the Liberal Democrats, as there are some difficulties between us in relation to their overall position on Gibraltar. On other matters, however, and especially in relation to the overarching powers to be given to the Lord Chancellor and the Electoral Commission, we may well reach an understanding.

The hon. Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) made an extremely sensible speech. He is a member of Labour's sensible tendency. He was right to say that a logical extension of the right to European Parliamentary representation is that there should be representation for the people of Gibraltar in this House—not a point on which there is any settled policy, but one that holds great attractions in principle. My hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) powerfully endorsed that point.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) gave us an extremely helpful history of the progress of the Bill with respect to Gibraltar, of which only those of us who had read the excellent Library research material would have been aware. He also emphasised the question of justifiable unilateral action—an issue to which we will no doubt return, not least when we debate human rights. Such points will arise when we discuss subsequent enactments, the European constitution and other matters, as we proceed towards further and deeper European integration, and resistance to it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) dealt adroitly with the question of boundary procedures. I was greatly taken with his emphasis on the political consequences for electoral law.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) talked about proportional representation. He was right to raise his concerns about the powers of the Lord Chancellor and the Electoral Commission and the implications for human rights.

The hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) made some interesting points about the case for the so-called stateless nations. I am not sure how we might define that in any amendments that may be tabled in Committee, but we shall wait with interest to see whether those issues are pursued at that point.

I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say in reply to the points that were made. Very important questions arise, and so far, she has given us no more than a sketch of the Bill's content as set out in the explanatory notes. Perhaps she will now explain what really lies behind the increased and rather engrossed powers granted to the Lord Chancellor, which, as she will have gathered, the House is extremely uneasy about. There is also unease about the question of Gibraltar and the lack of consultation with its Government. I look forward to hearing that much more detailed consultation will take place not only with the Chief Minister, but with the wider population.

7.30 pm

Yvette Cooper: We have had a very good debate on both aspects of the Bill: the reduction in the number of MEPs to accommodate EU enlargement, and the enfranchisement of Gibraltar. Most Members seemed broadly to support the basic principles behind the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green (Mr. McCabe) set out clearly the case for reducing the number of MEPs as part of the expansion. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) raised specific points relating to closed lists—I responded to them at the beginning of the debate—and set out his party's support for the principles behind the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Chorley (Mr. Hoyle) gave his strong support for the people of Gibraltar. I know that he and my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) have visited Gibraltar, and that they have been very active in supporting its people.

The hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) talked in detail about issues relating to unilateral action. The hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) asked about consulting the Electoral Commission, and the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) asked about consultation of Gibraltar, and about the Matthews judgment, about which I shall say more in a moment. The hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale called for representation for Gibraltar in this House, and the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) discussed representation in the European Parliament of Wales in particular.

I shall try to respond as briefly as I can to the various questions raised by hon. Members. Concerns were expressed about the number of powers in secondary legislation, but I should make it clear that they are very constrained. We are talking about two kinds of powers. Those relating to the reduction of the number of MEPs, which are included in first part of the Bill, are clearly constrained by the treaty of Nice. Reference is made to the reduction in numbers according to the treaty, and to the implementation of the Electoral Commission's recommendations on the allocation of MEPs across the country. It is right that we provide for the Electoral Commission's ability to make recommendations in that way; that is the fairest way to achieve proper distribution of MEPs across the country.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister give way?

Yvette Cooper: I have given way to the hon. Gentleman on many occasions and he has had various opportunities to make points; however, I shall give way one more time.

Mr. Cash: I have indeed had such opportunities, but so far I have had no reply to my question about the extension of the Lord Chancellor's powers in respect of the whole remit of European Community law. In particular, the question not just of the reduction in numbers under the treaty of Nice, but of future changes, has not been dealt with.

Yvette Cooper: I am coming to the number of seats, and to the suggestions that were incorrectly made by the hon. Gentleman and other Opposition Members.

The second issue relating to secondary powers concerns Gibraltar's enfranchisement and the need to address the many aspects of UK electoral law—the way in which election agents' expenses are paid, and other such details—that must be applied to Gibraltar. It is appropriate that such matters be dealt with through secondary legislation, but it is clear that there will be considerable debate about this issue in Committee.

[Yvette Cooper]

The hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) asked whether the Lord Chancellor will be able to reduce the number of MEPs in Northern Ireland to less than three, and the answer is no. Clause 2(4)(b) and paragraph 1(2) to schedule 1A establish that each electoral region must be allocated at least three MEPs. Opposition Members also suggested that the House was getting no say in the reduction in the number of MEPs, but that is not true. The treaty of Nice sets the final number of MEPs for the UK at 72, and this House debated and ratified both the treaty and that figure. How we get from here to there will depend on the agreement of the European Council this week on how many new states get in, and on what the timetable for the reduction should be. However, all EU members will need to sign up to that interim position.

Hon. Members also raised the question of consultation with the Government of Gibraltar. Officials have been in contact with the Government of Gibraltar through correspondence, and in direct discussion in meetings. As hon. Members suggested, further meetings will take place before Christmas, including with a Foreign Office Minister. The detail of the Bill will be discussed, as will the way in which enabling provisions can best be applied to Gibraltar, how far such changes can be made by Westminster Parliament, and the extent to which the Government of Gibraltar can legislate. We expect some of these changes to take place through Gibraltar's own legislation, but not everything can be dealt with in that way. For Gibraltar to be treated fairly as part of a UK region, UK electoral law—which is decided by this House—needs to cover Gibraltar as well. We are talking about detailed issues—I have already mentioned expenses and election agents—including sending election addresses through the post, whether schools and rooms can be used for parliamentary elections, and so on. We need to ensure that a whole series of detailed issues concerning the conduct of elections are applied fairly to Gibraltar, so that it is treated consistently as part of a UK region.

Certain Members wanted to discuss the future status of Gibraltar, but that does not form part of the Bill's scope. I welcome the points that were raised, but I should make it clear that the Government have always said that any proposed change in the status of Gibraltar would be a matter for the people of Gibraltar to decide in a referendum. That has always been the case, and it continues to be so. The constitutional settlement for Gibraltar, which was set out in 1969, is complex, and changing that status does not form part of the scope of this Bill.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk raised an important question about the European Court judgment. He suggested that the issue is whether the people of Gibraltar have the right to petition the European Court, or whether they are covered by the European convention. My understanding of the judgment differs slightly, and I shall write to the hon. Gentleman in more detail about this complex issue. As I see it, the judgment concerned whether or not the European Parliament formed part of Gibraltar's legislature, and whether the article and protocol on free and fair elections to the legislature therefore apply. The European Court ruled that they do, but the legal arguments do not apply in the same way to the Channel Islands as they do to Gibraltar. As I said, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman on this point, because these are complex legal arguments.

On the points raised by the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds, it would of course be preferable to amend the 1976 legislation, but we were unable to secure the unanimous agreement of the Council. That is why we have taken such action through the Bill, and we support the enfranchisement of Gibraltar in this way.

The hon. Member for Poole asked about the way in which the Electoral Commission should make its decisions and the matters that it should take into account. It does of course need to consult widely, and I am sure that political parties will make their views known as part of that consultation. In raising issues that might be important at the margins, the hon. Gentleman has in some ways shown exactly why it is so important that the Electoral Commission should conduct this consultation. Many marginal issues concerning Gibraltar, or concerning relations between individual regions, could have political consequences. It is therefore right that the Electoral Commission, which is independent and was set up for exactly such purposes, should be the body that makes the recommendation to us.

Mr. Bacon: Can the Minister confirm whether the decisions and actions of the Electoral Commission are open to judicial review?

Yvette Cooper: The Electoral Commission is responsible to the Speaker's Conference in this Parliament. I shall have to take advice on that point and write to the hon. Gentleman. It is important that the independent electoral commission should be the body to make the recommendations. I understand that it is subject to judicial review.

Many points of detail were raised that we can discuss in Standing Committee.

Mr. Hoyle: One quick point: would the Bill allow another overseas territory to challenge for enfranchisement to the EU?

Yvette Cooper: The Bill does not cover any other overseas territory. Clearly, if one wanted to have discussions with us, we would agree to that, and many such issues will also be matters for the Foreign Office.

Many matters of detail and drafting have been raised, and I hope that we can discuss them further in Standing Committee. I hope that we will gain the support of as many hon. Members as possible for the detailed provisions.

One substantive difference became apparent when the hon. Member for Stone seemed to object to the reduction in the number of UK MEPs. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Hall Green set the position out clearly. He said that supporters of EU enlargement can adopt one of only two positions: either they want the European Parliament to get ever bigger, or they believe that the UK and other countries need to reduce the number of their seats so that the new accession states can have representation.

In fact, there is a third option—that the new accession states should simply not get representation in the European Parliament. I assume that that is not the

Opposition stance. It is right that we should give the new accession states fair representation, and that, therefore, means recognising the consequences—as negotiated across Europe—for UK representation.

The hon. Member for Stone set out his objections to any reduction in the number of UK MEPs, and that seemed to me to be the wrong approach. In the past, he has said that he supported enlargement but not if that meant crushing out the democratic spirit. It is hardly in the democratic spirit to resist all reduction in UK representation, with the knock-on impact that that would have for fair representation for the new states that we should be welcoming to the EU.

The hon. Member for Stone also referred to his pamphlet on the Nice treaty. That is indeed a weighty tome—50 pages of criticism, to be precise. When I saw it, I thought that the hon. Gentleman must be prolific, and I assumed that he had written equally weighty tomes on other issues of interest to him in his role shadowing the Attorney-General and the Lord Chancellor's Department. I confess that I struggled to find any statements at all on those matters, let alone one that ran to 50 pages. In fact, I struggled to find much in the way of letters or parliamentary questions. It seems that the hon. Gentleman's interests lie elsewhere.

Mr. Cash: I assure the Minister that the shadow Cabinet has ample paper on all subjects.

Yvette Cooper: I wonder what the hon. Gentleman has been drowning his fellow members of the shadow Cabinet in. I suspect that the answer will not be matters to do with the Attorney-General, but matters to do with Europe. When the hon. Gentleman was appointed to the Opposition Front Bench, a Tory spokesman said that he was instructed by the Tory leader that he would not be discussing European issues or pronouncing on matters European. The hon. Gentleman has in fact been quite restrained in this debate, and I accept that he has said before today that he supports enlargement. However, the logic of his argument is that, although we should welcome other eastern European and accession states into the EU, we should pull the UK out of it. He wants the renegotiation of the treaties of Nice, Amsterdam and Maastricht, and in fact he believes that we should have a referendum on the entire EU treaty itself.

A much wider difference has become evident: the hon. Member for Stone and his party want to be outside the EU and shouting from a distance while European states and the new accession states decide matters affecting our future. The Government believe that we should be in Europe, arguing our case, influencing the debate and making a real difference to the issues that affect people's lives.

That includes supporting the European Parliament, and supporting a voice in the European Parliament for people from the accession states. It also means enfranchising Gibraltar and giving its people a voice in the European Parliament.

The Bill is important. It will extend democracy and ensure a better and wider EU. I hope that all hon. Members will support that, and that they will give the Bill a Second Reading tonight.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (REPRESENTATION) BILL [PROGRAMME]

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002].

That the following provisions shall apply to the European Parliament (Representation) Bill:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Standing Committee

(2) Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 16th January 2003.

(3) The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

(4) Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

(5) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

(6) Sessional Order B (programming committees) made by the House on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(7) Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT (REPRESENTATION) BILL [MONEY]

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills).

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the European Parliament (Representation) Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown in consequence of the Act; or

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided by virtue of any other Act;

(2) any provision made under the Act requiring sums to be charged on and paid out of the Consolidated Fund;

(3) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums to be charged on and paid out of the Consolidated Fund under any other Act;

(4) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I propose to put together the Questions on the two social security motions.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation).

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Tax Credits (Appeals) (No. 2) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.

That the draft Social Security Commissioners (Procedure) (Tax Credits Appeals) Regulations 2002, which were laid before this House on 28th November, be approved.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

Question agreed to.

ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT

Ordered,

That Mr Neil Gerrard be discharged from the Environmental Audit Committee and Mr David Chaytor be added to the Committee.—*[Joan Ryan]*

PETITIONS

Euthanasia

7.47 pm

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): I wish to present a petition, signed by people across the United Kingdom, against euthanasia and assisted suicide.

More than 93,000 people have signed this petition, almost twice the number who signed the pro-euthanasia petition calling for assisted suicide. It reflects the concern of members of the public at the activities of the pro-euthanasia lobby and the legislation that is imminent from the Lord Chancellor's office and the Department of Health.

The petition states:

Wherefore your petitioners pray that your honourable House urge the Government to introduce without delay proposals for legislation which outlaw the withdrawal of food and fluid (however delivered) with the purpose or intention of causing death by omission.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray.

To lie upon the Table.

Hospices

7.48 pm

Mr Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): This petition was gathered by Mr. and Mrs. Gregory of 10, Bolton road, Chorley, and by Mr. Carl Crook, also of Chorley, with the help and support of their friends. It is thanks to their dedication that I am raising this very important question of funding for hospices.

The petition of the residents of the Chorley area declares:

That the St. Catherine's and Derian House hospices carry out important and valuable work in the Chorley area; that they do not receive adequate recognition or funding.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons recognise the importance and the value of the work done by the hospice movement and bring forward legislative proposals to ensure realistic and ongoing funding for institutions such as Derian House and St. Catherine's hospice.

To lie upon the Table.

Wakefield Prison

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

7.50 pm

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise my concerns about proposals by the Angel Group to use the former prison officers' college building at Wakefield prison for the accommodation of asylum seekers. It is a matter of regret that I have been forced to bring the issue to the Floor of the House, but for almost two years I have been unable to get straight answers to straight questions and, frankly, I have had enough.

This saga began in February 2001 when I received a telephone call from someone at a senior level in the Prison Service. He told me that I ought to be aware that the former prison officers' college building at Wakefield prison was to be used for the accommodation of asylum seekers. It was apparent from his remarks that he was deeply concerned from a security point of view about what was being proposed.

I know that the Minister for Citizenship and Immigration, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Beverley Hughes) has been to Wakefield prison, so she will know that the building is located in Love lane, Wakefield, between the prison wall and the main Leeds-London railway line. It is next to the prison officers' club and the only vehicular approach was, until very recently, blocked by a manned traffic barrier. The building has throughout its history been part of the prison establishment and is viewed by local people as an integral part of the prison. I should also add that it is only a few hundred yards from Westgate, the popular pubbing and clubbing area of what has historically been known as the "Merrie City". Generations of young locals have traditionally undertaken the Westgate run, which entails having one drink in each of the numerous licensed establishments from the bottom of Westgate up to the city centre. The prison buildings are passed by revellers towards the conclusion of the Westgate run.

Following the telephone call, I had contact with the local authority, which advised me that a telephone call had been received some weeks before from the Angel Group, making tentative inquiries about the use of the building for asylum seekers. On 12 March 2001, I wrote to the then Home Secretary stating that in view of the sensitivities of the proposal, I would have expected, as the local Member of Parliament, to have been consulted at the very least. I set out my own serious worries about what I believed to be an inappropriate location for the proposed use. By this time, I had been made aware of the local authority housing and social care department's strong opposition to a proposal that it believed would completely undermine a successful local strategy for assisting asylum seekers.

I draw the Minister's attention to the letter of 23 March 2001 sent by Councillor Peter Loosemore, the Wakefield metropolitan district council cabinet member responsible for housing and social care, to Mr. Bob Eagle, the director of the National Asylum Support Service. The letter reiterated concerns that I had raised with the Home Secretary. Specifically, it referred to the inappropriateness of the physical location, saying:

"The proximity to the prison gives an inappropriate message to asylum seekers and to the local community".

It said that the local authority had worries that a 200-bed accommodation unit would be excessive in size, with Angel's proposals for an average 21-day stay meaning an annual throughput of at least 3,400 asylum seekers. Councillor Loosemore reinforced my worries about the impact on community safety, as the location would make it easy for asylum seekers to be targeted. He outlined fears about the impact on education and social care services and other agencies.

Two days earlier, following contact with the private office of the then Minister of State at the Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), I had spoken directly to NASS. Mr. John Hinchliffe, the NASS head of accommodation, confirmed his comments to me in a letter dated 26 March 2001. It said:

"Angel Properties have reached their contractual limit for dispersal accommodation and on this basis the scheme is unlikely to be approved unless there are particular representations to the contrary from the Local Authority."

The local authority was, by that stage, outlining its outright opposition in direct dialogue with the Angel Group as well as in correspondence to the Home Secretary and NASS. Mr. Hinchliffe concluded his letter by saying:

"I will ensure that a copy of your letter goes to my colleague, Les Hart, who is involved in the local consultation process and either he or I will advise you of the final outcome."

Nearly two years later, I am still waiting.

During the following month, I forwarded to Mr. Hinchliffe correspondence that I had received from Councillor Loosemore and local constituents, evidencing renovation work being undertaken by Angel Group at the building and local recruitment of staff. By May 2001, the Angel Group had asked the local authority whether its proposed use of the building for asylum seekers was covered by existing planning permission. When it was established that it was not, the group subsequently made a formal application to which I and many others, including the local ward councillors who were active on the matter and the housing and social care department, objected.

I received a further letter from Councillor Loosemore dated 14 May 2001, in which he expressed serious concern that, despite two separate letters from the local authority to the Home Office, there had been no response or any formal consultation about the Angel Group's proposal. He said:

"The Council has also held initial discussions with a range of other key local and regional agencies who would be affected by the proposals. Many of the Council's concerns are shared by representatives of those agencies."

I received a letter dated 15 June 2001 from the then Minister for Asylum and Immigration, Lord Rooker, again stating that the Angel Group did not have approval from NASS to use the property as emergency accommodation. He assured me that there was

"a full consultation process in place between NASS and the local authority-led regional consortia."

On 1 August 2001, Councillor Loosemore wrote to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary in an attempt to clarify NASS's position. He quoted the comments

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made in letters to me by Mr. Hinchliffe and by Lord Rooker. He also quoted from a letter to himself dated 9 August 2001 from Judith Simpson, head of support at NASS, in which she said:

"NASS is not therefore in any negotiations for this property."

Councillor Loosemore then asked four very relevant questions which, as I understand it, remain largely unanswered. First, is NASS negotiating with Angel Group about the proposed provision at the college site? Secondly, why will NASS not consider the offer of local authority-provided emergency accommodation from the regional consortium instead of seeking it from private providers? Thirdly, if NASS is considering Angel's proposed use of the building, when will the formal consultation take place with the consortium and with Wakefield council? Fourthly, what weight will NASS give to the views of Wakefield council and the consortium during any consultation?

Over the summer period last year, I had personal correspondence with the Angel Group's managing director, Julia Davey. I stated that I believed that her company had been highly irresponsible in ignoring perfectly reasonable local concern. I stand by my view that the company is exploiting a difficult situation in a grossly irresponsible way, and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), who is in his place, has similar views from his experiences with that company.

In a letter to me of 8 October 2001, Lord Rooker stated:

"I can confirm that NASS is not negotiating with the Angel Group about the acquisition of Wakefield College for use as emergency accommodation for asylum seekers."

On 18 October 2001, I met my noble Friend at the Home Office where he stated categorically that the Home Office had not asked the Angel Group to convert the building. An official from NASS had visited the building at the request of Angel and had told the company that the building was not required. If the Home Office were to consider its use in future, it would be done only with the support of the local authority.

On 2 November 2001, planning permission was refused and the Angel Group indicated its intention to appeal. On 30 January 2002, my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin and I met Lord Rooker at the Home Office. He stated that the Home Office had no intention of using the building for asylum seekers. He advised us that the Government would shortly announce the location of a series of new reception centres for asylum seekers. The Wakefield building was not appropriate for that use, being too small for the functions envisaged and sited in an urban area. Interestingly, when the NASS representative at that meeting was asked about the actions of the Angel Group he suggested that it had "an inside track" in NASS and gained information to its commercial advantage.

A further letter from Lord Rooker, of 7 May, informed me:

"Companies frequently buy properties speculatively and, although the possibility of the college being used to house asylum seekers in the future cannot be dismissed, NASS currently has no plans to do so".

That letter suggested to me that there had been a slight change of position, and by then I was beginning to believe that the Angel Group's acquisition was more than mere speculation. It was also apparent from the Minister's reply that perfectly reasonable opposition from a local authority and others did not count for much.

In early June, I received a letter from a constituent, Mr. Robert Austin. I pay tribute to Mr. Austin and to another constituent, Mr. Roy Eyre, for their work on the issue. They are motivated by personal concerns as former prison officers. I also pay special tribute to Mr. Austin. The issue is sensitive and, at one time, the British National party in our area attempted to exploit it. There is no racial motivation in my concerns or those of my constituents. I much appreciate the fact that Mr. Austin gave very short shrift to BNP members who wrote to the local paper expressing their support for what he had done.

As former prison officers, Mr. Austin and Mr. Eyre have particular concerns about the security aspects of Angel's proposal. Mr. Austin provided me with the Land Registry entries relating to the sale of the building by the Home Office to the Angel Group for £1,161,000 on 6 July 2001. Part 4 of the restrictions in the charges register, agreed between vendor and purchaser, outlaws the use of the property for a range of purposes, including accommodating remand prisoners, ex-offenders and those in receipt of psychiatric treatment. However, there was an interesting exemption: paragraph 1.4 states:

"The use of the property for providing temporary residential accommodation solely for persons seeking political asylum or the right to reside (whether permanent or temporary) in the United Kingdom shall not be deemed to be a breach"—

of the preceding restrictive paragraphs.

My hon. Friend the Minister will probably be aware that, due to my concern as to its contents, I passed the documentation to the Home Secretary when I met him on 12 June. In passing, may I say that I hope that my right hon. Friend is making a good recovery from his recent operation?

On 18 September, Sue Goring of the NASS secretariat wrote to Mr. Austin, assuring him that the college building would not be used as a hostel for asylum seekers. She went on to say:

"The site was visited by a representative from NASS and was deemed to be unsuitable for dispersal accommodation. Furthermore, the site is not under consideration for use as an Accommodation Centre."

Interestingly, my constituent, Mr. Eyre, received a letter dated 8 November from the very same Ms Goring. It stated:

"I can only reiterate what I stated in my previous correspondence and add that Angel Group purchased the site without any prior arrangement with the Home Office. However, I must add that it may well be the case that NASS will want to use this site in the future."

The Minister will be aware that a planning appeal was held on 8 October. I was present, along with representatives from the local authority and several local residents, including the two gentlemen whom I mentioned. Among the references provided in support of the Angel Group was one dated 4 October from Paul Winterbottom, the deputy director of NASS, which stated:

"The Group are committed to working in partnership with a broad range of organisations."

That has not been our experience in Wakefield but, as my hon. Friend the Minister will be aware, the appeal was upheld at the end of October.

I am happy to provide for the Minister copies of the correspondence to which I have referred, as it is worth comparing the initial reply that I received from NASS with subsequent letters. I have come to certain conclusions from this long drawn-out saga. First, despite protestations to the contrary, it seems clear that certain parties in the Home Office were directly involved in the disposal of the building for the accommodation of asylum seekers.

Secondly, it is also apparent that the Home Office went ahead with the sale of the property for that known purpose despite being well aware of the fact that the strongest possible objections to the proposed use had been made by the local authority, the local MP and many other people.

Wakefield already has a hostel for asylum seekers in the city and wants to play its part in addressing the current crisis. However, to have top-security prisoners communicating from their cells to asylum seekers on the other side of the wall does not make sense.

I realise that my hon. Friend's Department has faced unprecedented problems in regard to asylum seekers and that has created great strains. However, that does not excuse the fact that certain officials in her Department have been somewhat disingenuous in their handling of this affair. I hope that, at the very least, my hon. Friend will investigate the actions of those involved and find out why I and others have been given misleading, inconsistent and sometimes incorrect answers to our inquiries. I hope, too, that she will realise that using the building for asylum seekers would be wholly inappropriate.

8.7 pm

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I did not anticipate that I would have the opportunity to make a speech in the debate. I assure those Members still in the Chamber that I shall not carry on until 10 o'clock. My comments will be brief.

My experience with the Angel Group is similar to that of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe). The company followed a similar course of action when it acquired the Centrex site in High Ercall in my constituency—not on an option but outright, for a payment, which I understand amounted to £2.5 million. That is a considerable amount to speculate on the possibility of winning a contract with the Home Office.

That fact caused great concern in the small rural community of High Ercall. People thought that if Angel was as confident of having its way as it appeared to be something must be about to happen and that a contract between Angel and the Home Office must have been drawn up. It was extremely difficult for me and for others to try to convince the local community that there was a due process through which decisions would ultimately be made and that no decision had yet been taken.

As their Member of Parliament I endured—like my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield—a lengthy period, between October 2001 and July 2002, of rumour, scaremongering and speculation as to the future of the site and the consequences for my community. I am grateful to the Minister for taking the opportunity to clarify the situation in July. However, that has not been the end of the story and, again, there is an uncanny parallel with my hon. Friend's experience.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I understand why the hon. Gentleman is anxious to add to the remarks already made by the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), but we are bound by the fact that the debate relates to Wakefield prison. The debate is not about the company or the procedures, but about Wakefield prison's suitability for the purpose identified by the hon. Member for Wakefield. So the hon. Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) must have a care. I know that he is going to make his remarks brief, but they must be about Wakefield prison.

Peter Bradley: I will try to be even more ingenious than I have been in seeking constantly to refer to the experience of my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield. I will keep my comments brief and try to relate them to the experience at Wakefield prison.

I share my hon. Friend's concerns about the apparent relationship between the Angel Group and the Home Office in relation to Wakefield prison. I attended the meeting to which he refers and well recall the comment of a Home Office official when he raised his own concerns about that relationship. The official said that the Angel Group seemed to have an inside track—that was the expression he used—and seemed to be able to anticipate the decisions that were being made at official and policy level by the Home Office before anyone else seemed to know about them. That is a very serious allegation coming from any source, but it is yet more serious coming from a civil servant. I very much hope that the Minister will confirm in her reply that, if investigations have not yet taken place, they will be conducted now as a matter of urgency.

The issues that my hon. Friend has raised are extremely serious whether they affect Wakefield, my constituency or, indeed, anywhere else. As we already know, plans to accommodate and deal with asylum seekers are extremely sensitive and highly controversial, and it is extremely difficulty to cope with local people's concerns and expectations.

I had a similar experience to that of my hon. Friend, as the BNP turned up in my constituency. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's constituents and, indeed, my own for the fact that, when they recognised who those people were and what their agenda was, they gave them short shrift.

I should like to conclude with the plea that I made to the Minister's predecessor, Lord Rooker, at the meeting to which my hon. Friend referred. My plea is simply that the Home Office should not tolerate lower standards of community relations from the private sector than those that it would adopt itself in dealing with such sensitive issues. As I have constantly said, my experience echoes almost to a fault that of my hon. Friend. It is not enough for a public body, much less the Government, to say that little can be done to influence the conduct of a private sector organisation.

I very much hope that the Minister will be prepared to make it clear that the Home Office will inform the Angel Group and any other private sector organisation that wants to be involved in such highly sensitive public

[Peter Bradley]

issues that, if it has even the expectation of entering into contracts with the Government, it must conform not to the lowest, but to the very highest standards of local community relations.

My experience at High Ercall in The Wrekin is that the Angel Group has treated the local community and its representatives—the parish council, the unitary authority and the Member of Parliament—with utter contempt, and my hon. Friend's experience is very similar in Wakefield. Frankly, that is not the way in which we should pursue such policies, with or without the private sector.

The Angel Group does have form; it does have a record and if the Minister was not aware of that fact before, she will be now. I very much hope that a strong message will go out—not from hon. Members such as my hon. Friend and myself, but from the Minister—to the Angel Group, telling it that the way in which it has conducted itself in the past will no longer be tolerated in the future. Unless it can get its act together and show good faith—frankly, few of us who have had direct experience of the company would accept that at face value—it should be blacklisted and the Home Office should no longer be prepared to deal with it.

8.14 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) on gaining the opportunity to debate this important issue this evening. I hope that I can reassure him that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and I absolutely understand his concerns. Indeed, on 29 October 2001, my right hon. Friend made it clear, in answer to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley), that a provider would be very ill-advised to buy any property speculatively with a view to offering it to the Home Office for use as accommodation for asylum seekers.

My hon. Friends will understand that we cannot prevent providers buying such property; nor can we prevent them from applying for, or obtaining, planning permission to use a property for that purpose. We are not, however, obliged to accept such properties and, in light of the unequivocal statement made by my right hon. Friend, he and I would certainly be prepared to do so only after very careful consideration.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield is primarily interested in the former Prison Service college in Wakefield, and my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin is equally concerned about a site in his constituency, but I heard your advice on that issue, Mr. Deputy Speaker. When the Angel Group was in the process of purchasing the Wakefield site and others, it made it clear that it was doing so with the intention of offering them to the Home Office for use as accommodation for asylum seekers. That is absolutely true, as I understand it. As I have already said, however, we are under no obligation to accept those properties for that or any other purpose.

Let me make it clear that the decision on where asylum seekers are housed does not lie with accommodation providers. That decision is one for the Home Office and ultimately Ministers, and I emphasise that the company did not buy the property at the request of the immigration and nationality directorate. Following the Angel Group's purchase of the former Prison Service college, it sought planning permission to use the property as hostel accommodation for asylum seekers. A member of the procurement section in NASS made an informal visit to the site at that time, but, following that visit, the company was told that NASS did not wish to use the building as dispersal accommodation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield has said that he met my predecessor, Lord Rooker, in October last year to discuss the Angel Group's proposal. At that meeting, Lord Rooker confirmed that NASS had declined the offer made by the Angel Group and said that, if the situation were to change, there would be full consultation before the property was accepted if we considered doing so.

My hon. Friend met Lord Rooker again on 30 January this year, when Lord Rooker made it clear that the property was unsuitable for use as dispersal accommodation and that it was not being considered as one of the sites for the trial of accommodation centres, but he said that, although no plans for the site were being considered, it was not possible to rule out its use in some way in the future.

As has been said, the Angel Group's original application for planning permission was refused, but then allowed on appeal. That is a matter for the local authority, as my hon. Friends will know, and I cannot comment on that application. However, the Angel Group has now formally offered the accommodation to NASS. I am happy to assure to my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield—I wish to make this absolutely clear—that we shall not use the property as dispersal accommodation or in the trial of accommodation centres.

There is, however, a current need for some additional emergency accommodation, and NASS has been considering whether the sites at Wakefield and High Ercall would be suitable. I have decided that that would not be appropriate in the circumstances because there are significant problems with both those locations, so neither site will be used for our immediate or foreseeable needs. Although I cannot foresee a time when the problems involving both sites will be such that I would agree to use them, I cannot give my hon. Friends a categorical, absolute and indefinite assurance that they will never be used because I cannot predict how the situation that I am trying to manage with officials may change.

I am very grateful that my hon. Friend recognises the inherent difficulty that we face in managing what is and must be seen as a national issue, with some shared ownership, with which many areas will have to help us to deal. As he has acknowledged, Wakefield is already doing so. In the unlikely event that I consider it necessary to use either property, should they remain available, I reaffirm the commitment to consult thoroughly with them and the local parties with as much notice as possible.

My hon. Friend raised a couple of specific issues on which I want to touch. In relation to the contents of the Land Registry record, and the inclusion of an

acceptance that use of this site for asylum seekers would be appropriate, as he knows, the college at Love lane was declared surplus during the summer of 2000 and scheduled for closure later that year. Subsequently, it was given over to the Prison Service estates section for disposal. I know that my hon. Friend will argue—in a sense, he is right—that that is part of the Home Office, and therein lies some of the difficulty in deciding whether it is a case of the Home Office trying to sell to the Home Office. The Prison Service estates section, however, is a separate section, and it was dealing with that disposal. Given the college's size and layout, and the pressures that IND was under at the time to provide emergency accommodation, the site was offered to IND, but it decided that it could not make use of Love lane. It was therefore placed with agents to sell on the open market. As he now knows, unconditional offers were received, and it was sold to Angel Group, whose offer was the highest.

Mr. Hinchliffe: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's helpful and thoughtful response. Accepting that different tribes operate within the Home Office, may I assume that, if, at some unforeseeable point in the future, a need is perceived to use this particular building, the NASS tribe might consult the prison tribe on the security implications of asylum seekers being accommodated directly opposite the wings of Wakefield prison.

Beverley Hughes: As I said, given the issues raised by my hon. Friend, I think that it is highly unlikely that we would think that that was an appropriate location. I can say with absolute assurance, however, that should such a need arise, however unlikely at this point of time, I will insist on a full appraisal of all of the issues in relation to location, and particularly the security issues, as he raises a valid point in that respect. Arguably, given the concerns expressed to him by people working in the Prison Service, that point should have come to the fore in an appropriate way.

I want to explain the reference to housing asylum seekers as being a possible appropriate use for the site in the Land Registry record. When the Prison Service sells any site, it must ensure that any future use will not compromise the security of the prison, and Wakefield is a high-security prison. That is why several uses have been excluded. For absolute clarity, however, the Prison Service was saying at the time that, of all of the uses that the Home Office might consider, it did not regard housing asylum seekers as a security risk. That does not compromise what I just said about us considering the matter again, but that is the technical reason why that issue was made absolutely clear at the time of the disposal. As a matter of routine, the Prison Service would have to make clear what uses it thought were suitable or not suitable.

In relation to the apparently contradictory information and apparently contradictory statements of intentions by IND officials in various letters over a period of time, I agree that, at the very least, the letters to which my hon. Friend referred were confusing. On the face of it, they are not necessarily evidence of a deliberate intention to mislead. It may be more the case that officials use language very specifically—to them, hostel accommodation means dispersal. Understandably, however, he and residents read that language very generally, so that it may mean accommodation for [illegible] purposes. I understand that that is not good prac[illegible] terms of communication. As I want to explore the issue, I would be very grateful if he would provide me with all of those documents, some of which—but not all—he was kind enough to fax me this afternoon. I will write to him comprehensively about the issues that he has raised in that regard.

On the question whether there is any kind of inside track for this or any other company, I am aware of my hon. Friend's concerns. The Home Secretary instigated an investigation into that possibility some time ago, after his previous expression of those concerns to my predecessor as Minister, and no evidence of any relationship or untoward dealings was uncovered. I feel, however, that we need to look closely at the routine procedures that are used in our contracting relationships. NASS is in a difficult situation in the sense that, over the past year, we have needed more accommodation than has been readily available. It is understandable, in a way, if the first port of call to look for additional accommodation is with those who already provide it. I have already made it clear to officials, however, that not only must we be completely above board in those relationships but absolutely transparently seen to be above board. I will therefore ask for an examination of all the procedures that we follow to make sure that they are properly documented and that we can account properly for decisions that are made, notwithstanding the sometimes difficult and fluid situation with which officials must deal when trying to house people who turn up in the country at sometimes very short notice.

I hope that my hon. Friend will accept the assurances from me, and, through me, from my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary: first, in relation to the likely future for the building as regards any IND use, which, as I have made clear, is unlikely, although I cannot absolutely rule it out; and more generally, in relation to the efforts that I will make to answer his specific questions about communication levels, and to look at our procedures in detail to make sure that we are seen to be behaving in a proper way and that we can account for our decision making fully and openly.

Peter Bradley: Will the Minister give way?

Beverley Hughes: I had finished, but I will give way with pleasure.

Peter Bradley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. I am glad to hear those assurances, and I pay tribute to the even-handed way in which she has addressed these difficult issues since she has been in office. Can she confirm that the investigation that she mentioned will seek to improve communications between the various tribes, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) described them, in the Home Office so that they speak with one voice, and that it will also seek to improve communications with prospective private-sector providers to ensure that, as I have argued, they provide a maximum rather than a minimum amount of information to people who have a right to know?

Beverley Hughes: Yes, I can. I want to provide the assurance not only in respect of private providers, but of NASS and IND more generally. My hon. Friends will be generous enough to accept that this is an inherently difficult issue. Whatever people's genuine feelings about the need to respond to the issue constructively, most people reject the prospect of accommodation of any kind being provided for asylum seekers in their area. They do not want to hear such a message. I hold the strong belief—I may prove to be wrong—that one cannot deal with that difficulty by battening down the hatches and saying as little as possible. We have to face it squarely, provide people with information and argue the case even though people might not want to hear it. IND and the people with whom we work, including the private sector, have more to do to generate the culture of meeting the difficulties squarely and of providing full information. People will still not like the message, but they will not then be able to complain that we have not treated them as adults and given them full and open information.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 11 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

South Africa (HIV/AIDS)

1. **Mr. Mark Hendrick** (Preston): What recent assessment she has made of the impact of HIV/AIDS on the humanitarian situation in South Africa. [84685]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): HIV/AIDS is having a devastating effect on the crises in southern Africa. Drought has exacerbated the consequence of misgovernment in Zambia and Malawi, and particularly in Zimbabwe. The United Nations appeal is only 50 per cent. funded, logistics are difficult, Zambia is refusing to accept genetically modified maize, and as many as one in three of the population are weakened by HIV/AIDS. I am very fearful that by January, a terrible humanitarian catastrophe will unfold.

Mr. Hendrick: Like many other Members of this House, I am extremely concerned at the spread of AIDS in Africa and its devastating effect on the population. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the situation in respect of drugs is getting worse? Despite the fact that drugs are being made available much more cheaply, they are finding their way into markets other than those for which they were intended. That said, I thank her for the excellent work that she is doing in this area.

Clare Short: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. There is hope in Africa. The rate of infection among young people in Uganda has dropped massively, and there is some evidence that such drops indicate behaviour change. So there is light at the end of this tunnel, but in the meantime we are in a very difficult situation. Recovery from the drought in southern Africa will be much harder, because the population is weakened by HIV. We are going to see terrible things.

On drugs, there is no cure—only anti-retrovirals that prolong life. Even if drugs were free in most of Africa, they would not reach the people because there are no basic health care systems. In conjunction with the British pharmaceutical industry, we have undertaken a big review into access to medicines. What is required is a partnership to build health care systems, as well as to get drugs to people, but prevention remains essential.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The House will have noted with great concern what the Secretary of State said about the effect of food shortages and drought. On HIV, am I right in thinking that there is a massive overlap between venereal diseases and the spread of HIV among heterosexual populations, and will she encourage the people who discuss these issues to make that point more often, because those diseases can be cured?

Clare Short: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. In very poor populations that have no health care systems or access to antibiotics, venereal disease is often endemic, as it was in the UK among many of the young men who fought in the first world war. The likelihood of being infected with HIV and its spreading very rapidly is much greater in populations infected with venereal disease. So treating those diseases can reduce the spread of HIV, and we are trying to apply that in our programmes.

Barbara Follett (Stevenage): May I ask my right hon. Friend what discussions she has had recently with the South African Government on the HIV issue, and whether she discerns any change in their attitude towards this epidemic?

Clare Short: I have not had any recent discussions with them since my last visit to South Africa, but my officials are in constant touch. There is a change in attitude in South Africa, I am happy to say. There is much more positive engagement by the Government and a willingness to provide drugs, particularly to pregnant women. Drugs are now available more widely, as required by the courts, and there is much more public education. Although it is early days, I have seen figures that show some signs of behaviour change and improvement. Former President Mandela has made an enormous contribution, but the Government are now in a much more positive mode, I am happy to say.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Secretary of State rightly identified the capacity of health care systems in these countries as the primary way of trying to tackle the first stage of the HIV epidemic. Is she aware that last year, Britain recruited 2,114 nurses from South Africa, compared with the 393 who were recruited from there in 1997? According to the BBC, 38 nurses came here from one Johannesburg hospital alone. Is she not concerned that the Government's code of practice, which in any event is observed by only about a third of the private recruitment agencies used by the NHS, is insufficient? *[Interruption.]* Is she not depressed by the fact that Britain's recruitment strategy is undermining recruitment—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no need for the Secretary of State to answer that question. The hon. Gentleman should be seated when the Speaker stands.

Africa (Human Rights)

2. **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): If she will make a statement on the participation of her Department in reconstruction and reconciliation efforts in those parts of Africa affected by conflict and human rights abuses. [84686]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Twenty countries and 25 per cent. of the population of sub-Saharan Africa are affected by violent conflict. This is causing great suffering and holding back development across the continent.

Through the Africa Conflict Pool, my Department, the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence are working together to resolve conflict in Africa, and there has been progress. Sierra Leone and Angola are now at peace, and Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have ceasefires, but a new civil war has erupted in the Ivory Coast. Conflict resolution and development are inextricably linked.

Mr. Win Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, and for the magnificent work done by her Department and my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister in helping to resolve some of the serious conflict issues in Africa. However, will she consider whether the United Nations needs to use chapter VII of its charter to restore peace in Burundi? Will she ensure that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees does not have its budget for Burundi and Tanzania cut, as it is providing help for people in a truly desperate situation?

Clare Short: I agree with my hon. Friend that the situation in Burundi could lead to another genocide in Africa if we do not handle it well. Our generation failed Rwanda, and it is our duty to make sure that Burundi does not suffer the same experience. President Mandela brokered a peace deal in Arusha, but some of the forces fighting there have not recognised it. There has recently been a breakthrough, with the FDD recognising the deal. It was envisaged that, if other forces abided by the peace deal, an African peacekeeping force would be established, under a UN mandate and with UN funding. Discussions about that possibility are imminent, and I hope that they materialise.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Uganda is our largest recipient of bilateral aid in Africa. Will the Secretary of State explain gently to President Museveni that slashing the country's health and education budgets will not help defeat the Lords Resistance Army?

Clare Short: I assure the hon. Gentleman that I am in communication with President Museveni about these matters. There is no doubt that the Lords Resistance Army is one of those vile rebel groups that abduct young girls and make young men kill members of their own family. It is an especially brutal and nasty organisation. It is right that Uganda should do all in its power to bring the rebellion to an end. However, large demands for new military supplies are not what is needed to bring about that end. We must protect Uganda's progress in reducing poverty, which is considerable. I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall do everything in my power to achieve that.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one effect of internal conflict in African countries is widespread displacement and insecurity? What help is her Department giving, and what work is it doing with the UN development organisations, to build firm local government and administration structures to give people back their security?

Clare Short: My hon. Friend is right. Africa has more refugees and displaced people than any other continent. Some of the poorest countries in the world are hosting large numbers of refugees—way beyond the sort of numbers that Europe is contemplating. There is no real answer to the problem apart from resolving the conflict, helping people to return to their countries and lands and enabling them to resettle. That is why we are putting such an enormous effort into trying to resolve conflicts in Africa. In the meantime, we are trying to improve help for displaced people so that they are not reliant on handouts. We want them to be able to get their children to school and do something for themselves, so that displacement does not lead to disempowerment and the destruction of the lives of future generations.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): In Ethiopia, reconstruction after years of conflict is still a great struggle. Of course, we acknowledge the crisis response to the lack of food in Ethiopia at the moment, but will the Secretary of State say why the international community has failed to deal with the problem of water resource management in the country? After all, that is the key to all the food supply problems. Why is only 5 per cent. of irrigable land irrigated, when the Blue Nile flows across the plateau?

Clare Short: Ethiopia is one of the poorest countries in the world, with a gross domestic product of only $100 a head. It has been through political crises, civil war and misgovernment, and has not had the economic reform that it needs. Year after year, Ethiopia depends on food aid, but food aid that is badly supplied undermines agriculture by undercutting local prices, ensuring that there is no local production. That has been going on for a long time. We are engaged in helping the Ethiopian Government put in place long-term strategies for getting agriculture and irrigation going again. It will take time, while we handle the current crisis. There is movement forward: it is terribly delayed by the war with Eritrea, of course, but we are beginning to get attention paid to the long-term problems.

Israel/Palestine (Poverty)

3. **Dr. Phyllis Starkey** (Milton Keynes, South-West): What recent assessment she has made of how many people are living in poverty in the west bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem. [84687]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): The deteriorating humanitarian situation affecting the Palestinian people is leading to a rapid growth of poverty, and the situation is getting worse day

by day. Some 22.5 per cent. of Palestinian children in the west bank and Gaza are suffering from malnutrition. We and the European Commission have increased humanitarian aid, but the cause of the crisis is political and requires a political solution.

Dr. Starkey: I agree with the Secretary of State that ultimately the solution has to be political, but in the meantime ordinary people are suffering and, as she has outlined, they are suffering greatly. I have been told by World Vision, a charity whose projects in the west bank I have visited in the past, that it believes that the major need of the Palestinian people is work and income generation, not food aid. What is my right hon. Friend's Department doing to create jobs in the occupied territories, given the continuing Israeli policies of closures, curfews and roadblocks?

Clare Short: My Department is probably the best development organisation in the world, but we cannot work miracles. The closures mean that people cannot get to work; it is impossible for people to work when they cannot physically move about. Some 1.8 million people are dependent on food aid—food aid is not a good thing, but it is better than starvation. The levels of hunger in Gaza are as bad as those in Congo and Zimbabwe. We are engaged and are doing everything in our power, but without some political easing that allows the Palestinian people to move about and get back to work, I am afraid that it will continue to get worse.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): The situation is dire, as the Secretary of State says. However, does she not think it extraordinary that Prime Minister Sharon should ask the United Nations to address the humanitarian crisis in the west bank and Gaza? I have with me the report of the special envoy. The situation is due not to natural disasters or famine but, as the right hon. Lady says, to a failure of the peace process and the destruction of the Palestinian economy by Israel. Will she and her colleagues in Europe please impress on Israel that it should be addressing the humanitarian crisis, not the international community?

Clare Short: The whole House is agreed that for the sake of the people of Israel and the Palestinian people, we must as rapidly as possible reach the two-state solution—the establishment of the Palestinian state, with enough international presence to make sure that the suicide bombings and the rest come to an end. That will be good for everybody in the region. The attempts by the quartet to put in place a road map to final status have been delayed by the Israeli elections. People across the world should focus on the problem until the elections take place and move forward on the peace process thereafter, for the sake of both peoples.

Ms Christine Russell (City of Chester): Is my right hon. Friend aware of Oxfam's recent report entitled "Forgotten Villages"? It spells out in graphic terms the devastating impact that the Israeli Government's closure policy is having on poor Palestinian farmers who cannot harvest their olives or get their water tankers through the checkpoints. Does she agree that if the closure policy is not stopped, we will have a real humanitarian disaster in the west bank?

Clare Short: I am afraid that we already have a humanitarian disaster. The situations in Zimbabwe and Congo are horrendous. It is now as bad for the children of Palestinians, who were until recently living at middle-income levels, as it is in those two countries. We have a humanitarian disaster, and the closures, which mean that people cannot work, are at the root of it. I am not familiar with the report but I am familiar with the situation. We are doing all that we can to improve humanitarian support, but we cannot arrive at a solution in that way—there has to be political progress.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): The United Nations has been providing help to Palestine since 1948 through its Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees, but it is short of funds for its programme of aid to refugees in the west bank and Gaza strip. Does the Secretary of State accept that any conflict in the region will affect the capacity of UNRWA to meet humanitarian needs in Palestine? What contingency plans have been made for the Palestinian people in the event of a war in Iraq?

Clare Short: The hon. Lady is right: because of the closures and the growing dependency of so many of the population of Gaza who are technically refugees, the need for UNRWA support has grown and UK support for UNRWA has increased considerably. I have written to several Ministers in other countries to point out that they are not funding UNRWA as they have done in the past, so the agency is underfunded at present.

We are making plans for contingencies of all kinds, including optimistic scenarios, in Iraq. However, some of those contingencies will bring devastating problems to all the people of the middle east—let us all try to avoid having to live with one of those.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): My right hon. Friend will be aware of a World Bank report published earlier this year, which stated that gross national product in the west bank would need to grow by 6.7 per cent. to level the poorest people out of poverty. How integral to that is stabilisation in the region and the creation of a Palestinian state?

Clare Short: I do not know exactly what the shrinkage in the economy has been, but it has been massive and rapid due to the political situation. If we could achieve political progress, of course there would be rapid economic growth. There is a lot to do, but there is a high number of educated Palestinians. Currently, the economy is dependent on people being able to move around to get jobs, so an easing of the political situation would lift the economy considerably. That is what we must try to achieve.

Zimbabwe (Food Aid)

4. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What steps her Department is taking to ensure free and fair distribution of food aid in Zimbabwe. [84688]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): Two thirds of the food requirements in Zimbabwe are being provided by the Government of Zimbabwe to populations either able to afford to buy food or eligible for supplementary feeding programmes. There is strong evidence that those supplies are being manipulated for political reasons.

The UN appeal is separate and provides for those who are destitute. That food is being distributed according to need, and we are ensuring that it is not politically manipulated: but the UN appeal is only 50 per cent. funded and therefore many people are facing starvation.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I greatly admire the right hon. Lady's integrity, forthrightness and courage—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—in saying what she believes to be right. In the light of the facts that the Government of Mr. Mugabe are clearly denying opponents food and are using food to win elections, that Matabele women who go into hospital to have children are being sterilised and that brutal force is being used against anyone who stands up against Mr. Mugabe, will the right hon. Lady join me in urging the Government to bring down that African Milosevic who is destroying his country?

Clare Short: I agree with the hon. Gentleman; the situation in Zimbabwe is an absolute disaster. Of the 15.5 million people in need of food in southern Africa, 6.5 million are in Zimbabwe. One in three adults in Zimbabwe are infected with HIV. The economy is destroyed, an election has been stolen, and there is brutalism and misuse of humanitarian aid. I really fear that there will be a disaster such as we have never seen in our lifetime, with the lack of food, the political situation and HIV all playing into each other. I expect that that will bring an end to that awful regime. In the meantime, however, we must do all that we can to keep food flowing for the innocent people whose lives are being destroyed by that terrible regime.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): To underline what my right hon. Friend has just said, the message from the townships in Harare, in Zimbabwe, is that the position is extremely critical and getting worse all the time. They believe that there will be serious problems within the next six months if action is not taken. They believe that the UK and South Africa in particular must do something to end the present situation to ensure that food gets to the people in Zimbabwe who need it so desperately—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise in the Chamber.

Clare Short: I share the view that we are facing a disaster. The United Kingdom is making the second biggest contribution to the appeal. I am currently scraping through my Department to try to find more resources, and I have also written to other Governments. I am afraid that the shadow of Mugabe is preventing Governments from responding to the humanitarian appeal, so the people are being punished twice. The United Kingdom is taking a leading role in the humanitarian effort, and we will continue to do everything in our power to help.

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): ZANU-PF's organising secretary, Didymus Mutasa, has stated that Zimbabwe would be better off with only 6 million people—the half, not surprisingly, that supports his party's aims. Given that selective starvation of the people seems to be official Zimbabwean Government policy, does the Secretary of State believe that the United States Government were right to warn last month of the need for intrusive measures to ensure that the food gets to all those who need it?

Clare Short: I saw the statement in the press that was attributed to Didymus Mutasa. If he said anything like that, it is an absolute outrage. To welcome the death of nearly half the people in a country is completely unforgivable—no one should forgive him. I am aware also from the press that the US has implied the need for some enforced provision of food, but I am not aware of any action to follow up that statement. The situation is extremely complicated. We are doing all in our power, and the World Food Programme is doing a splendid job. There are petrol shortages in the country on top of everything else, and the unwillingness to accept genetically modified food unless it is milled outside the country is a further complication. I do not think that the proposals to use force in that situation would help us, but I am open to any serious suggestion that will. Most particularly, the WFP needs more resources just to keep people fed.

World Poverty

5. **Mr. Neil Turner** (Wigan): What action she is taking to ensure that programmes to tackle world poverty continue after 2015. [84690]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Ms Sally Keeble): Some 900 million people are still likely to be living in extreme poverty in 2015, even if the millennium development goals are achieved, so our commitment to work against poverty must continue. The 2015 targets have been extremely effective in focusing our development work, and we will need new targets after that date.

Mr. Turner: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply and for recognising the importance of the need to fight poverty in the future. Does she agree that poverty and the hopelessness that comes from it provide ready recruits to those sectarian and fanatical organisations that seek to divide the nations of the world rather than to bring people together?

Ms Keeble: There is a very clear link between conflict and poverty, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has addressed some of those issues in her goals. We are currently undertaking research to find out what will be the needs of the 900 million people who will still be in

poverty after 2015. All our efforts and those of the multilateral organisations—including the European Union, for example—must focus on combating poverty.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): What progress are the Minister and her right hon. Friend the Secretary of State making to deal with the collapse in commodity prices, which is having such a significant effect on the progress towards tackling poverty in the developing countries under the programmes of the various international bodies?

Ms Keeble: The hon. Gentleman is right to identify the trade and aid issue. We are obviously working very closely to look at the impact of commodity prices, and we also hope to diversify agriculture in some of the countries that are dependent on a single commodity. Although we are making progress in dealing with the trade-related issues, it is also extremely important that we now increase the amount of aid going to developing countries to combat poverty.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Does my hon. Friend agree that the key to meeting the millennium development goals in the poorest countries in Africa is the initiative under the New Partnership for Africa's Development, and that if we in the rich world are to deliver our part of NEPAD, we must take action to reduce food subsidies and to open up our markets to African products, particularly agricultural produce?

Ms Keeble: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to link the work that is being done in Europe in relation to the common agricultural policy with the work on the Doha agenda in opening up trade to deal with some of the deep-seated problems. He is also right to identify the importance of NEPAD as an African solution to African problems and to focus on some of the Government issues. Meanwhile, of course, the task of dealing with the worst poverty will be affected in particular by increasing the amount of aid. The Department for International Development is working very closely to increase the amount of aid to combat poverty in the poorest countries of the world.

Afghanistan (Poppy Cultivation)

6. **Sue Doughty** (Guildford): What progress has been made in the elimination of poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. [84691]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): During the 20 years of civil war and the period of Taliban rule, poppy cultivation became the mainstay of the Afghan economy. The drug economy will not be eliminated without extending security, justice and development across the country outside Kabul. Plans have now been agreed for the formation of an Afghan national army, and we need to develop plans on the demobilisation of militias and on extending security outside Kabul. We have already agreed interdiction programmes against production and trafficking. President Karzai is strongly committed to the elimination of the drug economy from Afghanistan, but that will take sustained effort.

Sue Doughty: I thank the Secretary of State for her response. As law enforcement is vital for the reduction of poppy cultivation, has she given any consideration to the establishment of a national police force in Afghanistan, and has her Department given any direct assistance to the Afghan Government for that purpose?

Clare Short: The international community has a clear aim—all of Afghanistan's institutions are smashed and need rebuilding, including its police force. The Germans are leading on the rebuilding and retraining of the police force, and we are doing work on customs. Collectively, we are providing economic help for the Afghan Government and their budget—strengthening their Ministry of Finance, central bank and so on. That work is going on, and the tasks are being shared out among members of the international community—every single institution in the country needs rebuilding.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [84666] **Mr. David Kidney** (Stafford): If he will list his official engagements for 11 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, in addition to my duties in the House. I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Kidney: Great amounts of money are going into the national health service for the likes of workers' pay and primary care trusts, such as the one based in Stafford, but will the Prime Minister confirm that the Government's evident good intention to support the health service will not be undermined by their plans for foundation hospitals?

The Prime Minister: Yes, I can confirm that. Foundation hospitals will be NHS hospitals and will service NHS patients. They will have greater freedom in the local community—they will be owned by the local community—to develop the services that NHS patients want. My hon. Friend is right; there is record investment in the national service, which is opposed by the Opposition, but it must be matched by reform—giving, on the basis on earned autonomy, the freedom to the front line to innovate and create in the way that the health service needs.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): Is the Prime Minister concerned about the loss of integrity surrounding the No. 10 press office and information provided by the Government, and how does he intend to restore it?

The Prime Minister: No, I believe that all questions have been properly answered.

Mr. Duncan Smith: That is the most extraordinarily complacent answer. After 10 days of half-truths and evasions, the Prime Minister knows that questions remain about the changing of deportation dates after officials admitted contact with ministerial staff, the breaching of the ministerial code and the conduct of the civil service. Surely, the Prime Minister should ask for an independent inquiry to clear up this matter.

The Prime Minister: First, the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department have answered all the questions put to them, and have done so conclusively. Secondly, on the ministerial code, the right hon. Gentleman will know that the Cabinet Secretary has replied to him, and I have put the terms of that response in the Library of the House. Thirdly, I do not believe that anything remotely warrants the inquiry that he seeks.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister refers to the Cabinet Secretary's letter. In that letter he states:

"I do not propose to respond to your invitation to detail what advice I gave to the Prime Minister and when."

So there is no information in the public domain that will settle the issue. I remind the Prime Minister that he said a few years ago:

"We are here to uphold the highest standards"

and that his Government would be

"whiter than white, purer than pure".

After what has happened, people simply do not believe what he says. Does he not understand that the only way to restore integrity to his Government and to No. 10 is to hold an independent inquiry? Why does he not do so?

The Prime Minister: First, the letter does deal with the issue of the ministerial code, and it deals with it in detail. Secondly, as I just said, the Home Office and the Lord Chancellor's Department have responded to all the allegations that have been made, all of which, I may say, have turned out to be false. Thirdly, it is typical of the right hon. Gentleman that he dives into the swimming pool just as the water is running out.

Q2. [84667] **Mr. Graham Stringer** (Manchester, Blackley): Is my right hon. Friend as concerned as I am that Mr. Cook, charged with the 2001 census, cannot count, and that he massively underestimated the population of cities such as Manchester with its large ethnic minority and student populations? Will my right hon. Friend use his good offices to ensure that those figures are not used in the planning of vital public services?

The Prime Minister: The Office for National Statistics, as my hon. Friend knows, conducts an examination of the census, and it is confident that the 2001 census provides the most accurate estimate of the population, both nationally and locally. I know that that is a matter of great controversy in Manchester, and that the national statistician has met the chief executive of Manchester city council on two occasions to discuss the estimates. I understand that the dialogue is ongoing, but my hon. Friend will understand that we must base our deliberations on the figures of the census, unless we believe them to be wrong. As the figures are checked by the ONS, we must take its advice.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On Iraq, given that the Secretary-General of the United Nations has criticised the style and approach of the American Administration in its handling of the Iraqi dossier, does the Prime Minister share the Secretary-General's criticism?

The Prime Minister: I am not aware of the circumstances to which the right hon. Gentleman refers, but I can tell him that the United States and the Secretary-General are agreed on the key issue: that there is a United Nations resolution, that it must be obeyed, and that if there is a breach, action must follow.

Mr. Kennedy: Will the Prime Minister take this opportunity to reaffirm that the perception should be that the United Nations is the sovereign authority in all this business, and that that underpins the international coalition of interest against weapons of mass destruction and terrorism in general? If that perception becomes misguided or misinformed internationally, it is the worse for all of us.

The Prime Minister: It is, of course, important that in all circumstances the integrity of the UN is upheld. I believe that it is being upheld. The resolution was passed unanimously by the Security Council. All those who backed the resolution are sovereign nations. I believe that it is right that we study the dossier provided by Iraq and see what is contained in it. The basic point remains that that declaration has to be honest and transparent, and if it is discovered not to be honest—in other words, if there is a breach of the duty to co-operate—action must follow.

Liz Blackman (Erewash): My right hon. Friend will be aware that 2002 is autism awareness year, and Members from across the House, the National Autistic Society and others have played their part in raising the profile of the disability. One positive thing that has come forward is that it is to be used as an exemplar in the children's national service framework. To date, no information has been given about the resources to be put behind that initiative. Will he press for those resources to be announced so that we can all get an insight into the kind of support that children with autism will have both now and in the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has campaigned on this issue long and hard and she will know that earlier this year just over £2.5 million of additional money was allocated for research into autism. Autism affects many children in Britain and it is important that we study both its effects and its causes. I can assure my hon. Friend that we remain committed to doing that and to ensuring that the policies for research and for the health service generally take account of a condition that I know causes great difficulty for parents and carers who look after the autistic.

Q3. [84668] **Mr. Michael Jack** (Fylde): The Chancellor says that he believes in a fair tax system, so does the

Prime Minister think it fair that council tax payers in Lancashire should next year have to pay a 13 per cent. increase in council tax, almost six times the rate of inflation, when council tax in the county has gone up by some 47 per cent. since 1997?

The Prime Minister: I simply point out that the Government have put substantial additional sums of money into the local authority settlement. I think that I am right in saying that somewhere in the region of 25 per cent. additional money has gone into local authorities during the past few years. That compares with a cut in funding in the few years before we came to office. Therefore, particularly after my right hon. Friend's announcement earlier this week, we have been very generous to local authorities, and it is obviously important that they use the money properly.

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): When my right hon. Friend attends the European summit at the end of this week, will he gently suggest to the German Chancellor that, in the interests of the European economy, perhaps Germany should consider withdrawing temporarily from the European monetary union, so that it can recover control over its interest rates, exchange rates and public expenditure, and therefore take the necessary measures to try to arrest its serious decline into deflation and economic depression?

The Prime Minister: It has to be said that, from time to time, my diplomatic triumphs at certain European summits are not always exactly as I would wish with one or two other leaders in recent memory, but I do not think that it would be wise or diplomatic for me to suggest to Chancellor Schröder how to run the German economy. I am simply delighted that the British economy is in such good shape.

Health and Social Services (Oxfordshire)

Q4. [84669] **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): What assessment he has made of health and social services in Oxfordshire.

The Prime Minister: Clearly, Oxfordshire is benefiting from the substantial investment in health and social services. For 2002–03, Oxfordshire has received more than £445 million, an increase of more than £41 million on last year's allocation. As for social services, the funding this year is £86 million. Local health and social services managers are working together, including pooling budgets, to find solutions to current issues.

Dr. Harris: Is the right hon. Gentleman happy that in each of the past six years of his Government the most vulnerable users of social services have suffered cuts, and now all the strategic authorities in the southern region are projecting a mid-year deficit of £230 million? What should the new growth money this year be spent on—paying off deficits or new front-line services? It cannot be both.

The Prime Minister: The integrity of the services is the primary concern, but—I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me the opportunity to say this—during the past few years Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS trust has had a new 54-bed trauma centre costing £9 million; there will be a major development of acute services, which is a £200 million scheme; it has received almost £1 million for additional accident and emergency nurses; and it is receiving an additional £2 million to secure additional capacity on delayed discharges. An extra £9 million has also been allocated by the trust for accident and emergency redevelopment.

Engagements

Q6. [84671] **Mr. Peter Viggers** (Gosport): What is the Prime Minister's understanding of the meaning of the expression "blind trust"?

The Prime Minister: Again, as I said, these issues have been canvassed extensively and answered many times before, and I have nothing to add to the answers that have already been given.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Does the Prime Minister recall that under both Tory and Labour Governments, I have argued that the press need to distinguish between politicians and their families and that failure to do so will lead to a great lack of willingness among ordinary people in all political parties to put their names forward for public office? When people such as Paul Dacre, editor of the *Daily Mail* and a member of the Press Complaints Commission board, surround themselves and their own families with a wall of privacy and yet seek to attack the families of other people, they present themselves as both cowardly and irresponsible.

The Prime Minister: The freedom of the press is and always must be paramount, but I would simply hope that people who have a personal agenda are open with their readers about it.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The National Association of Pension Funds says today that the rate of closure of occupational pension funds has doubled in the past year. Why?

The Prime Minister: Because companies have found themselves, for the reasons of economic slowdown that he knows about, in difficulty. I think that the association also said today in the same interview that 70 per cent. of those schemes are still open and taking new members.

Mr. Duncan Smith: One of the reasons that the Prime Minister did not mention as to why the schemes have closed is the Government's £25 billion pension tax. Over the lifetime of this Parliament, that will raise £40 billion from pension schemes. That is what is damaging pension funds—it is the single most important reason. Does he now agree with his own Downing street economics adviser, who said recently that there is a lack of vision in the Government's pension policy?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, a pensions Green Paper is being issued next week that will deal many of those issues. As for the question of pensions and the changes in advanced tax credit, he will

know that that was done many years ago. The drop has happened in the last year, for the reasons that I have given.

Mr. Duncan Smith: There has been a Green Paper or a consultation on pensions almost every single month over the past five years. Surely, what we need from the Government are funded pensions and less dependence on means tests. However, under the Government, despite what they have said, funded pensions are collapsing, and by next year 60 per cent. of all pensioners will be on means-tested benefits. Is that not an indictment of the Government's policy over the past five years?

The Prime Minister: What the right hon. Gentleman is actually referring to is the pension credit, which will help many pensioners who have made savings but are on lower incomes. It is important that we ensure that those people have more money. *[Interruption.]* Let us be very clear: the Conservative party is opposed to the pension credit. That is obvious. We should let every pensioner in this country know that when the pension credit helps them and gives them a better income, helping some to the tune of £20 a week, the Conservative party is opposed to them getting it.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): Is the Prime Minister aware that my constituency has the lowest GDP of any constituency in the UK? It also has the highest level of disability, with more than one in three households having at least one disabled person. Yet, under the old formula funding system, Barnsley health authority was the worst-funded health authority in the old Trent region, and it is now also one of the worst-funded authorities in the new Yorkshire region. Can he reassure the House that, under the new system that is shortly to be announced, Barnsley will at long last get its fair share of health authority resources?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend knows that Barnsley, like all other authorities, will get a real-terms increase. I know that he would also want to say that, partly through the Government's measures, unemployment is much lower and many children have been lifted out of poverty as a result of child benefit measures and the working families tax credit. There is also a big investment in regeneration in the area. I agree with my hon. Friend that much more remains to be done, but I hope that he agrees with me that funding in Barnsley and the surrounding areas is infinitely better now than six years ago.

Q7. [84672] **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): Will the Prime Minister amend the European Communities Act 1972 to reclaim for the House control over British waters and thus prevent the imminent eradication of not only the Scottish white fish fleet but the United Kingdom white fish fleet, which is staging a major demonstration of protest on the Tyne today?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the Conservative Government of the time were right to pass that legislation because the abolition of the common fisheries policy—I understand that that is now the Conservative party's official policy—is not the answer to the problem. It would be a disaster if we withdrew from the common fisheries policy—[HON. MEMBERS: "Why?"] I am about to explain why. It would mean that other countries would have the freedom to fish without restriction for fish that migrate into our waters. Consequently, we would end up in a worse position.

As the recent scientific report found, there is a huge problem with fishing stocks because they are being depleted rapidly. The only way in which to deal with that is to come together with the industry and consider the necessary changes to tackle the difficult problem. To suggest, as the Leader of the Opposition did in a letter to me today, that there is an easy solution of withdrawing from the common fisheries policy, is cruelly to deceive those working in the fisheries industry.

Q8. [84673] **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): My right hon. Friend will know that a ship carrying Scud missiles from North Korea to the Yemen has been intercepted by Spanish armed forces. What investigations has he undertaken into that disturbing incident?

The Prime Minister: We are talking to our allies and to the Yemeni Government about that. It is a serious issue. If ballistic missiles are being exported from North Korea, that shows the danger that we face from weapons of mass destruction and their proliferation. I emphasise to hon. Members that I believe that the threat is formidable, and that it confronts the security and stability of our world. It is important to investigate and deal with the incident. If it is true that ballistic missiles are being exported, we must keep up the pressure on North Korea to change its ways. Exporting such technology is an unacceptable threat to our security.

Q9. [84674] **Mr. Richard Bacon** (South Norfolk): Given that only 23 out of 378 private finance initiative projects have been examined independently for value for money, and given that the professional fees for the Treasury building PFI project exceed £25 million—the National Audit Office was unaware of that—does the Prime Minister agree with the Labour party conference and the Institute for Public Policy Research that the time has come for a full review of value for money in the PFI?

The Prime Minister: The Tory party is now against PFI too, is it? *[Interruption.]* I certainly will answer. We are absolutely committed to the PFI programme. School buildings and hospitals are being built around the country as a result of it. That is absolutely right. *[Interruption.]* It has been a useful session of Prime Minister's questions. We have another dividing line. Money is going to each Conservative constituency through the PFI, but Conservative Members want it taken out.

Q10. [84675] **Mr. John MacDougall** (Central Fife): Will my right hon. Friend join me in congratulating the many police forces throughout the country that have contributed to the seizure of drugs? Does he acknowledge that the drugs culture and its resourcing contribute to the sort of atrocities that we sadly

witnessed against the twin towers? Will he reassure hon. Members that the Government's resolve will strengthen?

The Prime Minister: It is important that we deal with the supply both from abroad and within this country. My hon. Friend will know that the Scottish Executive have committed almost £130 million more to fighting the drugs trade in Scotland. We are also taking measures in Afghanistan and around the world to defeat the drugs trade. That will be a long and steady business. I would emphasise that most of the heroin in this country comes in from Afghanistan, and that is an important reason for us to stay in Afghanistan and help to rebuild that nation, so that its farming community can make its living gainfully, not through the export of drugs.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is the Prime Minister aware that last year, under the 30-year rule, a civil service document was released which stated that in the context of the wider United Kingdom interest in Europe, fishermen must be regarded as expendable? That has been demonstrated many times by successive Administrations over the past 30 years. With so much at stake in so many coastal communities around the country at this time, and with some of the fish stocks—such as haddock—that are set for draconian cuts remaining in a healthy state, will the Prime Minister undertake to raise this matter at the Copenhagen summit and personally lobby other Community leaders in the run-up to the Fisheries Council, to demonstrate that he does not regard this industry as expendable?

The Prime Minister: Whatever the position of previous Governments may have been, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that that is not ours. What is more, we have already raised the issue, and we raise it continually. I have raised it personally with the Commissioner and with other European leaders. As I said to a member of the Conservative party a short time ago, there is a serious problem because of the depletion of fishing stocks, as the hon. Gentleman must know, and there is no answer other than to sit down with the industry, having got the best deal that we can out of Europe, and work out how we help the industry through this difficult time. It cannot be right, however, to withdraw from the common fisheries policy, which would make the position even worse, or to try to pretend to people that there is a simple solution, because there simply is not.

Q11. [84676] **Mr. Mike Hall** (Weaver Vale): My right hon. Friend will recall that the decision to take the Diamond project away from Daresbury laboratory and place it at Oxford caused great concern in my constituency and across the whole of the north-west. The Prime Minister challenged us at the time to come forward with a world-leading science project that could be carried out at Daresbury. The Daresbury and north-west science group proposed the fourth generation light source project. I am pleased to tell the Prime Minister that this project has now completed its international peer group review and has been given the green light to proceed. The only thing standing in its way is the decision on its location. The best location for that project would be Daresbury laboratory. Will the Prime Minister commit himself to that?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that we will listen very carefully to the representations that my hon. Friend has made. I know the concern that the Daresbury decision caused, but my hon. Friend will understand that we view Daresbury as a very important part of the future for science in the north-west. We have allocated additional funds to Daresbury on that basis, and I hope very much that we can offer him good news on that.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Will the Prime Minister promise to study carefully the views of sound and sensible trade unions such as Unison, which have expressed serious concern about the effect on jobs and prosperity in Britain if we join the single currency? Will he at least give us an assurance that if we have a referendum that says no to the single currency, he will accept that as the decision for the foreseeable future and not return repeatedly to hold several more referendums, as has been the case in other European states?

The Prime Minister: I somehow thought that the hon. Gentleman might get round to the single currency. Obviously, the position of the Government remains as it is, which is that the five tests have to be passed for a referendum to be held. We have to conduct those tests before June 2003. I am not going to say any more to the hon. Gentleman on that subject. Of course, we will listen to the views of the Unison-Conservative party alliance—or, at least, certain parts of it—with interest. The vast majority of people in this country believe that this is a decision that should be taken not on the ground of dogma—that is, that we should never join the single currency—but on the basis of what is good for British jobs, industry and investment.

Africa

Q12. [84677] **Mr. Win Griffiths** (Bridgend): When he next expects to meet his Commonwealth counterparts to discuss proposals for dealing with conflict resolution and human rights abuses in Africa.

The Prime Minister: The next major Commonwealth meeting is the Heads of Government meeting in Abuja from 5 to 8 December 2003. It is very likely that conflict resolution and human rights in Africa will be discussed.

Mr. Griffiths: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply, but will he continue the excellent work that is already being done by his Government in Africa and make special representations to President Mbeki, who is the only person who might be capable of bringing common sense, peace and prosperity back to Zimbabwe?

The Prime Minister: It is a desperately serious situation as 7 million people in Zimbabwe are facing food shortages. I know that President Obasanjo and President Mbeki are due to visit Zimbabwe shortly, and

I hope that they have some impact in bringing home to the Zimbabwean regime the consequences of their actions.

As for Africa, I can assure my hon. Friend that we are very proud of the enormous commitment spearheaded by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development and we are proud of the fact that, over the next few years, we will raise our contribution to Africa to £1 billion. We are also proud of the fact that we have been leading the way on international debt, which is one very good reason for having a Labour Government.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Is the Prime Minister aware that the people of Zimbabwe face far worse than food shortages, as he has just put it? Is he aware that recently a delegation of very brave men from Matabeleland met members of the Foreign Affairs Committee and told us stories of persecution bordering on genocide, the sterilisation of women and the forcible withholding of food from those who do not support the tyrant? Can he be a little more urgent in what he does to try to solve this despicable and dreadful problem?

The Prime Minister: First, I wholly agree with what the hon. Gentleman says about the situation in Zimbabwe. In addition to the points that he makes, one person in three in Zimbabwe now suffers from HIV/AIDS. I have to tell him that the only thing that we can do, and we are doing it with urgency, is to try to isolate the Zimbabwean leadership at every level and work with the Governments in the region to ensure that the situation in Zimbabwe changes. For that very reason, we led the calls to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth. It has indeed been suspended, but, in the end, the countries in the region can exert most pressure, and we will help them do so.

Bali: ISC Report

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the report published today by the Intelligence and Security Committee in respect of the terrorist bombings in Bali on 12 October.

This inquiry was established at my request, as I announced to the House on 21 October in a statement. I said then that I would be making available all relevant intelligence to the Committee so that it could make its own independent assessments of the facts. The Committee has since reviewed all intelligence relevant to Bali and taken evidence from the heads of the agencies, other officials, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and me.

The House will be aware that the Home Secretary is indisposed, recovering from a minor operation. For that reason, he cannot be here, but I hope that I speak for the whole House when I send him best wishes for a full recovery.

The Government welcome the report, and I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), the Chairman of the Committee, and her colleagues in the House and the other place for all their work. We will consider the recommendations carefully and let the Committee and the House know of our final conclusions as soon as possible.

I also know that the entire House will join me again in extending our deepest condolences to the relatives and friends of the victims of that terrible act. Special arrangements have been made today to contact the next of kin of the victims to tell them of this report.

As the report has only just been published, it may be helpful if I briefly summarise it and then tell the House of the Government's initial response. The Committee's report broadly covers four questions, which I shall deal with in turn. First, was intelligence collection in Indonesia a sufficiently high priority? The report says that sufficient priority was given to the collection of intelligence in respect of Indonesia, although since 11 September last year the volume of intelligence available to our intelligence agencies had increased

"by a factor of at least ten",

and that during the period in question the agencies received at least 150 separate reports covering at least 20 different countries.

Secondly, was any intelligence overlooked? That question, as the House will recall, was understandably raised by the relatives and friends who lost a loved one in the atrocity on 12 October. Having examined all the intelligence, the Committee concluded that it had

"not seen any intelligence that described or directly related to any form of terrorist attack on Bali on or around 12 October"

and that on the basis of the available intelligence

"there was no action that the UK or its allies could have taken to prevent the attacks."

Thirdly, did the Security Service make the correct assessment of the threat levels on the available intelligence? The Committee's report covers three areas. It says that the Security Service's current six levels of threat assessment do

"not provide a sufficiently clear definition of the threat to be of use to customer departments",

and makes recommendations for change. It questions why, in the wake of a failed grenade attack on a United States diplomatic property in Jakarta on 23 September, it took the Security Service over two weeks to issue an internal report on Indonesia. Lastly, it says that because there was intelligence of a terrorist threat in Indonesia, because there was the possibility of displacement of targets, and taking into account

"the reluctance of the Indonesian authorities to deal with terrorism",

the Security Service made what the Committee says was a "serious misjudgement" in failing to upgrade its assessment of the threat to British interests from "significant" to "high".

The staff of the Security Service must make fine judgments based on fragmentary intelligence and other information. In the absence of any specific material in the period preceding the Bali bombing, the service had assessed the threat to general British interests in Indonesia as being "significant". As a result, the security climate was judged to be such that United Kingdom general interests were likely to be a priority target for terrorists.

As I know the Intelligence and Security Committee itself fully recognises, the staff of the Security Service are dedicated people who work to the highest professional standards. They can never publicly justify or defend themselves. But they, and we, must also be properly accountable for what we do, and we will of course take the Committee's recommendations on board.

Against the background of the increased global threat of terrorism, the Security Service began to review the system of threat assessment earlier this year. That work will now be informed by the Committee's findings, and will be brought to an early conclusion. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary leads on this, and I know he will ensure that the Committee and the House are kept fully informed.

The Committee's fourth set of conclusions concern travel advice from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The Committee says that the travel advice at the time of the Bali bombing did not accurately reflect either the threat or recent developments in Indonesia, although it also says that the advice issued was "proportional" to the Security Service's assessment of the threat, to which I just referred. It says that FCO travel advice is generally not communicated effectively to the public and the travel industry, and that the whole purpose of such advice should be reviewed.

Our travel advice is widely used by individual travellers and by the travel industry. There are some 670,000 visitors to our website each month. In the wake of the Bali bombing, I have put in hand a comprehensive review of the way in which our travel advice is both prepared and presented. We have already made some improvements, but we will be making further changes, drawing on the Committee's helpful recommendations.

[Mr. Jack Straw]

The purpose of travel advice is to provide reliable information to British travellers and residents overseas. It is vital that our advice is based on the assessments made by the Security Service. The intelligence agencies are best placed to evaluate the terrorist threat to British nationals both at home and overseas. That often involves difficult judgments where we have to ensure that travellers are warned of threats that we assess to be credible, while not causing panic by over-reacting to unsubstantiated pieces of information.

It is worth underlining that that often requires very difficult judgments. The safety and well-being of our nationals abroad is our prime concern, but as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said last month, we must aim

"to take preventive measures without destroying normal life."

If rather than properly seeking to separate truth from fiction the Government treated every terrorist threat as accurate, on many occasions in recent months we would have had to shut roads, shopping centres, airports, factories and military installations. That would serve only to cause panic—precisely the circumstances that the terrorists are striving to create.

We are always looking for ways to do this job better, to work more closely with our allies to ensure that collectively we do all we can to protect our citizens from the threat of terrorism, while allowing people to live, as far as possible, normal and free lives uninhibited by unnecessary or exaggerated fears, but I remind the House of a sobering point about intelligence: by its nature, when it works, which is usually the case, the public rarely get to hear about it, but there will always be exceptions, instances where despite our best efforts the terrorists slip through the intelligence net.

The tragic lesson from Bali is that British nationals are targets of terrorism in many parts of the world. The message for the Government is that we must all exercise constant vigilance if we are to avert future such tragedies. I know that I speak for the whole House when I say that we will never bow to the evils of terrorism. Its purpose is to undermine the very foundations of our free and democratic life, and our campaign against it will continue to be unrelenting both at home and overseas.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I thank the Foreign Secretary for advance notice of both his statement and the report. I join him in sending our best wishes to the Home Secretary for a speedy recovery.

We on the Conservative Benches welcome the report and its contents. It is a very serious report with very serious implications for the security of British citizens abroad. We owe great gratitude to the members and the chairman of the committee for producing it so quickly. I take this opportunity to join the Foreign Secretary in paying tribute to the dedication of our security services, which work largely unthanked and unsung on behalf of the citizens of this country. I renew our condolences to the victims and the bereaved from the murderous Bali bomb.

At the time of the bombing, I called for the Committee to investigate what information had been available prior to the Bali bomb. I also asked that there be a full debate on the report. I hope that, notwithstanding the statement today, the Government will make time available for such a debate, particularly after they have completed their own consideration of the recommendations in the report.

I referred at the time to Australian Prime Minister John Howard's belief that we have an obligation to have procedure "thoroughly examined". Today's report supports that view, and its recommendations largely endorse the actions that I called for at the time of the Bali bombing.

As the report indicates, there are serious lessons to be learned from Bali. I am sure that the Foreign Secretary must share my concern at the Committee's findings that the pre-11 September Foreign Office travel advice was clearer on the threat to British interests in Indonesia than the advice that was available in August this year.

There are a number of urgent recommendations relating to the security services and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Those must be responded to swiftly, comprehensively and sufficiently openly to restore public confidence in the advice that flows from their activities. One of the major deficiencies highlighted in today's report concerns the levels of threat grading. The Committee calls for the gap between the level "significant" and the level "high" to be addressed. I am sure that the Government will wish to consider that. Will the Foreign Secretary tell the House whether the Australians and/or the Americans grade their threat assessments in the same way, and whether we can learn from them?

Even before this report, were early lessons learned from Bali? The Foreign Secretary said that improvements had been made, but the Australian Government, in particular, do seem to have learned lessons from Bali. Ahead of the attack in Mombasa on 28 November, they warned their citizens

"to defer non-essential travel to Kenya".

All that the Foreign Office warned was that there might be an increased terrorist threat. There is a substantial difference between those two warnings.

The Australian Government warned in mid-November:

"threats against Westerners and Western interests in Mombasa are high".

What was the Foreign Office warning, and why was Mombasa not mentioned? Why was travel advice not changed until I wrote to the Foreign Secretary on 29 November raising the disturbing similarities with the action taken by the Foreign Office in the run-up to the Bali bombing?

Does the Foreign Secretary agree that it is essential that the public can have confidence in the travel advice issued by his Department, and that the report must be acted upon swiftly to restore lost confidence? The inconsistency between the United Kingdom and Australia may have dented that confidence yet further. The right hon. Gentleman must tell the House today what steps have been taken to improve consistency.

Was our intelligence in relation to both Bali and Mombasa the same as that available to the Australian Government? Were the threat assessments that were made the same, and if so, why did we give the same travel advice on the first occasion, but different travel

advice on the second occasion? Were the threat assessments to the embassy in Jakarta and to the high commission in Mombasa the same or different? What were the levels for Nairobi when we know that in Jakarta the level was "high"? Were the equivalent threats to general British interests in Kenya the same as those being issued in Indonesia, where the level was said to be "significant"?

Has the Foreign Secretary seriously considered a more joined-up approach to the issuing of travel advice? Should not countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom consider a more co-operative approach? Has the right hon. Gentleman considered the effect of Foreign Office travel advice on the validity of travel insurance claims for holidays cancelled as a result of the advice given?

The report refers to there being insufficiency of information to prevent specific terrorist attacks, and the Foreign Secretary has written to me in similar terms—but does he not agree that although there may frequently be insufficient information to prevent an attack, that same information may be sufficient to establish a threat to British interests, which should be reflected in the travel advice? Was that not the case with Bali, and even more with Mombasa?

I urge the right hon. Gentleman to heed the words of the committee in its conclusion:

> "The whole issue of travel advice, its purpose, target audience and presentation needs to be examined . . . as a matter of urgency".

Can he assure the House that he will waste no time in implementing all the recommendations of the report?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's comments about my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, and about the relatives of the victims of this atrocity, and the staff of the Security Service—and, I might add, all the other intelligence agencies as well. He asked whether there would be a full debate on the subject, and I note his request. When I made my original statement six weeks ago I promised that I would do my best to ensure that the report was brought to the House as quickly as possible, and that is exactly what has happened; we received the report only yesterday. The request for a full debate will, of course, be dealt with in the usual way by the usual channels.

The right hon. Gentleman made a number of points as a sort of reprise of the report—and yes, since he asks, we are, as I have already made clear, moving swiftly to consider the recommendations in full. We will report both to the ISC and to the House. For reasons that the House fully understands, we can report rather more thoroughly to the ISC than to the House, because the ISC meets in confidence—but we shall report to the House as thoroughly as we can.

The categorisation of threat levels is published in today's ISC report—probably the first time that it has been published in this way. The right hon. Gentleman asked about such categorisation in respect of Australia and the United States. I will write to him with more information—if I have it—but my understanding is that neither the United States nor Australia makes public even the categorisation. While we were content for the basic categorisation to be published—we will of course take full account of the Committee's recommendation for an intermediate threat level between "significant" and "high"—it is firmly not our intention to make public the judgments made about threat assessments for individual countries, because in many cases to do so could inform terrorists that we have information about them. The Security Service makes its assessments as objectively as possible. They are then taken into account—not in an automatic way, but as a matter of judgment—alongside other factors, and that is reflected in the travel advice. Whenever a threat level changes, we reconsider the travel advice; it does not follow that, whenever a threat level changes, the travel advice is automatically altered.

The right hon. Gentleman asked several questions about the terrorist outrage in Mombasa. First, I am glad to say that there were no British casualties in Mombasa. In a letter to him, I said:

> "No information was available to the UK, US or Australia which could have prevented the attacks which took place in Mombasa."

As Alexander Downer, the Australian Foreign Minister, said:

> "Australia had no specific information about the timing, location or method of the possible attacks."

[Interruption.] The right hon. Gentleman seems to be muttering about the difference in advice, and I am about to come to that. It is always going to be the case that different countries, even if they are using the same intelligence, may come to different judgments. In some recent cases—they do not relate to the matter under consideration—the intelligence shared between key countries may be specific to the nationals of one country, rather than another; in others, we might come to slightly different judgments. So there may be good explanations as to why there are differences.

However, the right hon. Gentleman makes a good point when he suggests that, although there are high levels of co-operation at the moment between key countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand—and, to a different degree, with our European partners—we can always do more to upgrade co-operation. That is something to which I shall apply myself personally in the coming days.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): We also welcome the statement, and I am grateful for the advance copy that the Foreign Secretary provided. May I associate Liberal Democrat Members with the good wishes offered to the Home Secretary, and with the condolences expressed by the Foreign Secretary to the families of those killed in Bali? The tragedy there, and the subsequent one in Mombasa, has highlighted the real dangers of terrorism across the globe and the importance of high-quality intelligence to assess the threats that British citizens face.

We would welcome the Foreign Secretary's recognition that, despite best efforts and the high quality of our security services, mistakes were made in the assessment of intelligence and in the advice given before the Bali bomb. Will he be seeking changes in the ways in which intelligence is assessed and acted on once received? In the light of the Australian experience, does he accept that the public will now expect a qualitative improvement in the nature and timing of the advice that

[Mr. Michael Moore]

the Foreign Office gives? Finally, does he agree that the Committee's inquiry process was a worthwhile exercise and a useful precedent, and that it should be given the remit and resources to extend this type of work in future?

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his opening comments. We accept that the report highlights a need for changes in the way that intelligence is assessed and threat assessments are made, and in subsequent processing to a public result in terms of travel advice. Changes were put in hand after Bali, and some changes preceded that incident. However, the nature of the ISC's report means that the changes are likely to be accelerated and made more thorough.

Travel advice given by the UK is well regarded. Huge efforts are made to ensure its comprehensiveness and integrity, but it can always be improved. I have been looking at the nature of the advice and how it is presented on the website. There are ways in which we could change and better standardise the format of the advice, to ensure that it is more easily readable and that it refers to the websites of comparable countries such as the US, as has been suggested.

The ISC inquiry to which the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) referred is the second that has been conducted. The first was established in September 1999 in respect of the Mitrokhin disclosures, when I was Home Secretary. The second inquiry, in respect of Bali, was established just six weeks ago. The ISC's specific inquiries and its general work show the value of such scrutiny by senior parliamentarians.

Ann Taylor (Dewsbury): On behalf of members of the ISC, may I join my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in extending our sympathy to the families of those involved in the tragic bombing in Bali? I thank my right hon. Friend for his comments and for making all the relevant intelligence available to the Committee. We could not have done our work without that, or without the full co-operation of the agencies and Ministers who gave advice. We are also very grateful for the high degree of co-operation in terms of what has been published in the report, which for the first time includes the system of threat-assessment levels. It is important that people can see that, so that better judgments can be made in the future.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary was right to draw the House's attention to the Committee's conclusion that, according to the available intelligence, there was no action that the UK and its allies could have taken to prevent the attack. It is important that we bear that in mind, as the report contains other important criticisms.

The ISC shares my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary's view that the staff of the Security Service, some of whom we met again this morning, are dedicated people who work in a professional way. For that reason, the Committee did not reach lightly its conclusion that there was serious misjudgment in the threat assessment made for Bali. Will my right hon. Friend assure the House that he will work with my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to ensure that the review of the system of threat levels is completed as quickly as possible? That is not necessarily so that we can monitor what happens in Australia, America or elsewhere, but so that we get the assessment right for threats to British interests such as embassies and people. Occasionally, different judgments will be made.

Will the Foreign Office ensure that the totality of the ISC's recommendations for changes to travel advice is taken forward urgently and put in the context of the remarks that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made in his Mansion house speech about public awareness and education, given the new threats that everyone faces from international terrorism?

Finally, I thank my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in particular, and the Government in general, for turning the report around so quickly. The Committee finished its work only on Monday evening, and we are impressed that the report has been published so quickly. I urge my right hon. Friend to use his best endeavours, as some Committee members will, to persuade my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House to have a debate on these matters early in the new year.

Mr. Straw: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for everything that she has said, and for the manner in which she said it. I am also grateful to all the members of the Committee, who have dealt with the inquiry very assiduously.

My right hon. Friend underlined the Committee's first conclusion that the United Kingdom could have taken no action on the available intelligence that could have prevented the atrocity. It is very hard—indeed, it is awful—for those who were bereaved, and, as I said in my statement six weeks ago, they are bound to have the idea that some intelligence was overlooked that could have prevented the atrocity. That is not the case. Given the criticism that my right hon. Friend's Committee makes, I am glad that she has placed it on record—I know that she feels this very strongly—that the staff of the Security Service are dedicated professionals.

My right hon. Friend asks whether I will work with the Home Secretary to complete the review of threat assessments as soon as possible. Yes, although, as I explained to the House, it is primarily the responsibility of the Home Secretary, as he is responsible for the Security Service. We must get it right for the United Kingdom and I shall certainly act on the totality of the Committee's recommendations on travel advice.

As for having a debate, my right hon. Friend, as a former Leader of the House, will know that all Members who speak from the Front Bench are under a strict injunction never to offer a debate but only to say that we will raise it with the Leader of the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I allowed some latitude to the right hon. Member for Dewsbury (Ann Taylor), as Chairman of the Committee, but I appeal to other hon. Members to be brief because we have another statement and important business thereafter.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Is the Foreign Secretary aware that the son of a constituent of

mine was one of the British citizens who was murdered at Bali, that he had been married five months previously and that he relied on a life assurance policy taken out by his employer to offer financial protection to his wife—now his widow? Is he further aware that my constituent told me this morning, in advance of the Foreign Secretary's statement, that the employer has now expressed doubts as to whether the life policy will be valid because his late son lost his life in an act of terrorism? The Foreign Secretary has rightly made it clear that there is a continuing grave threat to British citizens abroad and possibly in this country as well. Can he assure the House that the Government will have immediate discussions with the insurance industry to ensure that life policy protection against acts of terrorism remains in place for the people of this country?

Mr. Straw: The answer to the right hon. Gentleman's last question is yes. I should be grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I could, through you, pass on to the family concerned my sincere condolences. I would be happy to see the right hon. Gentleman and, if he feels it appropriate, his constituent to discuss the details of the points that he has raised.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Thanks to the new system of distributing ministerial statements, it is possible to quote the Foreign Secretary accurately. He said:

"The tragic lesson from Bali is that British nationals are targets of terrorism in many parts of the world."

Could it be that British nationals are targets because of the bombing of the already traumatised children of Iraq, and that although we must fight terrorism, if we go ahead with bombing and war against Iraq, might not the eventual winners be Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda and the dreadful people who perpetrated Bali?

Mr. Straw: The answer to my hon. Friend is no and no again. Children in Iraq are traumatised by the atrocities perpetrated by Saddam Hussein.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): The Foreign Secretary is surely right when he says that both Australia and Britain suffered grievous casualties at Bali and both avoided casualties subsequently in Mombasa. However, is it not the case that the one was the result of good luck while the other was the result of good judgment? Is it not a fact that, based on the same intelligence, Australia gave a much more specific warning to its travelling population than our Government gave to ours? Is it not a fact that this was a serious misjudgment and failure by our Government?

Mr. Straw: I do not accept that. It is a matter that I have discussed separately with the Intelligence and Security Committee. I realise that the hon. Gentleman follows these things with some care, but it is very easy to have wisdom after the event. The Australians based what they said on similar intelligence to that provided to the United Kingdom, and United States intelligence was similar to that of the UK rather than to that of the Australians. Notwithstanding the criticism made by the ISC that I have published today, the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom all gave similar travel advice in respect of Bali and none of our travel advisories warned directly against travel to Bali.

May I remind the hon. Gentleman of a point made by his right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay)? In our exchanges on 21 October, the right hon. Gentleman warned of the genuine problem of "warning fatigue". We must be careful to ensure that the credibility of our travel advisories is properly preserved. The primary concern has to be that of the safety and security of British travellers, but how we achieve that is a matter of difficult judgments.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): May I, too, welcome the speedy production of the report? As my right hon. Friend knows, my constituent, Natalie Perkins, died in that terrorist atrocity, along with her young cousin, Laura France, the constituent of my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Central (Mr. Caborn). I especially welcome the fact that today a system has been set up to communicate the contents of the report to the families. Will my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary again confirm his willingness to meet relatives, should they wish to discuss in detail concerns arising from the incident?

Mr. Straw: Yes is the answer to my hon. Friend. She raised her constituents' concern during the exchanges on 21 October. I am glad that we have put the special arrangements in place. I have written to the next of kin of all the British citizens who were killed in Bali. I have already seen a number of the relatives and if my hon. Friend would like to bring her constituent to see me, I shall be happy to oblige.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Bearing in mind that the security services of those countries most at risk are not necessarily the most reliable sources of information or the easiest to work with, may I ask to what extent and how often our security services or the Ministers responsible for them check their assessment of the risk in such countries with their counterparts in friendly countries, such as the United States, or other friendly countries in the region, for example, in this case, the Governments of Singapore, Australia and Malaysia?

Mr. Straw: As the right hon. and learned Gentleman will know from his previous ministerial experience, there are substantial standing arrangements for the exchange of intelligence, especially between some countries—the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK being five of them—and there are liaisons with quite a number of intelligence services in other countries. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to say—it is a timeless verity—that the quality of intelligence and security services varies across the world. Countries where law enforcement is lacking may also—although not always—have security services that are below the quality required. That has to be taken into account. There is a continuous process of exchange of information and a large proportion of the intelligence that we see—albeit not every item—has been shared with our intelligence partners.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): At one time, travellers used travel agencies to purchase package holidays, so they were likely to receive advice about any problems in their destination. However, as travellers

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

now increasingly make use of the internet, are there arrangements to ensure that the information that they pull down is linked to the Foreign Office advice for overseas travel?

Mr. Straw: Our travel advice is itself available on the FCO website. That is how the overwhelming majority of travellers access it. There is substantial and significant contact between our consular department, the Association of British Travel Agents and tour operators. They work together to improve the availability of advice, but I shall follow up my hon. Friend's specific point and write to him on the matter.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): On behalf on the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru, I join other hon. Members in sending condolences to the relatives of those affected by this terrible atrocity.

Following on from the previous point, is the Foreign Secretary reviewing how the travel information is made available to those who are planning to travel and those who are already travelling, since the situation can change fairly rapidly? In particular, even in this age, many people still do not have quick access to the internet. In places such as south-east Asia, the problem is that many young backpackers may be on long trips through that area and may not be aware of a changing situation. Will he consider whether there is any way in which information can be more widely distributed quickly to people who are already travelling?

Mr. Straw: I thank the hon. Gentleman for the condolences that he offers on behalf of the SNP and Plaid Cymru; they are gratefully received.

Although the primary means of communicating our travel advice is through the website, whenever significant changes are made to the website a press announcement is made. We would draw a really important change to the attention of the BBC World Service, for example, and local broadcasters and so on, and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Foreign Secretary confirm the factual accuracy of his statement to the House this afternoon as opposed to the written statement that, during the period in question, the agencies received at least 150 separate intelligence reports a day? Will he also confirm whether the Government have thoroughly reviewed the deposition of the security and intelligence forces' assets throughout the globe so that they are correctly in place properly to assess the emerging threat from al-Qaeda, as the whole intelligence threat has changed since the dreadful events of 11 September?

Mr. Straw: The hon. Gentleman's first point was a paraphrase of the ISC report, paragraph 11 of which says:

"During the period in question"

the security services

"received at least 150 separate reports a day relating to terrorist activity in more than twenty different countries, including Indonesia and the UK itself."

Intelligence priorities are a very important issue; it is the core work of the Joint Intelligence Committee, based in the Cabinet Office and reporting to the Prime Minister and three Ministers—the Defence, Home and Foreign Secretaries—who are involved day by day in intelligence work. The ISC itself said that it was satisfied that sufficient priority was being given to intelligence collection in respect of Indonesia.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): In view of the general threat posed to travellers by the Bali bombing and the specific missile threat in Mombasa, will the Foreign Secretary tell the House what advice is being offered to British airline companies?

Mr. Straw: There are standing liaison arrangements with airline companies, but the crucial thing that we seek to do is to ensure that, so far as is possible and consistent with the protection of intelligence sources, the advice that we give is made public and is transparently available.

New NHS Resources

4.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish to make a statement about devolution of resources and responsibilities within the national health service.

I am today allocating revenue resources to England's 304 primary care trusts. I have written to all right hon. and hon. Members with details on the PCTs that serve their constituencies.

The NHS today is the fastest growing health service of any major country in Europe. Just six years ago under the previous Conservative Government, NHS budgets were falling in real terms. By 2008, under this Labour Government, they will have doubled in real terms.

The dedication and commitment of NHS staff is turning those extra resources into improved results for patients. Deaths from cancer and heart disease are falling; waiting times are down; the numbers of doctors, nurses and other staff are up; and the biggest ever hospital building programme is under way. There is a long way to go, but real and steady progress is taking place. We can now build on that momentum by coupling record resources to radical reforms.

I can tell the House that I have made three major changes to the method by which we allocate resources to the NHS. First, for the first time, locally run primary care trusts will receive funding direct from central Government rather than through health authorities—that is about devolving power and resources direct to the NHS front line. PCTs will now control 75 per cent. of the total NHS budget. That was an election manifesto commitment and today we have honoured it. Secondly, the resources that I am allocating today are not just for a single financial year but for three years. Short-term funding has hindered long-term planning in the NHS for far too long, so I am distributing to PCTs resources for the years from spring 2003 to spring 2006 to give PCTs the power to plan with confidence and certainty for the longer term. They will be free to commission services from the public, private or voluntary sectors—wherever they can get the best health services—to meet the specific health needs of their local communities. We want them to use their considerable extra resources to achieve a better balance between services in the community and those in hospitals, and to promote prevention as well as treatment.

Thirdly, the resources are being distributed according to a new fairer funding formula. The existing weighted capitation formula has been widely criticised for failing to get health resources to the areas of greatest health need, and has restricted our ability to address the health inequalities which scar our nation. Poverty and deprivation cause excess morbidity and mortality and bring extra costs to local health services, which is why I asked the expert Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation to review the existing formula and introduce a new one. The new formula reflects those costs by using better measures of deprivation and by taking greater account of unmet health needs. It reflects population changes in the 2001 census, and redistributes resources to some of the poorest parts of the country, such as Tower Hamlets, Newham, Barking and Dagenham in London; Tendring, Basildon and Thurrock in the south; Birmingham, Telford and the Wrekin in the west midlands; Ashfield in the east midlands; Liverpool, Knowsley and Manchester in the north-west; Bradford in Yorkshire; and Easington in the north-east.

The new formula, in calculating health need, takes account of the effects of access, transport and poverty in England's rural areas too. In addition, it recognises not just the challenges for the NHS in areas of highest need but challenges in areas of highest cost. We all know that the cost of living in some parts of the country is higher than in others, which impacts on the cost of health care. The new formula takes account of that in a more refined assessment of labour market costs. The allocations also reflect the impact of the recent "Agenda for Change" agreement on regional pay flexibilities and the need to expand capacity in areas where waiting times for treatment are longest. Those changes benefit almost 180 PCTs, including more than 140 in London and the south and almost 30 in the north-west.

The new funding formula is fair to all parts of the country, reflects extra needs and extra costs, and benefits PCTs in both London and the north. The average PCT budget will grow over the next three years by almost £42 million—in real terms, an increase of 22 per cent, in cash terms, of over 30 per cent. No PCT will receive an increase in funding over the next three years of less than 28 per cent. For the information of Members on both sides of the House, the real-terms increase in resources for local health services in this Parliament will average almost 7 per cent. In the 1992–97 Parliament by comparison, it averaged just over 1 per cent—that is the difference a Labour Government make.

The resources, together with our reforms, will make a difference to the care that patients receive. There will be better emergency care, shorter waiting times and improvements in cancer, heart, mental health, children's and elderly services.

The allocations to PCTs include resources to finance the costs of pay reform, new drugs and treatments and additional NHS capacity. They include the commitments that we set out in the NHS plan. However, none of the growth money has been identified for specific purposes. PCTs will be able to use these extra resources to deliver on both national and local priorities. PCTs are about shifting the balance of power in the health service so that while standards are national, control is local.

I am today placing in the Vote Office copies of a document that provides details of the help—in cash and in kind—that the Department of Health will now make available to all NHS trusts to raise standards of service for patients. There will be help, support and, where necessary, intervention to raise standards in all NHS hospitals, from the best-performing to the worst.

We on the Labour Benches reject the internal market idea that NHS hospitals should be left to sink or swim. Equity in health care demands support for all, just as it demands national standards of care, but for more than 50 years uniformity in health provision has not guaranteed equality of outcomes. Sadly, health inequalities have widened not narrowed. Top-down Whitehall control has tended to stifle local innovation, and it has too often ignored the differing needs of different local communities.

[Mr. Alan Milburn]

Sustained improvements in local services can happen only where staff feel involved and local communities are better engaged—where improvement is something done by local people, not just done to them. That is why devolution is at the heart of our reform programme for the NHS. It is why PCTs are so important, and it is why we now look to reconnect local hospitals to the local communities that they serve.

I am today publishing a guide to NHS foundation trusts—again, copies are available in the Vote Office. These NHS foundation trusts will usher in a new era of public ownership where local communities control and own their local hospitals. NHS foundation trusts will be part of the national health service, providing NHS services to NHS patients according to NHS principles—services that are free, based on need, not ability to pay. They will be subject to NHS standards, NHS star ratings and NHS inspection. They will be owned and controlled locally, not nationally.

Modelled on co-operative societies and mutual organisations, these NHS foundation trusts will have as their members local people, local members of staff and those representing key local organisations, such as PCTs. They will be its legal owners and they will elect the hospital governors. In place of central state ownership, there will be genuine local public ownership. Subject to Parliament, NHS foundation trusts will be guaranteed in law freedom from Whitehall direction and control, so that we can genuinely unleash the spirit of public service enterprise that so many NHS staff share. By putting staff and public at the heart of this key public service, these NHS hospitals will have the freedom to innovate and develop services better suited to the needs of the local community.

NHS foundation trusts will operate on a not-for-profit basis. They will earn their income from legally binding agreements with PCTs based on a national tariff. They will not be able to undercut other NHS hospitals. They will be free to borrow from the public sector or the private sector. They will be able to retain any surpluses and any proceeds from the more efficient use of their assets, where this is for the benefit of NHS patients. They will have the freedom to recruit and employ their own staff. Indeed, NHS foundation trusts will be among the first NHS organisations to implement the new pay system that we recently negotiated with NHS trades unions. Providing they can undertake extra work and make improvements in productivity and performance, they will also be able to offer staff extra rewards.

NHS foundation trusts will operate under a statutory duty of partnership under which they will use these freedoms only in a way that does not undermine other local NHS organisations—for example, by poaching their staff. There will be other safeguards to protect the public interest. NHS foundation hospitals will operate according to a licence, issued and monitored by an independent regulator who will be accountable to Parliament, to guarantee NHS standards and NHS values. The presumption will be light-touch regulation, but there will be intervention powers where they are needed. In extremis, foundation status can be withdrawn.

I can confirm today that the proportion of private patient work undertaken by any NHS foundation trust will be strictly capped to its existing level. Indeed, we will be particularly interested to see applications for NHS foundation trust status that propose to convert existing private patient facilities for the exclusive use of NHS patients.

To prevent any demutualisation or any future Government seeking privatisation there will be a legal lock on the assets of NHS foundation trusts. They are there to serve NHS patients—not just for now but for all time.

The freedoms that NHS foundation trusts have will be a powerful incentive for others to improve. The first round of foundation hospitals will be drawn from trusts rated three star next summer. Forty per cent of existing three-star trusts are in some of most deprived parts of the country—places such as Sunderland and Liverpool, Doncaster and Bradford, Southwark and Hackney. As more NHS trusts improve more will be eligible to gain foundation status. There will be no arbitrary cap on numbers. Over time foundation trust status will become the norm for many, perhaps most, hospitals in the NHS.Subject to Parliament, the first will be in place by Spring 2004.

Today I am announcing large-scale investment accompanied by radical reform, investment to get more resources to the NHS front line, and reform to give more power to the NHS front line.

The Labour Government have an unquestioned commitment to the NHS. It is time not just to invest more resources in front-line services, but to invest power and trust in those front-line services. That is what we seek to do. I hope that it is what the House will support.

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his statement and for his courtesy in making it available beforehand to the Opposition. It is really two different statements rolled into one, so I hope that the House will understand if I deal with it in two parts. *[Interruption.]* As usual, the Chief Whip has had her diet of Trill this morning. She might wait to hear what the Opposition have to say.

I must begin by welcoming the move to three-year funding. That is a sensible and overdue move if it is matched by a genuine willingness not to hold money back so that there is a genuine increase in autonomy. However, I have a number of reservations about what the Secretary of State said in the first part of the statement, not least when he said that PCTs will now control 75 per cent. of the total NHS budget. It would be more accurate to say that they will handle 75 per cent. of the NHS budget, because they certainly will not control it given the number of Whitehall interventions that are still in place. Perhaps the Secretary of State can tell us today what working assumptions he has made in the allocation of funding to PCTs about the cost of the GP contract should that contract be accepted in the coming months.

One or two other matters will certainly be welcomed. When the statement says:

> "We look . . . to achieve a better balance between services in the community and those in hospitals",

that is something that all parts of the Opposition have been asking for for some time, because those who take those decisions on the ground could not make a worse

job of understanding the relationship between the acute sector and what happens in the community. Perhaps the person who best expresses the problem is the Prime Minister when he says that it is about schools and hospitals. The majority of care is not about hospitals but about what happens in the community, and the Government have not understood that.

What is most worrying about this part of the statement is the Secretary of State's assertion that the formula being used to allocate resources is now fairer than it was before, yet we are not told exactly what the formula is. We need to know the basis of any change to the formula so that we can judge for ourselves. There has been no public discussion about this, just a working group reporting in secret to Ministers. It lacks transparency and I hope that we will have a full publication of the reasons and the mechanisms of this particular formula.

As the Minister of State, the right hon. Member for Barrow and Furness (Mr. Hutton), said at Health questions last week, it can never just be about money.Perhaps what is very troubling for many health service workers is the fact that in the past two years the Government have increased NHS funding by 21.5 per cent. Nobody doubts that that increase has been made; yet the figures that the Government produced last night showed that the increase in activity measured by finished consultant episodes was only 1.6 per cent. over the same period and that, in the past two years, admissions to hospital had fallen by half a per cent.

The question to which we want an answer is: where has all the money gone? Those who work in cancer services say that it has not gone there. There is a GP shortage, and GPs say that they have less time to spend with their patients. There are now more closed lists than ever before, 80,000 fewer people are receiving domiciliary care and waiting times in accident and emergency have increased. There are more cancelled operations and readmissions, and 60,000 care home beds have closed. There is a genuine desire to know where those beds have gone and where all that money has been used in the health service, as it is certainly not getting through to those on the front line. The Government need to address that issue.

On the second part of the statement and foundation hospitals, I understand why the Secretary of State feels the need to use as much left-wing rhetoric as possible, given the splits on his own Back Benches—the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) laughs at that—and he certainly did a good job in using the right words. The Opposition entirely welcome the principle of foundation hospitals, which lays the groundwork for the model that a future Conservative Government would like to see, with greater diversity in provision. As Bill Morris rightly said this week, it is a more market-oriented approach. I know that some Labour Members do not like that concept, but I think it is a good one and that Mr. Morris was right to say that. Such an approach also breaks up the NHS monopoly of supply, which again is a good thing and will ultimately benefit patients. However, it must not be about rhetoric, but about genuine substance. When the legislation is introduced, we will want to ensure that it delivers exactly what the Secretary of State and the Prime Minister claim to want and not what the Chancellor of the Exchequer seems to want for it—an early death.

We have a number of questions for the Secretary of State. On the autonomy of foundation hospitals, how exactly will borrowing limits be set? How will they be monitored, and by whom? What freedom will there be to vary pay and conditions for clinical staff outside the "Agenda for Change" agreement? What will be the freedom to change the configuration of services? For example, will foundation hospitals be able to drop any particular type of clinical service and decide that they do not want a dermatology department or an ENT department, or will such issues be determined centrally on the basis of core services defined by the Government in the legislation?

I find rather odd the concept that the foundations will be locally owned. If I were looking to measure whether I owned something, I would want to know whether I had a financial stake in it and whether it could be taken from me against my will, but it seems that there will be no financial stake and that foundation trust status can be taken away by the Secretary of State.

On accountability, on which the Secretary of State laid so much stress, which councillors will be involved in setting up the running of foundation hospitals? What electors will be involved? What will be the constituencies for elections to the boards that will be playing that role? What powers will the boards have over the configuration of local services?

The statement contained a number of contradictions that are worth looking at. The Secretary of State said:

"NHS foundation trusts will be guaranteed in law"

and referred to

"freedom from Whitehall direction and control",

but he also said that the trusts would still be subject to the star rating system. In other words, as the star rating system is dependent on the Government's central targets, foundation hospitals will therefore be subject to those targets. That is saying one thing and doing quite another. He said that the trusts

"will operate on a not-for-profit basis"

and went on to say:

"They will earn their income from legally binding agreements with PCTs based on a national tariff. They will not be able to undercut other NHS hospitals."

In that case, what is the point of giving them the freedom to be more efficient, which would allow the same amount of resources to be used to treat a greater number of patients? Why give them the freedom, but not allow them to use it? The right hon. Gentleman said that trusts would not be allowed to undercut other NHS hospitals. What is the point of the reform if not to achieve greater efficiency?

The Secretary of State said:

"They will be able to retain any surpluses and any proceeds from the more efficient use of their assets, where this is for the benefit of NHS patients."

However, he also said that they are not allowed to use the efficiency to undercut other hospitals. What exactly does he mean?

The right hon. Gentleman said that foundation hospitals

"will operate . . . in a way that does not undermine other local NHS organisations—for example, by poaching their staff."

[Dr. Liam Fox]

Who will define that? How is the measure to be policed? It is unworkable. A clinician in a hospital who likes the way in which a foundation hospital is being run and its freedoms might choose to work for it. He would not be allowed to do so because somebody—the identity is unclear—defines that as poaching, which is nonsense. Such a provision would have to be clearly defined in legislation.

I was amused when the Secretary of State said:

"The presumption will be light-touch regulation".

I presume that that is a tacit apology for the sort of regulation that has occurred under the Secretary of State so far. As for the idea that there will be a legal lock on assets to prevent demutualisation, all hon. Members know how meaningless that rhetoric is. Any future Government could change the law. The claim was included simply to give the Secretary of State a little peace from his Back Benchers. It is clearly meaningless in law.

We support the principle of foundation hospitals. Why will only a few hospitals be chosen? Is that a purely practical consideration? Do the Government want all hospitals ultimately to become foundation hospitals? Conservative Members would like that to happen. Is that the destination for the plans?

We will want to study the regulations that are associated with any legislation. That applies not least to the powers for the Secretary of State to expand and strengthen the foundation hospital project, without discussing them with the House of Commons.

When we believe that the principle is right, we will support it. The Secretary of State does not need to worry about problems on his Back Benches when introducing the foundation hospital principle in legislation because he will have the support of Conservative Members.

Mr. Milburn: I enjoyed the hon. Gentleman's contribution for the insights that it provided into the Conservative party's thinking—or lack of it—on the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned funding for local primary care trusts. It is easy to stand at the Opposition Dispatch Box and welcome three years' funding for PCTs, but when Conservative Members had the opportunity to vote for extra resources for every local PCT they voted against it.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the GP contract. I do not know whether he has negotiated with a trade union—for example, the BMA—but I can give him some advice. In the middle of negotiations, one never declares one's hand.

The hon. Gentleman alleged that discussions on the formula had been conducted in secret and that the information would not be published. It will be published shortly. It is based on information from the University of Glasgow, the Information and Statistics Division Scotland and other universities in York and London. On secrecy, I remind him that, since 1976, every Government have taken evidence about the best way in which to distribute NHS resources through the same mechanism that we used.

The hon. Gentleman went on, in his usual vein, to say that although he welcomed the resources, they never produce results for NHS patients. He asked where they went. I can tell him what happened to them in his constituency. North Somerset PCT is in his constituency. Last year, it used its 9.4 per cent. increase to ensure that no patients waited more than 15 months for a hospital operation and that no patients waited more than 26 weeks for a first out-patient appointment. There has been a drop of one third in the number of people who wait 12 weeks or more. In the Weston Area Health NHS trust, with which he is familiar, no one waited more than a month for breast cancer treatment, elective and non-elective activity increased, a new 15-bed observation ward opened at Weston hospital, and a new endoscopy service began at Clevedon hospital.

What the hon. Gentleman might have said is that he very much welcomes the extra resources that I announced for his local PCTs—an increase for his constituency and his PCT of 32.47 per cent. He had the temerity to welcome the measure, but when he had an opportunity to vote against the extra resources, he did so. He does not believe in the resources; he does not want to see the results. We all know why: he does not want the NHS to succeed; he wants the NHS to fail.

On foundation trusts, to which the hon. Gentleman gives such a warm welcome, I look forward to him and his colleagues voting for an extension of public ownership. I knew that they had wanted to find their own clause IV issue, but I had not quite realised that they wanted to pick up our old clause IV.

The hon. Gentleman asked about borrowing limits for NHS foundation hospitals and who will set them. The borrowing limits will be set according to a prudential code on borrowing, whereby the only way in which a foundation trust can borrow is against its ability to pay. The independent regulator, accountable to Parliament, will determine the borrowing limits for individual NHS foundation trusts.

The hon. Gentleman asked how much freedom the trusts will have in relation to "Agenda for Change". I set that out in my speech. The trusts will be part of "Agenda for Change". I think that he knows fine well that, within "Agenda for Change", there is considerable local flexibility for NHS trusts—foundation or other NHS trusts—to "flex" upwards the rate of pay according to their local labour market circumstances.

In the normal course of events there would have to be consultation on a change in clinical services on the scale that the hon. Gentleman suggests. Local authorities' oversight and scrutiny committees would want to assess it and, if necessary, that would be referred to the independent reconfiguration panel.

The hon. Gentleman gave the game away when he failed to understand one simple thing about NHS foundation trusts: they are part of the national health service; they do not sit outside the national health service. He seemed to be skating very close to the position that he probably advocated in government, and which he now continues to advocate in opposition: that there should be no national standards, no national targets and a local lottery in care, whereby local hospitals are allowed to sink or swim not according to the communities that they serve but according to happenstance or their individual circumstances.

The hon. Gentleman said that he found it difficult to understand the concept—and I perfectly understand why. What these NHS foundation trusts are not about is the sort of privatisation that he and the Conservative party advocate. This is a form of genuine public ownership, which Labour Members want to see.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Will my right hon. Friend accept that, like everyone on the Labour Benches, I very much welcome the additional funds and the effort to ensure a fairer formula for distributing them? I hope that he accepts that there may be some minor errors in the new fund and that it will be adjustable in the light of experience.

However, does my right hon. Friend also accept that nothing he said this afternoon stills many concerns of Labour Members about the likelihood that giving financial advantages to a limited number of hospitals will put them in a position where they can offer better pay and working conditions, and thus attract staff who are in short supply from neighbouring hospitals? In the case of my constituency, if University College hospital were to become a foundation trust and have vacancies for nurses, how could anyone stop nurses at Great Ormond Street, the Royal Free, the Chelsea and Westminster or Barts hospitals applying to fill those vacancies, which would offer better pay and working conditions?

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend has probably not yet seen the cash figures, but there is an increase for Camden PCT of 31.35 per cent., which is a total cash increase of £76 million. I hope that will help with the real pressures that he and people in the health service have to deal with.

I have a huge amount of respect for my right hon. Friend and I very much enjoyed working with him when he was Secretary of State. On the issue of NHS foundation trusts, however, I believe that he is fundamentally wrong. He says that there is a danger of our somehow having two-tier care, and asks what will prevent a hospital from recruiting another's staff, yet he knows well from his own time as Secretary of State for Health that the national health service is not uniform. Sadly, different hospitals perform at different levels; some do very well and some not so well, while some need to do a lot better. That is the reality of the national health service, as it has been for many years. Of course, staff make their judgments in part according to how well local health services are doing. My right hon. Friend is wrong, incidentally, to say that NHS foundation trusts are just for the few; I want them to be for the many, and I believe that, in time, they can be.

I say in all candour to my right hon. Friend that there are two lines of objection to these proposals, one of which involves an absolute objection in principle. I have listened carefully to what he has said, especially during the debate on the Loyal Address, when he argued cogently that one way forward was to trial and pilot these trusts, so it does not seem to me that he objects to them in principle. [*Interruption.*] Well, that is what my right hon. Friend said. I heard his speech and I read it very carefully. The second form of objection is that, if the provision is good enough for some, it should be good enough for the many and, perhaps, good enough for all. I agree, but the question is how we get there. We have to ensure that we start with those hospitals with a proven track record of success. We must help to raise standards in all parts of the national health service—my right hon. Friend knows well that we are trying to do so—through inspections, standards, intervention, help and support. That is what we need to do, but we also need to provide some freedoms and rewards for the best-performing organisations, not least as an incentive to others to improve.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): I thank the Secretary of State and welcome his improved performance in providing good time for Opposition spokesmen to read his statement. That is appreciated.

The right hon. Gentleman recognises that, unlike the Conservatives, my party voted for higher funding in the last Budget. Indeed, we called for that five years earlier.

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the first job in recognising that we have a sick patient is to accept that the previous treatment was poor? He said that the funding rise under the Tories between 1992 and 1997 was 1 per cent.—1.76 per cent., in fact—and that it was now 7 per cent. under his Government. Does he accept that the 3.5 per cent. funding that he delivered in real terms in the last Parliament was insufficient, and is part of the reason for our not having the capacity that we need?

The right hon. Gentleman recognised that what I have been saying about the freedom of foundation hospitals has been right. They will be subject to so-called NHS standards, so-called NHS ratings and so-called NHS inspections, but those are Government standards, political targets and flawed and distorted ratings. So there will be no change or freedom as a result of the target-driven approach that he is taking for these chosen few hospitals. They will, however, still be able to poach staff from other local trusts, or from developing countries. Will he answer a question that has not yet been answered? Is he satisfied with the fivefold increase in the number of nurses coming from countries such as South Africa, or with the fact that his own code of practice has still not been adopted by more than one third of the private nursing agencies that NHS hospitals use?

On the question of where the money has gone, I hope that the Secretary of State realises that, in the southern region alone, there are forecast deficits at the six-month point of more than £230 million. Does he believe that the extra funding should go towards paying debts that have accrued as a result of previous poor settlements, or that it should be used for front-line staff? Will he also explain why only 75 per cent. of funding is being handled by primary care trusts, rather than 95 per cent? Will he tell the House whether anyone out there supports the version of the star rating system based on his targets, rather than considering it to have a distorting effect on resource allocation and clinical priorities? Furthermore, why will the Secretary of State not get rid of private pay beds altogether from NHS hospitals? They use up vital NHS capacity and are allocated on the ability to pay, rather than on the basis of need.

Finally, will the Secretary of State accept that he must now go back to the drawing board? He has thrown away the baby with the bath water. He has pleased no one with the changes to NHS foundation hospitals because

[Dr. Evan Harris]

they will still be subject to Government control and will therefore not have the freedom to become new entities, such as public benefit organisations, which we would like to see. He is trying to please everyone, and trying to have it both ways. This is typical new Labour.

Mr. Milburn: Typical new Labour! Babies, bath water and drawing boards—an interesting metaphor that speaks volumes for the confused state of the hon. Gentleman's mind, I fear. On some of those issues, he might have welcomed the big funding increases for his local PCTs—£39 million in south-west Oxfordshire, £38 million in Oxford city and £14 million in north-east Oxfordshire—that range between 29.1 and 31.55 per cent. over the next three years. They have been achieved precisely by the approach to public finances that this Labour Government have introduced over the past few years. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor is quite right to say that it has been prudence for a purpose. If the Liberal Democrats had been in office, or anywhere near it, I fear that we would have gone back to the sad old, bad old days when deficits were out of control and unemployment was rising through the 3 million mark.

The hon. Gentleman raised specific issues and asked why 75 per cent. of funding is being allocated to PCTs. The reason is simple: certain budgets that he is aware of—for example, training budgets for nurses, doctors, scientists and others—are held nationally rather than locally. Indeed, the research and development budget is held nationally rather than locally because it has to be distributed not on an equitable basis but according to where the R and D centres are, and there is a large volume of cash for information technology systems, which we shall distribute in due course. He has been one of the strongest advocates of better IT in the NHS. I agree with him, but to achieve that we must ensure that the distribution formula is right.

On pay beds, when I last attended the Health Committee, or perhaps the time before that—no doubt my hon. Friend the Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe) will remind me in a moment or two—I was quite prepared to hear proposals from all NHS trusts, not just NHS foundation trusts. If they would like to get rid of their NHS pay beds, which serve private patients, and if they think that sensible in order to allow extra capacity for NHS patients, I would be delighted to hear from them.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I propose to move on at eight minutes past 5, so I appeal to Members for one short question and to the Secretary of State for brief answers.

Mr. David Hinchliffe (Wakefield): My right hon. Friend has brought us two Christmas presents today. One is his welcome present of increased resources for PCTs, and he should be warmly commended for the deal that he and his team have won for the health service and for securing the ability to plan health care locally, which we have never had before.

I like the wrapping paper that covers the second present—foundation hospitals—but when I open it I am not too keen on the contents. His statement is somewhat inconsistent: on the one hand, we have the devolution of power to local communities and primary care but on the other we have foundation hospitals. Through them, we are rowing back to the tradition, which has been a weakness in the NHS, of empowering the acute sector to drive forward change at the expense of primary care and the community. He ought to address that glaring inconsistency in what he has said today.

Mr. Milburn: I hope that, in time, I can persuade my hon. Friend to love NHS foundation trusts, although I fear that that might be a sticky wicket. He will be aware of the funding increases for Wakefield of between 29 and 32 per cent. for the two PCTs. He was talking to me earlier about some of the considerable pressures that the NHS faces, so I hope that they very much help.

My hon. Friend raises the issue of NHS foundation trusts and the relationship with PCTs. He is on to an important point. Indeed, when he reads the guide, as I know he will, he will see that there are two important roles for the PCTs, particularly to guard against the acute-sector creep that he has talked about. First, for any NHS trust to get the go-ahead to become an NHS foundation trust, it must have the support of its local PCTs. A lock is built in to safeguard the interests of primary care. There is a second lock too, in that the governance structure in a foundation trust includes not just local people, patients and of course members of staff at the local hospital or hospitals, but the local primary care trust.

My hon. Friend is right: we must have a better range of services in the community. I very much hope that the commissioning powers we have given today and the extra resources for PCTs will help to make that happen.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I repeat my appeal.

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): May we have a little more information about the mechanisms whereby foundation trusts will engage their local communities? How will people qualify for membership of trusts; and if elections take place, how will the electorates be constituted?

Mr. Milburn: The guide that we published today, which is in the Vote Office, sets that out in considerable detail—but I shall not do so given your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The trusts will operate on a basis that will be familiar to Labour Members but perhaps not to Conservatives: a basis of co-operative societies and mutual organisations allowing people in an area served by a trust to become its members. Obviously there are different sorts of NHS trust—the Royal Marsden is a very different sort from my local trust—so some flexibility is built into the Government's model. There is, however, one important stricture that I think entirely right in terms of public ownership. Whatever happens, a majority of those on the governing body of a foundation trust will have to be elected by members of the public and by the patients who use the trust.

Mr. Keith Bradley (Manchester, Withington): I welcome the 31.52 per cent. increase in funds for South Manchester primary care trust, which properly reflects the chronic health needs of the people of Manchester. It will allow the development of new, innovatory services in primary and preventive care at the new £20 million Withington community hospital, to be built next year. May I ask, however, how the foundation status of specialist hospitals such as Christie hospital in my constituency will properly reflect local needs?

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend and many of his Greater Manchester colleagues have lobbied assiduously and made a strong case for precisely the changes in the formula that we have made today in order to recognise the pressing health needs of his community. As he says, the increase in resources is considerable—about £40 million for South Manchester PCT and about £50 million for Central Manchester PCT.

Christie hospital is rather like the Royal Marsden, in that it serves two sorts of community. It serves the local community, but it also serves, as a tertiary centre, a wider cohort of patients. As my hon. Friend will see when he reads the guide to foundation trusts, enough flexibility is built into the system to allow both members of the local community and patients who have recently used the hospital to apply to become members. In that way, services, even in excellent organisations such as Christie hospital, can become ever more responsive to the people who use them.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): How free will the foundation trust hospitals actually be? For example, will such a hospital be able to enter into its own private finance initiative project? If so, will it be prevented from exchanging surplus assets for new build facilities by the Secretary of State's legal lock on assets?

Mr. Milburn: A foundation trust will be able to enter into a PFI contract in exactly the same way as existing NHS trusts. As the hon. Lady knows, sometimes there are land swap deals, but trusts will have considerable freedom to enter into new sorts of contract as well.

Mrs. Gillan: That is nothing new.

Mr. Milburn: I think that when the hon. Lady bothers to read the guide she will find that a huge amount is new. For instance, the trusts' ability to borrow from both the public and the private sector will allow them to bring onstream precisely the new capital developments for which she and her hon. Friends have long argued.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I welcome the record 28 per cent. increase for Durham and Chester-le-Street PCT, and the 30 per cent. for Derwentside PCT. Although I have reservations about foundation hospitals, I also welcome the opportunity they give local people to have a direct say in their health care. Will my right hon. Friend consider extending that to PCTs?

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's comments on Durham, Chester-le-Street and Derwentside, parts of the country with which I am very familiar. I know of the pressing health needs in those areas. On the extension of a more democratic form of governance to other parts of the NHS, the answer is yes but over time.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): May I ask the Secretary of State about the financial flow system that is being introduced to recycle £100 million from the NHS into social services so that they can pay fines back to the NHS? Is that money to be top-sliced from the NHS before money is paid to the PCTs, or will it be taken from individual PCTs or acute trusts?

Mr. Milburn: No, it is already being top-sliced and then we will distribute it to social services. On paying fines, if I know local government and social services—at least this is what they tell me and I believe them—they want to spend extra money. The whole case that they have been making is about building capacity, particularly in elderly care services. We have just provided an extra £100 million so that they can do so. I know that that does not always happen in Liberal Democrat councils, particularly ones such as Liverpool, which talk the talk but then fail to walk the walk by cutting back on social services.

Clive Efford (Eltham): Will my right hon. Friend say whether he intends that people from local communities who represent their communities on foundation trusts will be better known to those communities than, say, local councillors or even local MPs? How are they going to be representative of the views of those local communities, and how are they going to stay in touch with them?

Mr. Milburn: I suspect that those people will be better known than the current non-executive directors of NHS trusts. I may ask my hon. Friend later in private to name the five non-executive directors in his own NHS trust. I bet that he would struggle, and I would too. I believe that this is an imperfect form of governance. It is a public service and it should have greater public input—not just a community input but a staff input. We have important traditions, at least on this side of the House, not just of community ownership but of industrial democracy. We believe that services are better if local people and local staff are involved with them. I do not believe that the current governance structures in the NHS facilitate the involvement of either local staff or members of the local community.

Andy Burnham (Leigh): Communities in Leigh and across Greater Manchester will today celebrate the passing of a funding formula that has left a legacy of entrenched ill health across the county and a deficit this financial year of about £55 million. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on introducing a formula that better reflects our health needs, but, to ensure that the resources have maximum effect, I ask him to give our PCTs perhaps the full three years to balance their books.

Mr. Milburn: I place on record my thanks to my hon. Friend because, perhaps above all others from his area, he has argued assiduously for a change in the formula and made an extremely reasoned case. Some PCTs have inherited deficits. It is important that those deficits are managed out as quickly as possible, because we must get

[Mr. Milburn]

services on to the front line to improve services for patients. However, three-year budgets give an opportunity to smooth those deficits out over a period of time if that is what is necessary.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Authorities such as mine have bumped along at the bottom of the health provision league for many years far away from target. Can my right hon. Friend say following this welcome announcement that we will be levelled up with PCTs with similar health need?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, I can confirm that. I do not know whether my hon. Friend has been able to see the figures yet, but the total percentage cash increase for the Bolton PCT is in the order of 31.8 per cent., which is well above the national average and recognises the problems of deprivation and poverty that have caused such pressures on the local national health service. It will still take time to meet the targets, but we have an opportunity now, with a better, fairer formula, to ensure that we get the maximum resources into the areas of greatest health need, including his constituency.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that elitism has been the curse of the national health service for the 50 years since its creation, and that he now appears to be setting up precisely the kind of division that will encourage that? Will he please accept that there is no legal way in which he can bind those trusts, and make it clear that creating such foundation hospitals will not only damage the interests of patients but will, in the final analysis, create a machinery that any incoming Conservative Government would use to privatise hospitals?

Mr. Milburn: I have a lot of respect for my hon. Friend, but she has been in this place long enough to realise that any incoming Government can do whatever they like in terms of new legislation. If we genuinely want to protect the public benefit purpose of the national health service from future encroachments by any Conservative Government, however far away that might be, the best way of doing so is surely to lodge ownership in the public, among members of the local community. That is one of the main purposes of NHS foundation trusts. Then the Conservatives would not only have to pass a law but actively to take power, resources and assets away from local communities.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I welcome the experiment of foundation hospitals, but can the Secretary of State reassure me that the criteria used to judge the success of the experiment will be whether it delivers more efficient patient care and more choice for patients, rather than the ideological purity of the mechanisms used?

Mr. Milburn: I very much agree with my hon. Friend about choice in our health care system. Of course, there always has been choice in it—provided that people have had the wherewithal to opt out and pay for their health care. Most of us on the Government side—indeed, all of us—believe in choice being available on the national health service. Why? Because we believe that health care should be available according to the scale of a person's need, not the size of their wallet.

Mr. Paul Marsden (Shrewsbury and Atcham): I welcome the increase, but is not the reality—

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): The hon. Gentleman was not in the Chamber for the statement.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should not shout at me that the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) was not in for the statement. The hon. Gentleman came to the Chair and gave assurances that he was in for the statement. He is an honourable Member, and he is telling the truth.

Mr. Marsden: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, I welcome the real-terms increase, but the reality is that for Shropshire, for instance, there will be only slightly more money than there has been in the previous five years. Who will appoint the independent regulator for foundation hospitals, and how independent will that person or body really be? How free will they be from Whitehall constraints?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman's muddle on figures is rather like his muddle on politics. The allocation per weighted head in his area in 1997–98 was £438. As a result of the changes that I have announced today, and the extra resources for his primary care trust area, that sum will rise to £1,090. By any measure, that is a huge and handsome increase in resources for his local primary care trust. I will appoint the independent regulator, but he, like the regulators of other parts of the public services, will be independent and report independently to Parliament.

BILLS PRESENTED

Co-Operatives And Community Benefit Societies

Mr. Mark Todd, supported by Mr. John McWilliam, Dr. Vincent Cable, Mr. Simon Thomas, Linda Gilroy, Ms Meg Munn, David Taylor, Mr. Adrian Bailey, Mr. Andrew Love, Mr. Tom Watson, Mr. Gareth Thomas and Mr. Dennis Turner presented a Bill to enable the law relating co-operatives and community benefit societies registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Act 1965 to companies; to permit a registered society whose business is conducted for the benefit be amended so as to bring it into conformity with certain aspects of the law relating to of the community to provide that its assets are dedicated permanently for that purpose; and for connected purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 31 January, and to be printed [Bill 15].

Sunday Working (Scotland)

David Cairns, supported by Mr. Malcolm Savidge, Sir Nicholas Winterton, Miss Anne Begg, Jim Sheridan, Angus Robertson, Anne Picking, Mr. Tom Clarke, John Robertson, Sir Robert Smith, Ann McKechin and Mr. Edward Leigh, presented a Bill to make provision as to the rights of shop workers and betting workers under the law of Scotland in relation to Sunday

working; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February, and to be printed [Bill 16].

Fireworks

Mr. Bill Tynan, supported by Mr. Edward Davey, Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, Linda Gilroy, Mr. Jimmy Hood, Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, Shona McIsaac, John Robertson, Mr. John Randall, Mr. Paul Tyler, Mr. Michael Weir and Brian White, presented a Bill: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 17].

Retirement Income Reform

Mr. Edward Garnier, supported by Mr. Michael Howard, Mr. David Curry, Mr. Frank Field, Mr. John Butterfill, Mr. Steve Webb, Mr. Richard Allan, Mr. David Willetts and Mr. Charles Hendry, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the provision of retirement income in respect of private and personal pensions, annuities and defined and additional voluntary contribution pension schemes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March, and to be printed [Bill 18].

Municipal Waste Recycling

Joan Ruddock, supported by Norman Baker, Gregory Barker, Peter Bottomley, Malcolm Bruce, Mr. Frank Doran, Sue Doughty, Ms Julia Drown, Glenda Jackson, Julie Morgan, Mr. Simon Thomas and Ms Joan Walley, presented a Bill to make further provision regarding the collection, composting, minimisation and recycling of municipal waste; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March, and to be printed [Bill 19].

Sustainable Energy

Brian White, supported by Dr. Desmond Turner, Ms Debra Shipley, Sir Sydney Chapman, Alan Simpson, Ms Joan Walley, Gregory Barker, Mr. Gareth Thomas, Mr. Simon Thomas, Mr. David Amess, Sue Doughty and Mr. Don Foster, presented a Bill to make provision about the development and promotion of a sustainable energy policy; to amend the Utilities Act 2000; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed [Bill 20].

Female Genital Mutilation

Ann Clwyd, supported by Chris McCafferty, Dr. Jenny Tonge, Mrs. Alice Mahon, Mr. Frank Dobson, Mrs. Marion Roe, Mr. Brian Sedgemore, Ms Diane Abbott, Julie Morgan, Mrs. Ann Cryer, Joan Ruddock and Ms Debra Shipley presented a Bill to restate and amend the law relating to female genital mutilation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 March, and to be printed [Bill 21].

Company Directors' Performance And Compensation

Mr. Archie Norman, supported by Mr. John Bercow, Mr. Martin O'Neill and Mr. Mark Lazarowicz presented a Bill to amend the law in relation to payment of a company director by way of compensation for loss of office so as to require boards to take the respective director's performance into account in setting the amount of any such payment, notwithstanding anything contained in his service contract; to require the board to disclose the amount of any such payment upon request by any shareholder; to require the insertion into the company's annual report of an explanation for the amount of any such payment, should it exceed the equivalent of the basic salary payable by contract to the respective employee in the previous 12 months; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 31 January, and to be printed [Bill 22].

Aviation (Offences)

Mr. Frank Roy, supported by David Taylor, Mr. David Marshall, Siobhain McDonagh, Sandra Osborne, Paul Goggins, Sir Robert Smith, Miss Anne Begg, Patrick Mercer, Syd Rapson, Rosemary McKenna and Mr. David Stewart presented a Bill to make provision about the enforcement of certain offences connected with aviation: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February, and to be printed [Bill 23].

National Lottery (Funding Of Endowments)

Mr. Keith Simpson, supported by Dr. Ian Gibson, Mrs. Gillian Shephard, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Richard Bacon, Norman Lamb and Mr. Anthony D. Wright introduced a Bill to make provision about the funding of endowments from distributions of money out of the National Lottery Distribution Fund; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 24].

Human Fertilisation And Embryology (Deceased Fathers)

Mr. Stephen McCabe, supported by Mr. Tony Clarke, Ms Debra Shipley, Ms Gisela Stuart, Mr. Ivan Henderson, Peter Bottomley, Sue Doughty, Mr. Anthony D. Wright, Dr. Jenny Tonge, Mr. David Amess, Miss Julie Kirkbride and Mr. Stephen Hepburn presented a Bill to make provision about the circumstances in which, and the extent to which, a man is to be treated in law as the father of a child where the child has resulted from certain fertility treatment undertaken after the man's death; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed [Bill 25].

Legal Deposit Libraries

Mr. Chris Mole, supported by David Wright, Ms Meg Munn, Jim Knight, Mr. Stephen Pound, John Robertson, Mr. Chris Bryant, Dr. Ian Gibson, Brian White and Mr. Clive Betts presented a Bill to make provision in place of section 15 of the Copyright Act 1911 relating to the deposit of printed and similar publications, including on- and off-line publications; to

make provision about the use and preservation of material deposited; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March, and to be printed [Bill 26].

Equine Welfare (Ragwort Control)

Mr. John Greenway, supported by Mr. Peter Atkinson, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown, Jeff Ennis, Mr. James Gray, Mr. Alan Meale, Mr. Richard Page, Mr. James Paice, Mr. Owen Paterson and Mr. Richard Spring presented a Bill to make provision for the protection of horses from ragwort poisoning; to amend the Weeds Act 1959; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 March, and to be printed [Bill 27].

High Hedges

Mr. Stephen Pound, supported by Mr. Martin Salter, Mr. Tony Clarke, Paul Clark, Mr. Andrew Dismore, Mr. Jim Cunningham, Mr. John Randall, Mrs. Cheryl Gillan, Richard Younger-Ross, Matthew Green, James Purnell and Ms Meg Munn presented a Bill to make provision for dealing with complaints about high hedges; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed [Bill 28].

Government Powers (Limitations)

Dr. Julian Lewis, on behalf of Mr. John Bercow, presented a Bill to amend the law in relation to the permitted number of Ministers of the Crown; to limit the powers of Ministers to make certain appointments; to make provision with respect to the parliamentary scrutiny of European Union proposals and other subordinate legislation; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 14 March, and to be printed [Bill 29].

Dealing In Cultural Objects (Offences)

Mr. Richard Allan, supported by Mr. Mark Fisher, Mr. Edward Garnier, Shona McIsaac, Mr. Alistair Carmichael, Ross Cranston and Mr. Robert Key presented a Bill to provide for an offence of acquiring, disposing of, importing or exporting tainted cultural objects, or agreeing or arranging to do so; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 February, and to be printed [Bill 30].

Marine Safety

Dr. Brian Iddon, supported by Mr. Edward O'Hara, Mrs. Louise Ellman, Mr. Graham Brady, Ms Candy Atherton, Mr. Gwyn Prosser, Andrew George, Mr. Ivan Henderson, Syd Rapson, Dr. Ian Gibson, Dr. Desmond Turner and Mr. Joe Benton presented a Bill to make provision about the giving of directions in respect of ships for purposes relating to safety or pollution and about the taking of action to enforce, in connection with, or in lieu of, directions; to make provision about fire-fighting in connection with marine incidents; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 February, and to be printed [Bill 31].

Disabled People (Duties Of Public Authorities)

Ms Bridget Prentice, supported by Mr. Roger Berry, Angela Eagle, Helen Jones, Mr. Greg Pope and Mr. Tom Watson presented a Bill to make provision in relation to public authorities for the elimination of discrimination against disabled persons and for the promotion of equality of opportunity for such persons: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 28 March, and to be printed [Bill 32].

Food Labelling

Mr. Stephen O'Brien, supported by Mr. Eric Pickles, Mr. David Curry, Mr. Owen Paterson, Mrs. Eleanor Laing, Mr. Jonathan Djanogly, Alistair Burt, Mr. Robert Syms, Sir Sydney Chapman, Mr. Henry Bellingham, Mr. Bill Wiggin and Ann Winterton presented a Bill to make further provision for relevant information about food, including information about the country of origin and standards of production of that food, to be made available to consumers, by labelling, marking or in other ways; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March, and to be printed [Bill 33].

Endangered Species (Illegal Trade)

Hugh Robertson, supported by Mr. David Amess and Mr. John Randall presented a Bill to increase the penalties for offences under the Endangered Species (Import and Export) Act 1976: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 21 March, and to be printed [Bill 34].

Sir William McKay KCB

5.13 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): I beg to move,

That Mr. Speaker be requested to convey to Sir William Robert McKay KCB, on his retirement from the office of Clerk of this House, the House's gratitude for his long and distinguished career, for his wise contribution to the development of the procedure of the House, for his scholarly research into the history of the House, and for the courteous and helpful advice always given to individual honourable Members.

As the Leader of the House, I have become wearily familiar with the fact that not every motion that I move is a focus of unity within the Chamber, but I anticipate full support for the one that I put before the House on this occasion. By convention, the Clerk of the House is not present to hear these tributes, but I hope that he has found some instrument of modern technology in order that he may observe them, and that he may hear the warmth of Members' appreciation for his lifetime of service to this House.

Bill McKay first entered the Clerks Department in 1961. He has therefore been here longer than any serving Member of the House, and for one year longer than the Father of the House. He has served in the Clerks Department through momentous political events—from the Cuban missile crisis to the present day. When he first came, Harold Macmillan was Prime Minister and Hugh Gaitskell Leader of the Opposition. In the intervening period, he has served under eight Prime Ministers, and Leaders of the Opposition—of both parties—too numerous to recount. His record of service reads like a directory of the Clerks Department—Clerk of Journals, Clerk of Public Bills, Secretary to the House of Commons Commission, and Clerk to the Public Accounts Commission. In the past five years, as Clerk of the House, he has presided over momentous changes in the administration of the Commons.

Sir William McKay is the author of the biographical list of Clerks since 1363, when the office was first created. In that long list spanning more than six centuries, he is the first Clerk of the House also to hold the title of chief executive of the Commons—a post for which he gained valuable experience in his early years as Clerk to the all-powerful Catering Committee.

Over my three decades in the House, I have always found Bill McKay unfailing in the courtesy with which he responded to my questions, and in the authority with which he provided answers. I have also appreciated his tactful knack of always looking as though one had asked a really interesting question. There is only one recorded occasion on which his patience with an hon. Member failed him. He was Clerk of Public Bills during the passage of the Maastricht Bill, and used to receive a daily visitation from a certain very determined individual. After weeks of circular and fruitless argument with that hon. Gentleman, he took to seeking refugee status at a desk in the Journal Office—taking care not to tell his staff where he was, so that they could truthfully say that they did not know where he could be found.

I do not know the identity of the hon. Member involved, but we can all guess.

I suspect that Bill McKay will most want to be remembered in this place for his fine legacy of scholarship, and rightly so. He has been the editor of the second volume of Erskine May's journal, the author of a monograph on secretaries to Mr. Speaker, and he is the source of many of the authoritative revisions to Erskine May's guide to procedure. I am therefore delighted that he leaves us to take up a chair at Aberdeen university as professor in the school of law. It is a post and a location convenient to enjoying his retirement with his wife, the Rev. Margaret McKay, who serves as a minister of a parish in the presbytery of Buchan. Characteristically, Bill McKay and Margaret have already written the authoritative historical account of the parish.

Sir William leaves with the gratitude of hon. Members, with the respect of the House for having fulfilled the great tradition of Clerks, and with the admiration of every hon. Member for a great parliamentarian.

5.17 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): It gives me great personal pleasure to endorse very warmly what the Leader of the House has said about Bill McKay, and I happily add the Opposition's support to the motion before us.

I want to emphasise what the Leader of the House said about the breadth of the responsibilities now borne by the Clerk. Many people may not realise it, but the Clerk of the House is, at one and the same time, the chief executive of the House of Commons—the person who chairs the Board of Management—the corporate officer, the accounting officer and the custodian of our procedures, records and documents.

It may not be widely known but, as "Erskine May" points out, the Clerk is appointed by the Crown for life. It is therefore an unusually generous sacrifice that Bill McKay is making in standing down when he is still such a young man and could have continued for some considerably longer time.

The motion refers to Sir William's scholarship. Lest any hon. Members doubt that, I strongly recommend that they dip into his "Observations, Rules and Orders of the House of Commons—an Early Procedural Collection". The introduction states, on page 8:

"In the notes which follow, the appropriate Journal (or D'Ewes) reference has been inserted in the margin, under the note found in the Ms itself which usually gives the date or a Seymour folio reference. The foliation of the Ms is also indicated in the margin. Notes which bear on the textual history of the manuscript are given alphabetical references, while notes concerning the events noticed are in numerical series."

That illustrates the characteristic detail that the Clerk has always brought to his work, and to his history. More interestingly, page 1 of the text states that, on 18 November 1549, it was ordered

"That the Speaker with the Privy Council and twelve others of the house shall be suitors to know the pleasure of the King, if upon their humble suit they may treat of their late relief for cloth and sheep, at four o'clock in the afternoon".

More revealingly, however, on 1 June 1607, the text reads—and I hope that the modernisers will note this closely—

"Mr. Speaker, with sundry Members and officer of the House being assembled, sat from eight of the clock till eleven then did arise and depart, without a motion made or bill read."

[Mr. Eric Forth]

I hope that the Leader of the House is not too tempted by that, but it illustrates that things move backwards and forwards in this House and that nothing is for ever.

Alternatively, as the Leader of the House mentioned, one could refer to Sir William's work entitled "Clerks in the House of Commons 1363–1989: A Biographical List". Among those listed was John Hatsell, 1768, who

"drew full pay for 20 years after he retired and did nothing but interfere with the promotions of his erstwhile colleagues."

We cannot expect that of Sir William. The great Thomas Erskine May himself, in 1871—and not a lot of people know this—

"fought a duel on the sands at Boulogne with the offended husband of a married lady."

Our Clerks are characters, are they not?

Finally, Sir Courtenay Ilbert, 1902, was the only Clerk of the House—so far—to have been worshipped as a god. When a parliamentary draftsman for the Indian Administration, he drafted a Bill implementing a measure of self-rule. It was very unpopular in Calcutta, but up country, where the news arrived in garbled form, they made an image called "Ilbert-bill" and paid great honour to it.

We do great honour to Sir William today, although he has not quite become a deity. He will be a very hard act to follow, and we wish every success to his successor, our Clerk-elect, Roger Sands, who is sitting in his place at the Table. Those of us who know him know that he will discharge his onerous new responsibilities from January in his own distinctive style, having served the House since 1965.

The Leader of the House mentioned that Sir William McKay is taking up a distinguished chair at Aberdeen university. Sir William has shown a great interest in comparative legislatures, not least the House of Representatives in the United States, and has befriended the parliamentarians there. I hope that we can look forward to some thoughts from Sir William when he leaves us as to how various legislatures can all learn from one another. I am sure that we in the House of Commons, in our usual humble way, would never eliminate the idea that we could learn from others, perhaps even those across the Atlantic.

Regardless of our length of service as Members, we have all come greatly to appreciate the wisdom of the Clerk and, as the Leader of the House said, his courtesy and helpfulness at all times. We will miss him greatly. We wish him well and we thank him for his long, distinguished and dedicated service to this House.

5.23 pm

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Sir William McKay was the first Scot and the second graduate of the university of Edinburgh to be the holder of an office with an unbroken history of well over half a millennium—twice as old as the prime ministership.

The first Edinburgh graduate to be Clerk of the House was Jeremiah Dyson, who purchased the Clerkship of the House for £6,000. Who received the £6,000 is less than clear, but we must assume that it was Mr. Speaker. I refer to Mr. Speaker Onslow, who occupied your Chair, Mr. Speaker, for 33 years, between 1728 and 1761. I doubt whether Bill McKay purchased the Clerkship—he got there on merit. I say to Opposition Members that no wonder our late friend and colleague Cranley Onslow was so eager at one time to follow his illustrious ancestor into the Chair.

Bill McKay's baptism of fire was on the Licensing (Scotland) Bill in 1962. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the House can well imagine the difficulties of sorting out the amendments when the Member leading the Opposition was Willie Ross—a puritan teetotaller on Scottish licensing resulted in a cocktail of difficulties.

However, Bill McKay, who was second Clerk to Clifford Boulton, learned his trade and would have been an obvious choice to be Clerk of the Scottish Parliament had it been formed in 1978–79. Fortunately, or unfortunately, according to one's point of view, that post did not materialise and he and George Cubie were saved for Westminster. Between 1979 and 1981, Bill McKay was the Clerk of the Scottish Affairs Committee and won golden opinions from the late Donald Dewar.

As it has already been referred to, we shall pass over Bill McKay's time as Clerk of Public Bills, with Maastricht and all the problems with killer amendments, but it was as well that there was a scholar in that particular position of impartiality.

One of Bill McKay's great legacies resides in the contacts that he formed with the Nordic countries. His great friend, Anders Forsberg of the Swedish Riksdag, whom I had the pleasure to meet, had the greatest respect for him and his international contribution. Bill McKay formed friendships with the Folketing and especially Henrik Tvarnoe; the Storting and Hans Brattesta; the Icelandic Parliament, the Althingi, and Fredrik Olafsson; and the Helsinki Eduskuntu of Seppo Tiitinen.

Bill McKay follows in a line of distinguished people of great quality whom I have had the good fortune to know through longevity: Sir Edward Fellowes, Sir Barney Cocks, Sir David Lidderdale, Sir Richard Barlas, Sir Charles Gordon, Sir Kenneth Bradshaw, Sir Clifford Boulton and Sir Donald Limon.

I speak for many of my colleagues of yesteryear—retired or departed—when I thank Bill McKay for his dedication, his expertise and his many kindnesses to many Members.

5.27 pm

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): On behalf of right hon. and hon. Friends, I am delighted not only warmly to welcome the motion but also to express good wishes to Bill McKay's successor.

We have found Bill McKay wise—as has already been said—but also very approachable. That is extremely important in the House, especially for new and less experienced Members. I understand that he is also eminently unflappable, which must be a quality that we should all admire.

As has already been said, Bill McKay is the first Clerk to fulfil the full role of chief executive officer, which is a recognition of the huge administrative task that falls on the Officers of the House following the Braithwaite report. It is as a team manager and a team player that Bill McKay will be especially recalled by members of our staff. His role on the Board of Management has

been not only unprecedented—for obvious reasons—but also a clear guide to the future management of this building.

Reference has already been made to the fact that Bill McKay is a distinguished historian. Many, many years ago, my academic discipline was history and I recall that history has been described as the study of past mistakes for the avoidance of their repetition. It sometimes seems to me that Members of Parliament should automatically have to take a course in history. Perhaps, in his spare time as a new academic, Bill McKay could put on some distance learning courses for those Members of the House who require constant reminders of the necessity to avoid past mistakes.

Bill McKay has given steady, practical and extremely useful advice to all Members of the House, but it is because he led such a talented team through a period of such change that we shall particularly remember his stewardship. It has been a time when the House has asked for major changes to our procedures in terms of the modernisation programme, but none of those changes could have been achieved without the Officers of the House loyally and professionally putting them into practice.

Today marks another important occasion. Mr. Speaker, you will not have missed the point that this marks a change in the Scots mafia in the House. The Leader of the House comes from north of the border, and the shadow Leader of the House originates from north of the border. The Father of the House comes from north of the Scottish border, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood), who speaks on behalf of the House of Commons Commission; and dare I say that it is not unknown for you, Mr. Speaker, to speak up for the Scots? As a fellow Celt from Cornwall, I am jealous of the Scots mafia's influence, and I hope that, from now on, we may be able to broaden the base of the House's control system to include other Celts.

I am delighted to speak in support of the motion. All of us not only thank Bill McKay for the very considerable contribution that he has made to the work of the House and to its reform and modernisation, but for the way in which he, I hope, will be able to ensure that students—not just in Aberdeen, but elsewhere—benefit from his study of the history of parliamentary democracy.

We wish Sir William and Lady McKay every happiness in their retirement.

5.31 pm

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh): I should like to add my tribute to the contribution that Sir William has made to the affairs of the House of Commons. I wondered earlier today what key qualities the Clerk of the House and, indeed, an official who advises the occupant of the Chair should have. I thought that those qualities were probably honesty, intelligence and fairness, and Sir William has all those qualities. Those are among the reasons why he made such a valuable contribution to the affairs of the House for more than 40 years, as we were reminded by the Leader of the House. That is a tremendous contribution.

I met Sir William when he was the Clerk to the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs in the early 1970s. He will probably remember an excellent report that the Committee produced after conducting an investigation into something called land resource use in Scotland—an issue that still causes a great deal of interest, but now in the other Parliament, of course, in Edinburgh. It was a pleasure to meet him.

Although I have not had a lot of contact with Sir William since then, I have clearly taken an interest in his career primarily, I suppose, because he comes from Leith. As some hon. Members will know, I have had the privilege of representing Leith—or perhaps I had better say part of the greater Leith area—for quite a few years. You will understand, Mr. Speaker, that I have to be careful about the geography.

It is excellent that we have had the benefit of Sir William's contribution. I was aware that he was retiring to the north-east of Scotland, but I had not realised that he had gained a chair at Aberdeen university. I am sure that that is good news because it means that his talents will be deployed to the benefit of not just Aberdeen university but the wider Scottish, United Kingdom and world community.

5.33 pm

Mr. David Trimble (Upper Bann): I am delighted to associate my colleagues and myself with the motion and to echo the tributes that have been paid today to Sir William McKay. Reference has been made to his length of service, to his scholarly research and interests and to his publications. Indeed, we have heard quotations from them during the debate. Of course, we have heard a most interesting contribution from the Father of the House himself. Reference has also been made to the changes that have been introduced during Sir William's time. Those changes have been considerable and a great deal of additional information and assistance has been made available to hon. Members. That is especially important. I noted in particular the introduction in 2001 of induction courses for new Members. I was tempted to say that my hon. Friends the Members for North Down (Lady Hermon) and for South Antrim (David Burnside), who are both here today and entered the House in 2001, benefited from them, but I took the precaution of checking with them beforehand and I regret to say that as traditionalists—all Ulster Unionists are traditionalists—they preferred to rely on traditional methods of acquiring information about the House and did not essay the new courses; but that does not mean that they are not a valuable introduction to the House.

The services provided by Sir William, as Clerk of the House, and the people whom he directs are important, especially for members of small parties. Without the resources that other parties have, we depend very much on the Officers of the House and the services provided by the House, and very much appreciate the way in which Sir William has managed them over the years. I was encouraged and reassured about the breadth and wealth of his interests when I saw him in a certain place where one repairs for a liberal cup of refreshment reading newspapers printed in the island of Ireland.

[Mr. David Trimble]

As Clerk of the House, Sir William occupied what H.A.L. Fisher described as

"a pleasant opera box from which to view the comedy".

As the Leader of the House hinted, he may be relying on a much more inferior box at the moment, but whatever he is relying on, he and his wife have the best wishes of my colleagues and me for the future.

5.36 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Most Members will not be aware of one activity with which Bill McKay was associated. He was the first British Clerk of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body. Before our first meeting in early 1990, rules drawn up by Bill McKay and his Irish counterpart, Paddy Judge, were established and approved. In the 12 years since, they have come in very handy indeed in meetings between British and Irish parliamentarians. However, some of us with a suspicious turn of mind think that when the two Clerks were drawing up the rules they did so, to some extent, to keep the politicians in check. From time to time, when we wanted to do something, we were told to look at the rules but, at the same time, the Clerks were pretty flexible.

On behalf of the British and Irish members of that body, I should like to put on record our tribute to Bill McKay for doing so much to make the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body a success. I am sure that my Irish colleagues will be interested in the tributes paid to him today.

5.37

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is with great pleasure that I associate my colleagues in Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National party with all the tributes to Sir William McKay.

I am not the first Scot to speak in this debate, but I am the first Scot to speak about one of his constituents. Indeed, I am the first Scot ever to do so because, as we know from Sir William's history of the Clerks of the House, he is the first Scottish Clerk of the House. I was therefore surprised that the hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler) suggested that there was some kind of tartan stranglehold over the key Officers of the House. A quota of one Scot in 650 years, or 300 years since the treaty of union, is not an overabundance of people of our nationality holding the post of Clerk of the House.

Bill McKay provides us with a clue to something that has fascinated many hon. Members. Why do the Clerks of the House—Bill, Roger and their colleagues—remain inscrutable, regarding our proceedings with equanimity without a shake or nod of the head and only the occasional raised eyebrow? I have the answer in Bill's case—he has balanced his time in this frenetic den of iniquity by commuting every week for the past few years from the village of Aberchirder, known locally as Foggieloan or Foggie, in the beautiful countryside of Banffshire. Before that, he balanced his time in London with building crofts on the island of Coll. I recommend to hon. Members who get caught up in this overcrowded corner of the country that they, too, should live in the beautiful Banffshire countryside and take the same balanced view of life as we have seen from Bill McKay over the past few years.

As has been said, Bill McKay almost became the Clerk of the Scots Parliament in the late 1970s. The hon. Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) rather deftly waltzed his way round the fact that he did his level best to deprive Bill of having a job at that time. However, Bill was ensconced in Edinburgh preparing for the Parliament in 1978, and I am happy to say that the sterling spadework that was done by Bill in that period has no doubt been put to good use 20 years later. The hon. Member for Linlithgow was thus defied in his ambition.

I note that Bill is to be a professor at Aberdeen university. Indeed, Bill's wife is one of the pillars of the Buchan presbytery. I congratulate Bill on his retirement, but it is not really a retirement. Freed from all the bounds of impartiality that are required of the Clerk of the House, who knows on what issues of the day Bill might want to enter into public debate—top-up fees in the university, perhaps? For my part, I shall prepare for my surgeries in Foggieloan with considerable care, never knowing who might appear and demand an answer on the issues of the day.

I have one final remark. When Members come to the House, they often believe that the Clerks and the machinery of the House are somehow an adjunct of the Government or the Executive—*[Interruption.]* I see those on the Government Front Bench collapsing. New Members realise, however, that the staff of the House are there to serve the House, and do so very ably. I can say from personal experience that with the sole exception that the Leader of the House managed to identify, Bill McKay has unfailingly provided advice to Members in all parts of the House. Sometimes I took Bill's advice; sometimes I did not. I usually benefited from the advice and regretted it when I did not take it. For all Members of the House, his advice was always courteous, always informed and always practical. For that we should all thank him indeed. His has been a lifetime of outstanding service, and in every sense we are congratulating the real McKay.

5.42 pm

Mr. Stuart Bell (Middlesbrough):. Following the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), I support the motion. I do so as a founder member of the British-Irish Inter-Parliamentary Body—I am grateful for the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick)—as a vice-chairman of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and also as a member of the House of Commons Commission.

I was in the City not long ago having one of those lunches or dinners to which we often have to apply ourselves. I sat next to a lady of a certain age and told her who I was and what I was, and she said, "Oh, I used to work in the House of Commons." I asked how long ago that was. She said, "Forty years." I said, "Forty years is a long time to go back. Whom did you work for?" She replied, "Bill McKay". I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House for mentioning the fact that Bill McKay came to the House in 1961 and has given 40 years of dedicated public service, unsung, unremarked but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North said, with great prestige and great influence.

I have seen this, as vice-chairman of the IPU, at international conferences that I attended with Bill. He did not attend the last conference in Moscow: he broke a leg. I thought that Moscow was a wonderful place to go to, and that it was taking matters a little too far to break a leg so as not to be on that trip. But Bill was unable to go, and we had to manage without him.

Parliamentary occasions such as this bring the House together. All of us in all parts of the House can come together and recognise the role that we play in public life and the role that has been played behind the scenes for us. The hon. Member for North Cornwall (Mr. Tyler), who spoke for the Liberal party, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House spoke about the role that Bill has played recently as chief executive. That is a new and significant role, which he has played because he is a parliamentarian himself. He understands 659 Members of Parliament with their foibles, their egoism and their impatience. He has brought us all together, and that again is a role that is entirely unsung and for which he should take a great deal of credit.

The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) mentioned that William McKay might wish to write his comparative parliamentary scenarios. That would be useful, but I hope that we are not encouraging him to write his memoirs. If we were to do that, we would all have to hunker down and hope for the best. But I know that he will not do that. Clifford Boulton, his predecessor but one, who was referred to by the Leader of the House, did not do that.

My final remark, and the only remark that I can think of, in relation to William McKay, and for his wife too, is that

"He nothing common did or mean
Upon that memorable scene".

The House of Commons will long remember him, even in his retirement.

5.46 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I want to refer briefly to one aspect of Sir William's work that has not been mentioned. I speak on behalf of the officers of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association when I say that his contribution to our activities has been beyond measure. It has been appreciated throughout the Commonwealth.

It is fitting that Sir William should be going to a professorial career from his chair in front of your Chair, Mr. Speaker, because over the years he has given the most wonderful guidance, tutelage and advice to a succession of Clerks from around the Commonwealth, and he has made a not insignificant contribution to legislatures around that unique international institution. He will, therefore, be missed and appreciated for what he has done not only in this House, but in many far flung parts of what used to be the empire and is now the great Commonwealth of Nations; the name of William McKay will be honoured there, and we should honour him for that.

Mr. Speaker: Before I put the Question, I should like to add my own tribute to Bill McKay. As my principal adviser on procedure and privilege he has consistently offered me wise counsel, tempering his technical advice with good humour and common sense. For that I owe him a great personal debt. As chief executive of the House of Commons service, he has done much to enhance the efficiency with which we are all supported. I know that after 41 years of service to the House, Bill and his wife Margaret will take into retirement the thanks and best wish of all Members past and present.

Question put and agreed to.

European Affairs

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

5.48 pm

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Danish presidency will host the European Council in Copenhagen tomorrow. It is due to run on to Friday, but I have already warned my colleagues that it could be a five-shirt summit. Today the House has its customary opportunity to debate the Government's priorities for this summit.

I hope that the EU leaders will agree at Copenhagen to issue a formal invitation to the 10 most advanced candidate countries to join the union in 2004. These are: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Their accession has been a long-standing aim of the Government's foreign policy. Three years ago my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister was the first EU leader to call for this the largest expansion in the union's history, for the negotiations to be completed by the end of this year and for the accession to take place formally by 2004.

Much of the summit will be taken up with complex negotiations relating to the financial arrangements in an expanded union. Understandably, all member states and the candidate countries are looking for the most favourable terms. But I am confident that each country will keep an eye on the main prize—the unification of Europe and their place within it. The alternative—a failure of nerve to take the tough decisions necessary for enlargement—would be unforgivable. We would not just be denying future generations access to the economic benefits created by the world's largest trading bloc, but creating the conditions for future instability and even conflict in Europe.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the current round of EU enlargement. I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who said that we will see few more significant events in our lifetimes. For what we are contemplating is nothing less than a new Europe—a unified political and economic entity that is larger than the United States of America and Japan combined. For the peoples of the countries that we hope will come into Europe, accession will mark the end of an epic journey. For almost 50 years, Malta and Cyprus apart, they were subjugated by a system whose raison d'être was to crush the human spirit and frustrate the natural human aspirations of freedom and prosperity.

The fall of the Berlin wall not only demonstrated the bankruptcy of the Soviet approach, but showed that an all-encompassing ideology and authoritarian state control were no match for the determination of millions of Europeans to rejoin a community of values that has inspired the world since the enlightenment. The fall of the iron curtain acted as a catalyst for an initial burst of wealth creation in many parts of the continent, but the gruelling process of political and economic reform has also created some disillusionment, especially among those who expected instant transition to western levels of prosperity. Nevertheless, EU enlargement and membership enjoy high public support in all the accession countries, but there can be no further delay, and developments in recent months suggest that Europe is taking that message to heart. Two months ago, the people of Ireland endorsed the Nice treaty, which is crucial to an efficient accession process. At the Brussels European Council meeting in October, EU leaders agreed the broad framework of a new budgetary settlement for the new, expanded Europe.

A Europe united by a common attachment to the ideals of good governance and based on democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law advances the causes of stability throughout the continent. It also acts as a bulwark against the forces of dictatorship, ethnic division and the atavistic national rivalries that have scarred the continent in the recent as well as the more distant past.

Many of us in the House are of the immediate post-war generation. For us, Europe was divided not only to the east by the iron curtain, but to the south, with dictatorships in Portugal, Spain and Greece. It was the European Union that helped to put those nations, each with its own troubled history, irreversibly on to the path of democracy and human rights. Today, the prospect of European Union accession is acting as a stimulus for reform in the group of 10 candidate countries, and in Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. In the Balkans, the long-term prospect of European Union entry is driving economic and political reform. Democratic, market-oriented government based on the rule of law is becoming the norm in a region that still bears the scars of dictatorship and authoritarian rule.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): I am not personally opposed to enlargement, but would the Secretary of State care to comment on the views of the Secretary of State for Wales, who I believe is the Government spokesperson on enlargement? He said:

"Monetary union is . . . probably incompatible with enlargement."—[*Official Report*, 1 March 1995; Vol. 255, c. 1093.]

Mr. Straw: Before I could comment in more detail, I would, as the Speaker says when he tells us that he is putting the Queen's Speech in the Vote Office, need to send out for the full text in the interests of greater accuracy. Meanwhile, however, I refer my hon. Friend to the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 27 October 1997. *[Interruption.]* I know it almost by heart.

Enlargement is not just a matter of historical obligation. *[Interruption.]* I ask the Whip to bear in mind his obligation to his bank balance—we give him a cheque and he stays silent. *[Interruption.]* My Whip is always helpful and I am helpful to him.

Enlargement is also matter of enlightened national self-interest. Britain needs more partners if we are to tackle the problems that do not respect borders, such as illegal immigration, environmental degradation and cross-border crime. We need stronger links with our European trading partners if the single market is to realise its full potential. The impact of enlargement on Britain's economy is potentially enormous. Recent studies estimate that it could increase national GDP for the UK by £1.75 billion a year and create up to 300,000 jobs throughout the European Union.

Angus Robertson (Moray): As a strong supporter of the European Union and enlargement, I am finding it very difficult to explain to my constituents and people throughout the rest of Scotland who are facing the prospect of massive closure in one of our most important industries why the fishing crisis is not on the agenda of the Copenhagen summit. The Foreign Secretary may not be aware of this point, but I have with me a letter from the Danish Prime Minister saying that the Prestige disaster is to be discussed at the meeting. That is important for the people of Spain, but the fishing crisis is a man-made disaster and why are the UK Government not pressing for it to be on the summit agenda?

Mr. Straw: Of course, we understand the great concern of fishermen in fishing communities throughout the United Kingdom and not least in Scotland. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who speaks on fishing matters and is one of Europe's great experts in that regard, are extremely concerned to secure a fair deal that respects the needs of fishermen in the United Kingdom and, above all, ensures their long-term livelihood by further conserving fish stocks.

Fishing is not on the agenda of the European Council because it is on that of the Fisheries Council, which meets next week. That is a better forum in which the United Kingdom can settle the matter, as it can be dealt with there by qualified majority voting. The Prestige is a new issue that relates to new policy and we discussed it in the General Affairs and External Relations Council, which I attended on Monday and Tuesday. We are supporting the proposals being made by the Spanish Government about accelerating the phasing out of the single-hulled oil tankers that have caused such devastation to the northern coast of Spain and the south-west coast of France and could cause devastation here.

Alongside the enlargement process, the Convention on the Future of Europe is holding its deliberations. A key issue in the Convention is how Europe should operate and what its guiding political principles should be. Enlargement supports Britain's approach in that respect, as the 10 new member states share Britain's vision of the Union's future: a Europe of sovereign nations proud of their distinct identities, but co-operating together for the mutual good.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): My right hon. Friend mentioned the candidate countries and the Convention on the Future of Europe. One of the issues that greatly exercises the candidate countries is what role they will play when the Convention draws its conclusions, after which there will be an intergovernmental conference. They wonder what the term "playing a full role" will mean. If that issue is discussed, what view will he take?

Mr. Straw: I cannot give my hon. Friend—

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I bet you can't.

Mr. Straw: Excuse me.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman is looking for equal behaviour from the Whips of both Front Benches.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): My hon. Friend is not paid.

Mr. Straw: Of course he is not; he does not deserve it. At least sedentary interventions from Labour Whips are of the quality that one would expect for the money that they receive.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) asked me a question. I hope that an unpaid Whip will not interrupt me again. I cannot give my hon. Friend a comprehensive reply because the matter has not yet been decided in the EU. We discussed it yesterday in the General Affairs and External Relations Council when we considered whether the IGC should take place in 2003 or 2004. We took account of the conclusions of Nice and Laeken that the accession countries should be involved. Indeed, they must be involved, because their future as much as that of existing members will be at stake.

From any perspective, the case for enlargement is overwhelming, but the process is not without pitfalls. In particular, there is a risk that the accession of the 10 will simply establish a new economic dividing line across the continent. Some stark figures underline that. The new 10 will add 23 per cent. to the landmass of the European Union, 20 per cent. to its population but only 4 per cent. to its GDP.

At Copenhagen, EU leaders will have an opportunity to deal with some of those anxieties. Our objective will be advancing the candidatures of Bulgaria and Romania. Both countries have some way to go towards satisfying the criteria for membership but the Union should acknowledge the political and economic reforms that both countries have adopted in the past 12 years. We expect the Copenhagen summit to reiterate strongly the Union's support for both countries' objective of accession by 2007. We agreed to that at the previous summit in Brussels at the end of October.

I want to consider Turkey's application for membership. Britain has long championed Turkey's membership of the EU. Last week, I echoed the call of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister for a "firm date" to be set for negotiations with the Turkish Government. I reinforced that commitment during a visit to Ankara last week. It was my third visit to Turkey as Foreign Secretary.

Turkish membership of the EU is a matter of obligation to previous EU decisions and our history. Turkey must be treated the same as any other candidate country. Three years ago, at the Helsinki summit, all Heads of State and Government said:

> "Turkey is a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to other candidate states."

Since then, Turkey has made significant progress against the so-called Copenhagen criteria for EU membership. Improvements have occurred in its

[Mr. Straw]

approach to human rights and the application of the rule of law. For example, it has abolished the death penalty. It also supports a market economy. If the principal definition of a functioning democracy is that it allows peaceful change of Government, Turkey more than passes the test. We have a large stake in the success of the new Government's national vision as a model, democratic, Muslim country that is coping with the challenges of globalisation in a way that marks it out for EU membership.

That befits a country that has long been linked with the United Kingdom by the bonds of military alliance, and already plays a key role in other European institutions and on the world stage. That role includes peacekeeping in Afghanistan and the Balkans, hosting Operation Northern Watch over Iraq and being a crucial ally in our battle against drugs and people smugglers, and in the war against terrorism.

Irrespective of the Union's outstanding obligations, Turkish membership should be a major strategic goal. Europe needs a western-looking Turkey—a secular Muslim nation joining us in the family of European democracies. That is a goal for which it is worth striving in any circumstances, but especially now.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Was anything said about the provision of air force bases in Turkey in relation to Iraq, which my right hon. Friend mentioned?

Mr. Straw: I am sorry, but I did not quite hear the question, which my hon. Friend may want to repeat. However, as he knows, there is a major Turkish air force base in Incilik. Both United States and United Kingdom forces use it by agreement, which is renewed at least twice a year, with the Turkish Government.

Mr. Dalyell: Are the Turks happy about the uses to which it might be put?

Mr. Straw: They are happy about the uses to which it is put; it cannot be used unless they are happy. Future uses outside the existing agreement are a matter for the Turkish Government.

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I welcome my right hon. Friend's comments about Turkey, which is making a strong case for getting a date for accession at Copenhagen. However, one of the Helsinki criteria was progress on Cyprus. In the light of the Annan plan, which was published a couple of weeks ago, does my right hon. Friend accept that the case for Turkey would be greatly strengthened if agreement on a settlement in Cyprus was reached? Does he also agree that to achieve that, Turkey must put pressure on Mr. Denktash to come to the negotiating table and do a deal with Mr. Klerides?

Mr. Straw: I was about to consider Cyprus. Although the issue is obviously linked to Turkey, it is a separate matter. The key parties to a resolution of the Cyprus conflict are separate from the Governments of Greece or Turkey.

I say to those who question Turkey's right to a European future that it has been a loyal European ally in NATO for half a century, making a vital contribution to the defence of the continent throughout the cold war. Turkey therefore deserves a great share of the credit for bringing down the iron curtain and making possible EU enlargement to the east.

The overwhelming majority of Turkey's peoples are Muslim. It has political parties that celebrate that, just as western Europe has equivalent Christian parties, but it is a secular state and accepts our concept of liberal democratic values. Its accession would be hugely important to the stability of not only Europe but the entire world. The fitting response from the Union at Copenhagen would be a positive welcome for a firm date for the beginning of accession negotiations, subject to the Copenhagen criteria. The Turkish Government accept that.

Let us consider Cyprus. Our objective is that a date for Turkey's accession should be agreed at Copenhagen as part of a package. The other elements will be ironing out some of the outstanding difficulties on European defence and finding a solution that allows the EU to admit a reunited Cyprus.

The Helsinki criteria made it clear that, if necessary, the EU should be ready to admit a divided Cyprus—that is, a Greek Cyprus—if a comprehensive agreement for a unified Cyprus could not be reached. We were party to that agreement and we stand by it. However, everybody agreed that it would be far preferable to have a united Cyprus joining the EU. The point was reiterated in the General Affairs and External Relations Council a few weeks ago. If that does not happen, the EU will have to deal with the issues that underlie the conflict.

The Cyprus problem has existed for too long. For the past half century, relations between Cyprus, Greece and Turkey have been characterised by tensions and strife. We have a great chance to change that, cement the process of rapprochement between Greece and Turkey that began in 1999, and, as envisaged by the United Nations Secretary-General, welcome a new Cyprus to the EU.

On 11 November, Kofi Annan published a comprehensive settlement proposal for Cyprus to end the years of separation on the island. It is both balanced and fair, and it has our strong support. Too many openings have been missed in the past. The parties should not allow the current opportunity to slip by, whatever the difficulties. I therefore warmly welcome the Secretary-General's efforts.

A range of other issues will be discussed at Copenhagen. They include the middle east and Iraq.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I apologise to my right hon. Friend for waiting until he had completed his remarks on Cyprus before intervening. To take up the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), there is some anxiety that Turkey will delay a solution to the island's problems until it is ready to accede to the EU. I do not know whether my right hon. Friend is aware of those anxieties. He commented extensively on Turkey's progress on other matters that concerned the EU; will he say whether Turkey has given him any reassurances on ending the division in Cyprus?

Mr. Straw: The best thing that I can do is to praise the constructive efforts that, to my certain knowledge, are being made in respect of Cyprus by both the Greek and

Turkish Governments. In the past few years, there has been a sea change in relations between Greece and Turkey—a dramatic change, for those who know the causes of the conflict. These days, it is the Government of Greece who are in the vanguard, pushing for an early and a firm date for Turkey's accession to the European Union. Of course there are some deep historical divisions that must be resolved, and both sides must take account of their own public opinions. However, in respect of Turkey's accession and of seeking unity on the divided island of Cyprus, both the Greek Government and the new Turkish Government have shown considerable statesmanship. I hope—I cannot be certain because it is fraught with difficulties—that that will pay off. I hope, too, that the diaspora communities of Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots in this country will recognise the huge importance for their relatives and friends in that divided island of ending the very long-standing conflict.

The three-monthly meetings of the European Council are the most important events in the EU calendar. The accession of 10 new members, which we hope will be agreed, will represent a profound change for the European Union; so will further work on Romania and Bulgaria. As I have already made clear, we want the Copenhagen Council to chart the course of Turkey's future accession to the European Union. Above all, reuniting Europe will be the greatest achievement of the current European generation. I hope that a further chapter in making Europe one continent will be opened at Copenhagen this weekend.

6.11 pm

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): Walking home on Monday night, I bumped into a senior Labour politician—a keen European. I remarked how cold it was and he looked at me and said, "European weather." I decided that I had heard it all: an instinctive integrationism whereby even the weather is now European—despite the fact that the current weather may be known to northern Europe but is hardly known to the Mediterranean. There is no European weather any more than there is European foreign policy or European defence policy. Europe cannot be forced into conformity, yet that is precisely what the Government, often by stealth and very gradually, seek to do.

I listened to the Foreign Secretary's speech with some interest and, I have to say, with some enjoyment. I noticed that, unlike the Secretary of State for Wales, who has decided that the title of a lecture that I gave last year, "A partnership of sovereign nations", is now Labour policy, we heard very little from the Foreign Secretary about the partnership of nation states. The Foreign Secretary's Government and his party are instinctive integrationists. He made that clear tonight when he referred to the Europe that he was looking for as a "unified political and economic Europe". That may be his view, but I am glad that he stated it tonight, because I believe that that is the Government's position, rather than that set out by the Secretary of State for Wales.

We see that that is so from the Government's actions and words. They signed, to this country's cost, the social chapter. At Nice, they gave away the veto on 31 articles, and now they have only five areas in which they wish to keep the veto. We saw the Prime Minister's instinctive integrationism when he spoke in Cardiff of a unified European foreign policy, of "communitising"—a terrible word, but it was in his speech—most of the justice and home affairs pillar; of a Europe without a fixed limit; and, in his words, of establishing Europe as "a superpower, if not a superstate".

Despite what they say, the Government seek political unity, perhaps not as fiercely as Romano Prodi, but just as doggedly. After Cardiff and last week's debate on the Convention, the extent and nature of the changes in the EU that the Government seek are now becoming clear. We have also had Mr. Giscard d'Estaing's draft treaty and Mr. Prodi's proposals. Any new treaty is likely to represent a step change in the EU's structure, and I doubt whether anybody in the Chamber would deny that.

Angus Robertson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I shall give way in a moment.

The new structure will be more centralist and less democratic, and will mean a further loss of sovereignty from nation states. All those changes will last long beyond the life of this Government. I believe that this is a constitutional change so great that the assent of the British people must be sought, and that if it is sought it will not be given.

I therefore call on the Government to assure the House and the country tonight that there will be a referendum on the draft treaty produced by the Convention. If the Government believe in democracy, the new treaty—either in draft or in actuality—should be put before the country before the forthcoming intergovernmental conference or, at the very least, before ratification.

Angus Robertson: Let me say at the outset that I would be the last person to defend the Government's policy, but would the right hon. Gentleman accuse the acceding countries of central and eastern Europe—for example, Lithuania, which has fought so long for its independence—of selling out to Brussels and getting rid of their independence when they become full members of the EU?

Mr. Ancram: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman was here for last week's debate; otherwise, he would have heard me say that many of the accession countries have complained to me about what Brussels has demanded of them in the negotiations. They have told me that they did not get themselves out from under the centralised bureaucracy of the Soviet Union merely to find themselves under another form of centralisation.

Mr. Straw: The right hon. Gentleman has just committed himself to a referendum on the treaty. I am trying to remember whether he voted against the referendum on Maastricht.

Mr. Ancram: What I am saying to the right hon. Gentleman—[HON. MEMBERS: "Answer the question."] This is very important. We said before the last election that a major transfer of sovereignty of the sort that we

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understand is likely under this treaty and a move away from intergovernmentalism should require the assent of the British people.

Mr. Straw *rose—*

Mr. Ancram: Will the right hon. Gentleman give me time to respond?

If the treaty is to be ratified before the next election, a referendum should be held, and I ask the Foreign Secretary to assure the House that one will be.

Mr. Straw: The question that I asked the right hon. Gentleman can be answered with a yes or no: am I right in thinking that he voted against a referendum on Maastricht?

Mr. Ancram: The Secretary of State might remember that I was out of the House at the time of the treaty.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): How convenient to be out of the House at the time.

Is it still Conservative policy to hold a referendum on the Nice treaty? If so, would it be held before or after the referendum that the right hon. Gentleman proposes on the Convention? It certainly was the policy when he spoke for the Opposition on these matters.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman will remember that we called for a referendum on Amsterdam. He asks me about Nice, but Nice has been acceded to. I am talking about a treaty that has not yet been signed or agreed—a treaty that will make a major transfer of sovereignty from the nation states to the centralised institutions of Europe. In those circumstances, there should be a referendum before any decision is taken.

Mr. Straw: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman wants to correct the record. My memory could be playing tricks on me, but my recollection is that the Maastricht vote took place after the 1992 election. "Dod's Parliamentary Companion" shows that the right hon. Gentleman was in the House and that he was an Under-Secretary and a Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office between 1994 and 1997. Thus, he was in the House. He knows the answer and there is no point in his being coy. He talks about frankness with the British public. Will he answer yes or no to my question about whether he voted against the Maastricht referendum?

Mr. Ancram: I voted for the Maastricht Bill, because I was here then, but I do not recall a vote on a referendum. If there was—

Keith Vaz: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can confirm that there was such a vote, because the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs asked me to come back from my honeymoon to vote. I can confirm that that is the case; my wife still remembers it.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Regardless of those circumstances, I have to say that that is a point for debate, not a point of order.

Keith Vaz: Not for my wife, it isn't.

Mr. Ancram: To avoid getting into the more intimate details of the honeymoon of the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), I will check the record; if I did vote as has been suggested, I will certainly come to the House and admit that I was wrong. If I did so, may I say that, in the light of what is happening now, I regret that we were unable to seek the assent of the British people? I think it right that we should do so—

Ms Stuart: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I am going to move on now, because I am conscious of the time.

This is a particularly opportune time for the House to debate European affairs more generally than was possible in last week's debate. It is good to see the hon. Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart) in her seat once again, as it is to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). They represent us on the Convention and were able to enlighten us in last week's debate on the direction in which Europe is moving.

Ms Stuart: This is a pertinent question, because quite a number of people on the Convention are asking for a Europe-wide referendum on the constitution. If there were a call for a referendum from Brussels, would the right hon. Gentleman support it?

Mr. Ancram: My concern is that the sovereignty of this country should not be sold out without the consent of the British people. If the constitution likely to emerge from the Convention were to propose such a sell-out—last week's debate suggested that it will—the House should not ratify it without the democratic consent of the British people. That is a very simple principle—and, I believe, a correct one—that will be supported by many people in this country.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I am going to move on, now. I have made our position on a referendum clear, and that is the position from which we will move forward.

The European Council meeting at Copenhagen will be of particular importance, as the Foreign Secretary said. We hope that four matters will be successfully taken forward from it. We look forward to the conclusion of negotiations on enlargement; we hope to hear something about reforming the common agricultural policy, whether or not the issue is formally on the agenda; we expect progress to be made on Turkey's path to EU membership; and we look forward to an acceptable resolution of the problems in Cyprus.

We support Turkey's membership of the European Union, but it raises an old question: what is Europe, and where does it end? The time has come for a wide debate, both in this country and across Europe. At the moment, we are talking about Turkey, but in the future we may also be talking about Ukraine or Belarus. We need to explore where we envisage the European Union ending and what we believe constitutes Europe. I believe that Turkey belongs in Europe. Its geography may be ambiguous, but its values are becoming increasingly democratic. Its membership will allow the European Union to show the Muslim world that it does not reject it as alien, that democracy and Islam are compatible, and that a country can be both European and Muslim. The Foreign Secretary was also suggesting that, and I believe that this would be a useful gain.

Britain and its partners in the European Union would do well to set a date at Copenhagen for the commencement of negotiations on Turkey's membership of the EU. It is important to welcome Turkey into the EU because it will help to underpin a stable settlement in Cyprus. Kofi Annan's proposals form a sound basis for a settlement that is fair to both communities, and I am pleased that the new Turkish Government's response has been encouraging, although the response of the Turkish Cypriot Government has been less so.

The island's division is one of Europe's unhealed wounds, and the impetus of EU enlargement and the United Nations plan give us the best chance in a generation to heal it. Having been involved in attempts at conciliation in the past, however, I would say to the Foreign Secretary that, in reaching an agreement, it will be important not to leave behind too many unresolved problems that could surface later to undermine a settlement. I hope that the Foreign Secretary would agree that progress on Cyprus could be faster if the Turkish Government were given to understand that Turkey would progress faster to EU membership if the Cyprus problem were solved. It would be a tragedy if this unique opportunity to unite the island were missed.

Last month also saw the expansion of NATO. It is a great tribute to the harmonious relations that exist between the United States, western Europe and Russia that we have been able to welcome Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria into the north Atlantic alliance. That showed that making Russia a co-operative ally—as we have done over the last few months—in both EU and NATO enlargement has been helpful. The Berlin wall was not torn down only for another wall to be set up further east. At the same time, however, we must understand the difficult relationship that some of Russia's neighbours have, and may continue to have, with her.

That is why it is vital that we get right the solution to the problem of Kaliningrad. The only way to guarantee that it will not become a permanent source of tension is to reach a fair settlement in which neither Russia nor Lithuania feels that its sovereignty has been compromised. Much progress has been made on this issue, but I hope that the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, as relatively disinterested parties, will do their best in Copenhagen to ensure that a lasting settlement is achieved.

The 10 countries due to join the EU in 2004 are looking, above all, for two things from EU membership—prosperity and stability—but they will get them only in a European Union that is working to achieve them. The Lisbon process set out fine objectives, but in too many ways the EU has failed to deliver. The liberalisation of the energy market has been delayed, a single market in financial services is bogged down, and very little progress has been made in cutting youth unemployment. With the eurozone's main economy, Germany, in danger of recession, there must be more determination to move forward on the economic agenda. More red tape on business and more social directives only keep European economies stagnant. The deputy director general of the Confederation of British Industry told the *Financial Times* that, since Lisbon,

"we have seen a raft of inappropriate measures that have damaged British business and the reputation of the EU".

It is telling that, of the CBI's 10 most unpopular regulations, seven are EU directives. We must address that problem. In conversations that I have had with people around Europe, I have found that many who may fundamentally disagree with me about the future shape of Europe are as concerned as I am about the nature of some of the directives that are being issued.

A good example is the atypical workers directive, and the CBI has predicted that it may cost 160,000 British jobs alone. The directive is a fine example of how we have failed to fight our corner successfully in Europe, and have let down our partners by failing to win the arguments on economic liberalisation. The directive is a classic piece of Brussels bureaucracy and Labour MEPs supported it against the Government's wishes, so far as we can discern those wishes. The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions went to Strasbourg to plead with the European Parliament's Social Affairs Committee to support the amendments that our MEPs had proposed. His own MEPs avoided him like the plague and not only went on to vote against his wishes but led the whole Party of European Socialists to do the same. The British representation in Brussels even refused to advise British MEPs how to vote. It was a complete shambles. I have to say that, rather typically, the Liberal Democrats were, as we might expect, split. Our MEPs voted to protect British jobs. There is still a chance to correct the directive, and I hope that the Government and their allies in the European Union will take the opportunity to do so.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): It is seems strange, to say the least, that the right hon. Gentleman should complain about the non-completion of the single market in financial services when his own Conservative Government blocked many of the directives, more than five years ago, and when the City and the CBI are against many of the directives coming from Europe.

Mr. Ancram: We supported the outcome of the Lisbon summit and the Lisbon principles, and our MEPs have been pressing hard in the European Parliament for their implementation ever since.

Everyone wants enlargement to be a success. Most previous enlargements have been successful—we need only look at the economies of Spain and Portugal and compare them with how they were 20 years ago to see that. Many people have rightly pointed out that the

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number of these countries' nationals working in other European countries dropped after enlargement. That is an encouraging example, but there is also the warning of east Germany. The old East Germany has struggled since it united with West Germany and thus acceded to the EU, and its population has fallen. Among the reasons for it struggling is the weight of social regulation and rigid employment practices to which it has been subjected. Enlargement will succeed only if the EU moves to become less rigid and if it encourages flexible employment practices. More directives such as that on temporary workers to which I referred do nothing to help either the existing or the new members to build wealth and jobs.

In particular, I want to ask the Foreign Secretary about an announcement that he made yesterday on the free movement of workers. Why does he think it suitable for Britain not to have the transitional arrangements with the enlargement countries? Germany has secured the full seven-year transitional arrangements and every other major European economy has such arrangements in place. Why have we, in what is an overcrowded island, decided not to give those arrangements effect?

The Foreign Secretary has mentioned independent studies that justify the Government's position. *[Interruption.]* I hope that we find an opportunity during the debate to hear from the Minister for Europe, who spends more time talking from a sedentary position than from the Dispatch Box, some explanation of the Government's position.

Europe is also tied down by the failure to reform the common agricultural policy. There was a lot to be said for the CAP 40 years ago; now there is little. It has become to the EU what the Old Man of the Sea was to Sinbad—a parasitical burden that cannot be removed. The financial demands that enlargement has placed on the EU make the CAP unsustainable its current form, yet the Government have—

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I think that I gave way on that point last week, but if this is a different one I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman. I suspect that it is the same.

Mr. Bryant: The right hon. Gentleman is preaching to the converted in this Chamber. Is not the point on the CAP that he needs to persuade his colleagues in the Christian Democrat parties, if the Conservatives are still part of the Christian Democrat group in Europe, if we are to win on the issue?

Mr. Ancram: I am amazed by such an intervention from a Member representing a party that is in government and which claims that it is at the heart of Europe and that it will influence how Europe moves forward. Now I am being told that the future of CAP reform depends on my conversations with the German CDU. We are looking to the Government to produce answers. In Brussels the other day, France and Germany put together a scheme behind the backs of the British, but when the Prime Minister visited the House the following week he told us that he welcomed that scheme. We have heard since that the Government are doing their best to try to unravel it because it is so damaging. It is for the Government to show that they can go to summits and get active reform in place on matters such as the CAP before they begin to undermine the enlargement process.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Does the right hon. Gentleman not recognise that there is such a thing as a mid-term review of the CAP, which has been strongly argued for by the Government and is still very much on the table and the subject of debate?

Mr. Ancram: We know that the money has been set until 2013. That is what the agreement is about and that is what has been delivered from Brussels. We know also that, whatever happens, it will be difficult for each of the 25 states to receive the same money that currently goes to each of the 15 without enormous tensions and enormous rows in the enlarged EU. That is the reality, but it is what the Government have allowed to occur. We look to them to begin to unravel it before it begins to damage enlargement.

The offer made to candidate countries is seen by them as unsatisfactory. If it is implemented, their electorates will naturally ask why they should pay the club's full dues but receive only part of the benefit. The Brussels offer endangers successful and sustainable enlargement. The opinion polls in Poland are worrying. Many politicians in the accession countries are naturally concerned that their electorates will reject EU membership unless a better deal is offered.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I have given way a lot, so I shall make progress.

Why, therefore, have the Government apparently failed to support the Danish compromise package that has been put forward for the summit? What will be their position on the Danish package at the Copenhagen European Council? We heard nothing on that from the Foreign Secretary. Will the Minister at least support the Danish proposal to allow candidate countries some flexibility and allow them to top up direct payments? Far too much of the process of enlargement has been characterised by an attitude that treats the candidate countries as supplicants rather than applicants. Rigidity now may mean catastrophe later, and enlargement without Poland would be a huge blow to the enlarged EU's credibility.

In Portugal, we can see the effect of another side of the EU's rigidity. Yesterday, 1 million workers went on strike to protest against spending cuts imposed by the Commission. It was therefore heartening to see the Portuguese Prime Minister embodying the virtue of hope by telling us that we should copy them and that we would be better off in the euro. I look forward to further such lessons from him. Experience may point to a very different conclusion, however. Of course, we must sympathise with the Portuguese Prime Minister. If he had not inherited finances destroyed by the outgoing left-wing Government's profligacy, he would not be in such trouble.

By design or default, the Government are leading this country into ever tighter integration. Two years ago, the Prime Minister said in Warsaw that the EU did not need a written constitution; two weeks ago, he said that it did. We were told that the charter of fundamental rights would have no more legal weight than the *Beano*. Now we hear that its incorporation is acceptable, provided that there are certain horizontal guarantees. Before Nice, the Government had a limited list of areas in which they wanted the national veto abolished. Now the Prime Minister tells us that it should be abolished practically wholesale.

The Government's thinking on Europe's future structure is once again muddled. The Prime Minister has called for a "unified European foreign policy", but the experience of the past 18 months must show him how impossible that is to achieve. He will remember last year's Council of Ministers in Ghent and the communiqué that, in effect, had to say nothing because the countries represented there could not reach any agreement on their reaction to 11 September. For the past few months, we have seen the differing views among the British, French and German Governments as to how to deal with the threat of Iraq.

A unified foreign policy, in the end, would be either the lowest common denominator or it would try to impose on member states foreign policies that they were not prepared to accept. Nor is the Prime Minister's proposal for a unified foreign policy backed up by the means to enforce it. Some reinforcement of the high representative's powers will not achieve that. Once again, the Prime Minister is willing the end without willing the means.

On the other hand, if the EU works as a partnership of sovereign nation states, it will be able to accomplish the promotion of peace, prosperity and stability that are its proper goals. The single market needs completion, and we can look to the EU to help to maintain environmental standards in eastern Europe.

Last week, we debated the EU's structures in the context of the Convention, and I set out our views on reform of the Council and the Commission, restoring greater accountability and the role of national Parliaments, but there was a wider issue in that debate that has not been touched on today and which I believe must also be central to the Copenhagen summit: the need for Europe to re-engage with its peoples. It can do that only if it reforms and decentralises. It does not need to increase its central powers. It must have the courage to trust its peoples and to involve the national Parliaments.

As I have said before, the proposals made by the Convention's subsidiarity working group do not go far enough. National Parliaments must be able to enforce subsidiarity and proportionality. An early-warning system is not enough. We need a sense of finality—an end to what has become known as the ratchet effect. Only the elites of Brussels want ever closer union.

In summary, I believe that the EU can be made to work better. In the 21st century, it still has a vital role to play in building prosperity across Europe. We have the opportunity to enable it to do that and to build the true partnerships of sovereign nations that we wish to see. We in this country should have a vision of a Europe for the 21st century—firm in its cohesiveness, agile in its international operations and taking pride in its diversity. Such a Europe could take on the challenges that face us while leaving intact the national aspirations that will be essential if it is not to collapse under the weight of its own centralisation. That is not the Government's vision, but it is ours. I believe that it is the vision that the British people support.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed a 15-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

6.39 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am delighted with the opportunity to speak when we are on the threshold of the important summit that will take place in the next few days. I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on what he has said recently about freedom of movement for new applicant countries, and I am convinced that when Ministers, including the Prime Minister, go to Copenhagen they will do what they have always done under this Government and present a strong, dynamic case for Britain's full engagement in the European Union. I wish them well.

Let me also add my congratulations to those extended by other Members over the last few weeks to my hon. Friend the Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane), the Minister for Europe. When we worked in the Foreign Office together, I told him that he would be Minister for Europe one day, and now he is. I can think of no one better qualified, and I wish him well, specifically on the occasion of his first European summit.

The House is united in our wish to see an enlarged Europe. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) tried hard to sound radical and Eurosceptic, but it did not really come through: we know that, deep down in his heart, he supports most of what the Government are doing. He supports the fact that when British Ministers go to Europe they bat for Europe—they want to ensure that we get the best deal in Europe. And that is precisely what we have done in respect of all the other agenda items.

That is precisely what we have done on enlargement, for instance. Our country, and our Prime Minister, championed enlargement. We rightly suggested that it was essential for an enlarged Europe not just to benefit the European Union, creating the largest single market in the world, but to unite an historically divided EU. My visits to applicant countries give me the impression that that mood—enthusiasm about joining a European Union that is, in a real sense, led by the United Kingdom—has not diminished. Of course the results of opinion polls have changed in some of those countries—when I was in Poland a year ago, there was concern about the need to maintain enthusiasm there—but I think that when it comes to a referendum the Polish people, like those in all the other applicant countries, will prove strongly in favour of EU membership.

The reason for the waning of support was the fact that the negotiations were taking so long. I welcome what has happened under the last two presidencies. There has been a desire to move forward and to establish a date for entry—1 May 2004. Nevertheless, we should not gloss over the problems that will arise over the next few

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months and years. We must help the applicant countries as much as we can. It is not just a question of providing extra resources; it is a question—a very important one, I think—of this Parliament's working with parliamentarians in each applicant country so that we can build bridges and links.

When the applicants join the EU, they will have to engage in a bewildering exercise. Some of us who have attended European summits have had to do the same, of course, because the EU has its own language and sub-culture. When 10 are added to the existing 15, it is necessary to look at a reform agenda. Enlargement is surely nothing without reform, and it must be right for our country, our Prime Minister and our Foreign Secretary to be in the lead in that regard.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will tell us something of the progress that has been made on the famous Blair-Schröder letter sent earlier this year. As my hon. Friend will know, the Prime Minister of our country and the German Chancellor compiled a list of areas in which they wanted reform. During the last debate of this kind before the last European Council meeting, I asked the Foreign Secretary how many boxes had been ticked. I know that he was concentrating very much on the enlargement agenda, but it is important for us to look at those boxes. I do not object to a single one of the items presented by the leaders of Germany and the United Kingdom—I consider them all important—but we now need to benchmark them.

The right hon. Member for Devizes said that the Opposition supported the Government on Lisbon. I went to that summit, and I was here for the Prime Minister's statement. The right hon. Gentleman may say that there was support for what the Government had achieved, but not much support came from the then leader of the Opposition. We want real support for the reform agenda, not just soundbites from the right hon. Gentleman. Without genuine reform, we cannot make the progress that we need to make in engaging the British people.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned that need to engage the British people, but this Government are engaging them everywhere. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe have attended meetings all over the country in an attempt to ensure that the people understand what is happening in the EU, and to defeat the nonsense that issues from the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues, and some of the tabloid newspapers, when they undermine everything that the Government are trying to do.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): The hon. Gentleman talks of public support. Does he now regret giving all sorts of assurances, when he was Minister for Europe, that the charter of fundamental rights would not be made legally binding? Less than two years later, the Government have signalled their assent to its being legally binding: I was attending a plenary session of the Convention when that U-turn took place. Is that how to secure public support—giving assurances that are abandoned shortly afterwards?

Keith Vaz: As the right hon. Gentleman will know, and as I have just been reminded by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Edgbaston (Ms Stuart), that is not what the Government have said. They have made it clear, in the context of the charter, that we want no extension of the current laws. That is what the charter was about: it was intended to encapsulate the rights and responsibilities that currently exist. It was not about making new law, but about codifying what was already there. The right hon. Gentleman knows that very well.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman said that the Government were connected with the people on European issues. Can he perhaps imagine how connected the Government may be with people throughout the north and north-east of Scotland after this weekend, when a crucial move that may involve tens of thousands of job losses—the equivalent of more than 100,000 job losses in England—will go ahead because it will not have been discussed at the summit? It will not be discussed because the United Kingdom Government do not consider it to be of vital national interest.

Keith Vaz: I am certain that the hon. Gentleman is wrong. Of course the Government consider such issues important, and of course they are connected with the people of Scotland. Along with other Ministers over the past five years, I spent an enormous amount of time in Scotland discussing those issues. The First Minister, moreover, is a member of the European team of my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe, and attends meetings regularly to talk about such concerns.

Of course we must go on reminding people of Europe's importance. Rather than standing at the sidelines carping and attacking everything that the Government do, the right hon. Member for Devizes should do what any decent shadow Foreign Secretary would do when they are trying to fight for our agenda abroad, and support their intention.

Mr. Ancram: Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that, if the Government are trying to sell out our sovereignty, I should support them even though I fundamentally object to that?

Keith Vaz: That is precisely what I mean! What a load of rubbish. There is no question of this Government doing that. This Government support a British agenda in Europe, leading and fashioning the European debate in accordance with what we are trying to do. What an absurd suggestion that was from the shadow Foreign Secretary.

As I have said, the reform agenda is important, and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will tell us what progress has been made on the Blair-Schröder letter. Let me also express my concern about the ongoing debate on Turkey, and add that subject to the caveats of my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), along with my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love)—that the Cyprus issue should be discussed and settled. We are not supposed to refer to those who watch our proceedings, but I know that the high commissioner for Cyprus is also aware of what is going on. Of course we have to deal with the Cyprus issue but it is vital that we have a date to begin negotiations for the entry of Turkey. I think that everyone accepts that that is a long way off but it is

important for the Turkish Government and the Turkish people to know that they will be fully included in a Europe of many nation states.

I hope that we will get out of Copenhagen a date for the start of those negotiations, because, as we all know from the recent negotiations and discussions with the 10 applicants, it takes a long time to move the process forward. Commissioner Verheugen may be very busy dealing with the 10 applicants, but it is necessary for the European Commission to appoint a senior official, perhaps one of the Commissioners, to look carefully at what Turkey wishes to do and to begin that negotiation process.

I hope that that will happen at the summit because the entry of Turkey is important to an inclusive Europe. We have heard far too often the view that because Turkey happens to be a majority Muslim country, Europe does not want Turkey to join. I was glad to hear what hon. Members on both sides of the House said about Turkey's inclusion in Europe. I hope that there will be more than good words—I hope that there will be good deeds. Let us get a date out of Copenhagen.

Mr. Love: Does my hon. Friend accept that if it is not possible either at Copenhagen or next April to resolve the division of Cyprus, taking into account all relevant factors, as the Helsinki agreement has already stated, Cyprus should be allowed to accede to membership?

Keith Vaz: It is vital that Cyprus be allowed to join with the other applicant countries on 1 May 2004. The issue of Turkey also has to be addressed but that should not stop the enlargement of the European Union. It should not stop us accepting those 10 countries and enlarging with Cyprus, so I hope that that happens. I have two final points. One concerns the case of Catherine Meyer, which I raised with my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe when he spoke from the Front Bench in a different capacity. I understand that the Prime Minister has written to Chancellor Schröder about the Catherine Meyer case. I recently tabled a parliamentary question asking for details of the reply. That has not come forward yet. I know that the Minister knows Catherine Meyer, and is involved and interested in the case. It is important that we know what Chancellor Schröder has said.

It is unacceptable for the German Government and German courts to continue to act in the way in which they have. Catherine Meyer has not seen her sons for years and years. They are going to be 17 and 16. The whole of their childhood has disappeared. We are not talking about a country that does not subscribe to democratic values. We are talking about Germany, a close ally of our country. The judicial systems should be working together—not necessarily the same judicial systems. The court systems are independent but there should at least be some co-operation. There is no point in having a justice and home affairs summit meeting, and Home Office Ministers and Ministers from justice departments meeting when people are not prepared to talk to each other.

I want some progress to be made on the Catherine Meyer case. I urge the Minister, in the margins of the summit, when he meets the German Minister for Europe, and the Foreign Secretary when he meets Joschka Fischer to talk about that case, because it is a blot on the relationship between Germany and the United Kingdom. I hope that we will have some news.

I end as I started by wishing the Minister and the Government well in the negotiations at Copenhagen. We always talk about things being historic but this is a historic conference. The summit will produce for us a new and united Europe, not a federal Europe but a Europe of nation states. The Poles no more want to have a federal Europe than do people in the United Kingdom. We want not a superstate, as the right hon. Member for Devizes says, but a Europe of nation states working together for the people of Europe and for the people of the individual countries.

6.54 pm

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Last week in the Chamber, we spent a brief time concentrating on the future shape of Europe and its institutions. In this debate, properly, we have been focusing on this week's summit, where the European Union is poised to take a major step towards the historic reshaping of Europe. It is not simply the symbolic achievement of bringing eight former communist countries within the European Union but the sheer scale of the exercise. At one stroke, the union will admit more new members than in all the previous enlargements put together. As the airwaves and newspaper columns are filled this week with the haggles and disputes of last-minute negotiations, it is important that we do not lose sight of what is under way.

In the past half century of European integration, the world has changed significantly but the appeal of European Union membership has remained remarkably constant. The original six countries were brought together by common desires to end the uncertainties that had plunged Europe into war over many centuries, creating security by linking competing countries together. They sought to entrench democracy in the face of totalitarian disasters that had preceded the war in fascist Europe and arisen after it in communist Europe. They also sought to create prosperity by the creation of a common market for trade and economic development. Those themes of security, democracy and prosperity are as relevant to today's applicant countries as they were to the founding countries and many of those who have joined in the meantime.

After the collapse of the Berlin wall in 1989, Lech Walesa talked of the creation of "a common European home", which in many ways is realised by this expansion of the EU. It is a development that the Liberal Democrats welcome wholeheartedly.

We must not presume that the anticipation of membership is universally positive within all the candidate countries. The latest evidence from the Eurobarometer polling indicates a high level of support, with 61 per cent. of populations in candidate countries believing that the European Union is "a good thing", but in particular countries it is obvious that the case has yet to be won. In the so-called Laeken 10, which have the prospect of imminent accession, there is still a majority who regard it as positive, but it is only 52 per cent. on the most recent poll. In individual countries, opinions ranged from 32 per cent. in Estonia to 67 per cent. in Hungary. Much of that wariness is due to the detail attached to the accession negotiations.

[Mr. Michael Moore]

We should pay tribute to the candidate countries and latterly to the Danish presidency for the progress that has been made. When we debated the issue before the Seville summit, it looked a daunting task to get anywhere close to completion ahead of Copenhagen, but the last few days will be crucial to getting a set of agreements that can win favour in each of the applicant countries.

Attention will inevitably focus on some key areas. In particular, agriculture is a current cause of concern. The debate in Westminster Hall that I was unable to attend this morning focused on the fact that the common agricultural policy is a mess. It is costly, inefficient, and in its current form unsustainable. Farmers rightly want reform, although given the experience of previous attempts they are highly suspicious of the way in which it is being handled. Reform will undoubtedly be required but the mid-term review has been plunged into chaos and looks in danger of being fudged, and its credibility has been damaged.

The impact on the accession countries is of great concern to them. They have argued strongly about the proposals for phasing in the payments that they will be allowed to receive, not least because some of those will be back-loaded, whereas their contributions to the European Union will start almost immediately. The candidate countries are at best bemused and at worst hostile to contributing from the start to the British rebate and to French agriculture subsidies.

The crucial moment at the summit will probably relate to the island of Cyprus. The difficulty that we have there is obvious to all who have been following the debate, and Cyprus is the case in which we must be least presumptuous that accession will actually occur. Kofi Annan's November plan, updated this week, has offered real hope and a prospect of a solution to the problems experienced since the 1974 division of the island. Key players have made serious efforts to engage in the negotiations, although Mr. Denktash has made his reservations clear and there is much work still to be done. The news that the Turkish Cypriot leader must return to hospital is not good, and we must hope that he will make good progress, and that in his absence the talks in Copenhagen, too, will progress.

The Secretary-General wrote to the parties saying:

"Cyprus has a rendezous with history . . . it should not be missed".

The summit is not the final word ahead of the accession treaties being signed, but with the expected presence of the United Nations Secretary-General we must hope that, notwithstanding the illness of Mr. Denktash, progress will be made.

In all this, Turkey will of course play a key role. It is inconceivable that a solution can be found without Turkey's support. Likewise, progress on Turkey's own desire to join the European Union in future is inextricably linked to a solution to the Cyprus problem. There has been much comment and concern about the prospect of Turkish entry—not all of it confined to the European Union and Turkey.

At the previous Copenhagen summit, criteria were set out that applicant countries had to match to be eligible for membership. Stability of institutions is crucial, guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the protection of minorities. A recent European Commission report has stated that Turkey has not yet satisfied those criteria, and the Danes have also questioned Turkey's readiness to participate.

Clearly there are issues to address. Turkey must be under no illusion about its responsibilities, but it is also true that the country has made significant progress. Mr. Erdogan, the leader of the governing party, has set out encouraging objectives since the elections a few weeks ago. Although we may concur with the judgment that the country has not yet achieved the standards necessary for entry, it should be given the clear incentive of a clear future starting point for substantive discussions. Without that, the prospect of Turkey taking the EU seriously will disappear and the hope for further integration within European will be dashed. The prizes are significant—a modern democratic pluralist Turkey, and the important signals that that would send out to other Islamic states that democratic and liberal economic policies are the starting point for closer ties with the European Union. There would also be the prospect of resolving NATO's relationship with the European security and defence policy, and the issues surrounding the use of NATO assets by the EU in that respect.

Enlargement and associated issues will dominate the summit, but the opportunity of the gathering must not be lost; we must ensure that other crises are addressed. In particular, fishing must be a key priority for UK Ministers, especially the Prime Minister.

Angus Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way on that point?

Mr. Moore: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will let me make slightly more progress first.

The crisis arising from the reduction in fish stocks and Commissioner Fischler's proposals is real. The strength of feeling has been evident across the UK, not least in Scotland; a massive petition taken to the Scottish Parliament has now been sent to the Prime Minister, and many have sailed from Scotland to take part in the protest taking place at the mouth of the Tyne.

Strenuous efforts are being made to tackle the issue, and the Scottish Executive Minister, Ross Finnie, has been working closely with Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Ministers to maximise the impact of the UK's arguments on the issue. Fishermen all over the UK know that there is a serious problem to tackle, but nobody can be expected to accept the Commission's draconian proposals.

Next week's Fisheries Council will seek a solution, but the Prime Minister's involvement at the summit is still essential. In other circumstances, the French President or the German Chancellor would have no hesitation about arguing the cause on behalf of their countries, and we should expect the same for our fishermen on this occasion.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Prime Minister recently wrote about the fishermen in the *Daily Record*. Referring to Ross Finnie and the Westminster Fisheries Minister, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) he said:

"but they will also, I promise, have the full backing of both the UK Government and the Scottish Executive, right to the very top".

I do not believe that Ross Finnie, the Liberal Democrat Minister with responsibility for fisheries, will be in Copenhagen. Is the Liberal Democrats' position that the British Prime Minister should raise the issue of fishing at the Copenhagen summit?

Mr. Moore: I hope that the hon. Gentleman was listening to what I said before his intervention, which was that I do believe that the Prime Minister should raise that issue. If an equivalent issue faced another member country, it would be inconceivable for its Prime Minister not to raise it, and I hope that our Prime Minister will do what is expected of him.

The debate will, of course, be carefully watched by many, not least by the accession countries, which will see the resolution of that problem as symbolic of the nature of the organisation that they seek to join. An article in the *Financial Times* yesterday by the Prime Ministers of Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, stirringly entitled "One step away from making history", acknowledged the huge efforts made by existing and candidate countries to find solutions to the innumerable problems that have characterised the accession process so far. In taking the last few steps towards final agreements, they appealed for vision, statesmanship and pragmatism to go hand in hand. That catches the spirit of how the EU should do business, and is the right approach for the European Union leaders when they meet in Copenhagen.

7.6 pm

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): I welcome the critically positive speech by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who speaks for the Liberal Democrats, and I contrast it with the negative speech made by the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who, alas, in spite of his general geniality and good nature, cannot bring himself to say anything positive about the European Union.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Absolute rubbish.

Donald Anderson: I at least concur with that—

Mr. Spring: Had the right hon. Gentleman listened last week to the debate on the Convention on the Future of Europe, he would have heard spelled out in the greatest possible detail policies dealing specifically with our relationship with the EU in a wholly positive and constructive way.

Donald Anderson: Perhaps the right hon. Member for Devizes was so positive then that he felt that he had to be totally negative tonight.

I approach the question of enlargement, which is, of course, the main item on the agenda of the Copenhagen Council, in a spirit not of caution or anxiety but of total rejoicing. I like the word that my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary used when he said that this was not enlargement but unification. I know the countries of central Europe; I have lived for a year and a half in Hungary, and my eldest son has just married a citizen of Slovakia in Prague—and those who know these countries know that they are part of Europe. It is a uniting Europe that we see. Looking around the architecture and the culture, who can doubt that although there have been artificial divisions in the past, especially after the second world war, those divisions are now, happily, being ended?

It was only in 1989, on 8 and 9 November, that the Berlin wall fell, and only in 1993, at the Copenhagen Council, that we saw the start of the enlargement process. It is a happy 10 years that has led from that Council in 1993 to the Copenhagen Council in 2002. Enlargement has proceeded apace. It is a tremendous tribute to the Danish presidency that it has done so well over the past six months to further the aim of the enlargement—or, as I would prefer to say, the unification—of Europe. This is indeed an historic time. The year 2002 will be remembered for the security changes, with the accession to NATO at the Prague summit in November and now the 10 countries being welcomed into the unity of Europe.

I also pay tribute to a good friend of mine, Commissioner Günter Verheugen, for the way in which he has brought the ship to port. It is sad that that coincides with a time of financial stringency, when Germany, which has been so ready to be the paymaster for the European Union in the past, is facing much difficulty, and is ready to throw its weight around as it did not do in the past. None the less, there is positive change, and we should welcome it. Indeed, it will have profound effects on the nature of Europe, which I shall come to in a moment.

When we began this process in Helsinki in 1993, there seemed to be so many obstacles, some of which were in danger of proving decisive, in the way of each of those countries. Estonia, for example, had a problem with its Russian minority and its border with Russia. Lithuania had a problem with its power station, and Latvia had problems with its own Russian minority. There was the question of how we could possibly welcome in a divided Cyprus. There was deep division between the parties in Malta and the possibility of a negative outcome of the referendum. At times, Hungary had a more nationalist leadership that held perhaps irredentist views about the minority populations in Romania, and across the border in Voivodina. Poland had impossible problems with agriculture. The Czech Republic had problems with its minorities, and Slovakia suffered a setback because of Meciar. Save perhaps for Slovenia, every country had problems that at times seemed insuperable, but happily, by working through them and always seeing the broad vision, Europe has triumphed. The Copenhagen Council, on Thursday, Friday and Saturday, will be a signal date for us.

At least I agreed with the right hon. Member for Devizes when he talked about the disconnection between the elites of Europe and the people of Europe. We clearly have a long way to go in convincing our peoples about enlargement. According to the Eurobarometer surveys of candidate countries, there was no overall majority in favour of the European Union in seven of the 10 leading candidates. So far as the UK is concerned, there is a general lack of interest in enlargement; indeed, the latest Eurobarometer survey found that only 51 per cent. even knew that enlargement was taking place. It is clear that a great task needs to be undertaken in terms of public relations.

[Donald Anderson]

I turn to two key issues that affect us: Cyprus and Turkey. Cyprus is a country with which we are on the most friendly of terms. Happily, two Commonwealth countries—Cyprus and Malta—will be joining the European Union. There are valued Cypriot communities in this country, and we are a guarantor power. Now, after 1974 and so many disappointments, there seems at last to be a real prospect of a happy conjunction of favourable factors in respect of Cyprus. The Turkish Government no longer includes Mr. Ecevit, and in Mr. Erdogan they have a leader who can deliver. Two elderly gentlemen—President Clerides and Mr. Denktash—sparred for far too many years. Mr. Denktash is alas ill, but we hope that that will not delay a settlement.

A happy rapprochement has taken place between the Greek and Turkish Governments, and through the initiative of Mr. De Soto, who had such triumphs in El Salvador, we have a package that, although unacceptable to the extremists, at last provides a chance of real progress. I anticipate that absolutists on both sides will reject it, and if they do, the prospect of a united Cyprus will be set back for perhaps a generation. Those who sign the document must also recognise that there will be some in both communities who will shout "traitor!" That is part of what far-sighted politicians have to bear, but we look forward, at last, to a solution to the Cyprus problem.

Others have already mentioned that Turkey is making serious progress towards meeting at least some of the criteria established in Copenhagen in 1993. Our Foreign Affairs Committee report stated:

> "We conclude that Turkey's cultural and religious traditions will make a positive contribution to the diversity of the EU. Pursuing Turkey's candidacy evenhandedly gives an important signal that the EU is not a closed Christian club, but an open organisation which can embrace those parts of the world within its geographical compass, both Christian and Muslim . . . We recommend that the Government speak out forthrightly in defence of Turkey's EU candidacy"—

and they have done so magnificently. However, the report also states that the Government should

> "temper this encouragement with the pragmatic advice that accession is certain to be some years away".

Hopefully, that is not a rendezvous date, but an actual date—

Mr. Love: Should we also temper that judgment with the recognition that Turkey has many steps to take to meet the criteria for accession to Europe, not least in respect of democracy, the treatment of its minorities, and—perhaps most importantly in terms of sending a signal—support for a resolution of the division of Cyprus? Unless we can get those messages across, I fear that Turkey's entering into negotiations will not lead anywhere very fast.

Donald Anderson: I am absolutely confident that the Turkish leadership knows that positive moves on Cyprus will be extremely important to Turkey's candidacy. I wholly agree with my hon. Friend, in that the same Copenhagen criteria on matters such as democracy, rule of law and human rights as are applied to other candidates should be applied to Turkey—no more, and no less. Turkey could become an important model of Islamic democracy in the world. It is clear that it wishes to take the path into Europe. It has already undergone significant reforms, and we hope that implementation will follow.

I end on the issue of the new neighbours and the future expansion of our Europe. We know that, if there is to be a Europe, there has to be a non-Europe, and the danger always exists of instability at the borders. I understand that a new document is expected from the Commission in January, on our new neighbours. There are important problems not only in the south, in the countries of the Maghreb, because of the attraction of the region to the north of the Mediterranean, with their booming populations, but in those countries which have no reasonable immediate prospects—Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus—without substantial reforms. In that regard, I agree with Mr. Prodi. There have to be some new borders, and the question of where we draw the line will lead to problems. On a recent trip to Zagreb, I visited the cathedral and saw how the changes in European architecture are wholly reflected in that country; it is part of central Europe. Other Balkan countries, particularly Albania and Macedonia, prove far greater challenges.

A line will have to be drawn, and when we do so we will have to find creative solutions for those countries that are the wrong side of it. We do not know what the final outcome will be; all that we do know is that the Europe that began with the vision of de Gasperi, of Jean Monnet, and of Adenauer will not be the Europe that we end up with. It began for a certain reason, and involved relatively rich, homogenous peoples. The Europe that will emerge will be far more diverse and valuable. It will still be a model for the world, but when the new, poorer countries are admitted, it will indeed be very different in 10 or 20 years' time. The applicants therefore need to be realistic about their own chances, and we too, as Europeans, have to be realistic and expand our thinking as Europe itself expands not just geographically, but culturally. That is an enormous challenge, and the Copenhagen council will be a major step on the road to meeting it.

7.19 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): I am most grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker, for catching your eye in this important debate. It is always a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson). He has done the House great service as the longstanding Chairman of the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. I may not always agree with everything that he says, but I always listen with great care and attention, as the right hon. Gentleman has a lot to offer in foreign affairs debates.

Like the Foreign Secretary, who opened the debate, the right hon. Member for Swansea, East used the language of Europe reunited. To me, that sounds like the language of the superstate. I bow to the right hon. Gentleman's superior intellect when it comes to examining such matters, but I feel able to disagree with him from time to time.

Much has been said about enlargement in this debate, and I think that it is one of the greatest challenges facing Europe. There have been four enlargements since the

community was established by the six founding member states, but there has been nothing approaching the ambition of this project. I want briefly to touch on some of the specifics this evening.

If enlargement is to succeed, the candidate countries must be able to receive the benefits, but they will not reap the full fruits of enlargement unless businesses, and business men and women, are happy to invest their money in them. For that to happen, they must have confidence in those countries' legal systems, but the quality of the judiciary and the trustworthiness and efficiency of the criminal and civil justice systems are serious matters in some candidate countries, as reports on enlargement by the Select Committee on European Scrutiny and by the European Commission show.

If the trustworthiness of the criminal justice system in some states remains in doubt, we are exposing British businesses to serious risk of injustice, for example with the introduction of the European arrest warrant. I hope that the Minister for Europe will say what the Government are doing to help in that respect when he winds up the debate.

We must also encourage the new states to make their criminal systems of satisfactory quality. I hope that the Minister will say whether any candidate countries are causing the Government specific concern.

In addition, trustworthy and efficient civil legal systems are vital when it comes to building prosperous societies that attract investment. I understand that it is not unusual for civil law suits in Poland, for example, to take up to five years before receiving a judgment. I have heard from British investors that the weaknesses of the legal system there are a serious impediment to business. That is a challenge that must be overcome if our new partners are to enjoy the prosperity that they deserve. Inefficient legal systems effectively put property rights at risk. Helping the candidate countries reform their legal systems should be a priority for the Government.

Structural operations, or regional subsidies, are potentially of great benefit in building up these countries' economies. In particular, they can help build up the infrastructure that many of these countries badly lack. To enjoy that benefit, however, the candidate countries must be able to absorb those subsidies. As the European Scrutiny Committee's report says, some candidate countries have

"weaknesses in public administration which call into question the candidate's capacity for sound management of EU funds".

That is dangerous. Unless we can encourage reform, those countries will not receive the advantages of EU membership that they need, and taxpayers' money will be at risk. Are the Government, with our European partners, looking at ways to simplify the allocation of structural funds without damaging their integrity? Again, that should be a priority. I hope that the Minister for Europe will answer that point.

There is also the question of a proper management of funds by the Commission. It would be hypocritical of existing EU member states to insist on the new members raising their administrative game when one of the EU's central institutions has such a lamentable lack of financial self-discipline. We now have a chamber orchestra of whistleblowers, if the House will forgive the term, and the unsympathetic manner in which the Commission handles them is deeply disappointing.

It is clear that current systems of financial controls are not satisfactory. Major reforms, along the lines suggested by the sacked chief accountant, Marta Andreasen, are only now beginning to be implemented. The latest Court of Auditors' report also pointed to continuing serious weaknesses in the EU's finances. We need significant improvements urgently. For all of us, it is scandalous that taxpayers' money from all over Europe is treated so carelessly.

We have heard very little from the Government about this matter. One could almost believe that it does not seem to be of particular concern to them. I believe that it should be. Eurostat has today reported that only 31 per cent. of the British public think that EU membership is a good thing. That is unlikely to improve while the Commission seems so arrogant. It must become better at taking care of public money—taxpayers' money. Romano Prodi's grand plans for the Commission become particularly risible when the Commission fails to do properly the jobs that it already has. The Commission should learn to walk before it even thinks of beginning to run.

If we can deal with these matters, we can vastly increase the chance of enlargement being a real success. Enlargement, and this summit, must not be about fine words alone, but about hard work on the practicalities of making the EU work. The cost of failure is too high a price for any members of the EU to pay.

7.26 pm

Mr. Andrew Dismore (Hendon): I begin by declaring an interest. In October, I visited Cyprus as a guest of the House of Representatives there, and of the Morphou municipality. I shall refer to Cyprus in a little while. Also, I visited Greece last week, where I met various Ministers, academics and journalists. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) commented on the quality of European weather, but I took London weather with me on my visit to Athens. It poured with rain most of the time.

I undertook the visit because I wanted to look at some of the issues related to the presidency of the EU, which Greece takes over in January. The debate has focused on the proceedings in Copenhagen in a few days, but it is important for us to look beyond that, and to examine the forthcoming presidency. I shall set out some of the key priorities that will emerge—one of which is, of course, enlargement. The Greek presidency will see to the finalisation of enlargement and the signing of the treaty, and I shall say more about that in a little while.

Asylum and immigration are extremely important matters, and so is the Lisbon agenda, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) referred. The Greeks are concerned that their presidency may be overshadowed by security issues, in particular the confrontation with Iraq. However, Greece has made real progress on security matters, especially with the break up of the November 17 terrorist group. I am also pleased to say that the bilateral aspects of Greece's concerns about European security and defence policy, a major source of disagreement between our countries earlier in the year, have now been resolved. Greece now regards the matter as being between the EU and Turkey, rather than between Great Britain and Greece.

The Greek presidency will want a reaffirmation of the Lisbon process, and it is especially keen to look at matters related to social inclusion. Special attention will

[Mr. Andrew Dismore]

be paid to the applicability of the Lisbon process to the new applicant states, assuming that enlargement goes ahead. It is important that we recognise that Lisbon sets a challenging agenda for states that already belong to the EU, and for those set to join in just over a year's time.

Immigration and asylum are also key issues for the Greek people. Over the past 10 years, Greece's population has increased by 8 per cent., or almost a million people, as a result of immigration. That immigration comes primarily from the Balkans and Albania, and from north Africa.

Greece is very concerned about the policing of the Aegean and the Mediterranean, and considers its national border to the south and to the east to be the EU's front-line frontier in the battle against illegal immigration. We must bear it in mind that the total length of Greece's coastline is the same as that of the continent of Africa. It is therefore not surprising that the Greeks should have great difficulty in trying to prevent illegal migration into the EU through Greece. It is fair for Greece to hope for help from the EU in developing the policies necessary to police that EU frontier. It is important that we recognise that it is better to stop illegal migration into the EU in the Mediterranean than in the English channel. Greece needs help and I think that it will be looking for financial support from the European Union, as might Italy and Spain, which face similar problems.

On the social issues arising out of immigration and asylum, I was pleased that the Greek Government are looking at the regulation of legal migration. The written statement issued yesterday on the free movement of people to the UK from the accession countries is an important contribution. There is an important debate to be had on this issue, and I hope that we will be able to play a constructive role with Greece in dealing with a problem that affects all European Union countries.

On enlargement, Greece is keen to press the road map forward for Bulgaria and Romania, as Bulgaria is a border state with Greece and Romania is not very far away. It would also like to see progress towards integration of the western Balkans into Europe. Obviously it will be a long time before there is sufficient stability for them to become members of the European Union, but progress in that direction is welcome.

As many speakers have said tonight, the key enlargement issues for this European summit are Turkey and Cyprus. Those who have followed Greek politics for as long as I have welcome the rapprochement in recent years between Turkey and Greece. Several years ago, they were not far short of going to war over a rather obscure rock in the eastern Aegean but since the recent earthquakes that struck both countries so tragically, there has been a much more friendly relationship, piloted in particular by Foreign Minister George Papandreou and the then Turkish Foreign Minister, Mr. Cern. The very positive attitude that I saw in Greece to the new Government of Mr. Erdogan was extremely welcome. Some commentators described it as being one of reserved optimism, but certainly everyone whom I talked to had a rather more welcoming approach. The early statements issued by Mr. Erdogan were very positive, even though their content may have been reined back under the influence of the Turkish military. They are, however, a clear sign of the good intent of the new Government in Turkey and are welcomed by the Greek Government.

Greece also recognises Turkey's importance for regional security, because bringing Turkey into the European Union would strengthen regional security in south-east Europe. Greece sees Turkey as a key partner in the development of south-east Europe and the Balkans. People often talk about Greece as the key state, the entry state, with Thessaloniki as the key port for entry to the Balkans, but the Greek view is much wider than that. It knows that it needs key partners such as Turkey to achieve proper development in that important region. Like us, Greece is keen for a date to be set for the start of accession negotiations for Turkey.

When considering Turkey in the European Union, one must inevitably take a reality check against the Helsinki process. With the new AK party Government in Turkey, there has been a welcome break with the past system of musical chairs that has bedevilled Turkish politics for so long. The same faces and personalities have been changing seats and changing places, in and out of Government for decades. There was really very little change and, as others have said, the Government were pretty detached from the population at large and operated as a political elite.

The new Turkish Government have learned the lessons of previous parties which were portrayed as Muslim. The AK party sees its role as evolutionary not revolutionary. In fact, if one were to describe the party to itself as Muslim, it would take exception. Its members call themselves Conservative Democrats. However, looking at their programme, they are probably more like social democrats than conservative democrats. I was interested to see that Mustafa Akinci, the leader of the Social Democrat party in northern Cyprus, believes that he is far closer to the platform of the AK party than to Mr. Baikal, the leader of the official Turkish Social Democrat party.

The new Turkish Government have a clear programme on human rights and constitutional reform. It is perhaps not surprising, when one sees that the leader of the AK party, Mr. Erdogan, is banned from sitting in Parliament because of statements that he made several years ago. There have been important reforms on the death penalty, torture and minority rights. The state of emergency has been lifted and progress has been made on incommunicado detention and access to lawyers. The question is whether all those constitutional reforms going through the Turkish Parliament can be delivered, and I think that Turkey needs help on that. I was pleased, therefore, to hear that one of the outcomes of the visit to Ankara by the Foreign Secretary last week was a $3 million bilateral arrangement between the UK and Turkey to provide support for prison reform, modern policing, economic affairs and banking regulations.

The Turkish Government's other priorities include economic revival and stabilisation, key facts in developing progress towards European Union membership within the context of the International Monetary Fund. Perhaps most important is the question of European Union accession. As has been said, EU accession will help to strengthen the reforms in Turkey, but we should not see Turkish membership as a one-way

street. Turkey has an awful lot to offer the EU. We must recognise that at the very least, before my generation has retired, Turkey will start to provide quite a lot of the young labour that we will need in western Europe as our population increasingly ages, and more people become less economically active than the economically active population can support. Turkey is a young country—half of its population is aged under 20. When I come to retire, the people looking after me in my old folks' home may well have a Turkish background.

I have said optimistic things about Turkey, but there is always the great "but": the role of the army in Turkish politics to defend what it sees as the secular state and the principles of Kemalism. Although the general mood of the army now appears to favour EU entry and the new chief of staff is seen as a progressive, none of the reforms so far contemplated considers the role of the army on the National Security Council in Turkey, where 50 per cent. of the seats are reserved for the military. If the Turkish army is serious about withdrawing from politics and Turkey is serious about European Union entry, the National Security Council has to become a purely civilian body.

Cyprus is also an important topic in today's debate. Turkey is trying to link its membership of the European Union with progress on Cyprus. However, the two are not linked, and we need to resist that even though Turkey is trying to push that agenda. It is also trying to link its acceptance with the reform of the European security and defence policy Ankara document. Certainly a settlement in Cyprus is desirable, but I do not think it right to link it with its EU accession. That has been said on many occasions since Helsinki, most recently tonight, and previously in answer to a question that I asked the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago.

We must recognise the constructive role played in the negotiations by the Republic of Cyprus. It is also fair to say that the time pressures that have been put on those who are being asked to make extremely difficult decisions can be counter-productive. People need time to adjust to the serious concessions that may have to be made to make progress.

We must reflect the fact that both sides have to agree in a referendum if the deal is to go through. In this respect, I take issue with my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) when he talks about extremists being rejectionists. Many people on both sides are concerned about the proposals not because they are necessarily extremists but because they see the possible problems arising from implementing the plan or believe that they could lose out. Refugees from Kyrenia, for example, would see very little in the plan for them as it stands. Those people are not necessarily extremists but they are concerned about their position. We must recognise that we are talking about the lives, properties and futures of real people with real concerns. It is easy for us in the House to talk about things in a very glib way without recognising that those problems are long standing and deep seated.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): In saying that there should be no linkage between the accession of Cyprus and the settlement there, does the hon. Gentleman think that if the settlement goes ahead on terms that are not proper and sustainable in the future, so that property rights and the legal rights of the original owners are protected in areas such as Kyrenia and Ayios Ambrosios, it would in the longer term deliver a solution in Cyprus akin to that in Northern Ireland during the past few decades?

Mr. Dismore: If a solution can be put to the people in a referendum, it is important that it commands overwhelming support from both communities. Acceptance of 51 per cent. by either community may be technically sufficient to carry the vote but it would be disastrous. Adjustments were made to the proposals yesterday and I hope that the final version will command confidence.

I am concerned that the Turkish Cypriots have been delaying progress. There has been time for negotiations for well over a year, and they have the most to gain from a solution. That was exemplified by the big demonstration that took place a couple of weeks ago when 20,000 people were on the streets of north Nicosia asking for a solution—indeed demanding a solution—and showing support for the platform of "This country is ours" which is bringing the opposition parties together. In our country, the equivalent would be that about 5 million people took to the streets of London.

The Greek-Cypriot side has clear reservations and the adjustments made yesterday made some progress to address them. I have yet to see the details, but I understand that a review clause was proposed with a shortening of the transitional period. More Greek-Cypriot refugees should be able to go home and a fund will be set up for the voluntary repatriation of settlers.

Major issues remain, however: freedom of movement, settlers and property rights. They could all breach the acquis communautaire and will require detailed derogation. Those substantive issues must be considered. None the less, it is important that the negotiations continue and that they are not forced by an artificial deadline. In the Northern Ireland peace process, for example, deadlines became more elastic as deals were getting closer.

I return to the fundamental point: Cyprus must join the European Union, irrespective of whether there is a settlement. It is a settlement that we all want, but it is not and should never be a precondition.

7.42 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I want to outline seven principles that should guide the Government at the forthcoming Council. Indeed, they should probably guide any Government at any Council meeting.

First, I am sure that it is widely agreed among Members on both sides of the House—there is no dispute—that it is important that we reassert the fact that enlargement is of huge importance. In its successive guises and titles, the European Union has had a series of purposes. Clearly, its first and primary purpose was the establishment of lasting peace between Germany and France.

We take great pleasure from the way in which democracy has been sustained and built in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Some of the elder statesmen, who were involved in the early days of European union, resisted even that enlargement. They wanted a tight nucleus of traditional, western European countries to form the basis of the EU, so early enlargement was unacceptable.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

I am glad that there is now consensus that the next historic task is to underpin reform and sustain democracy in the countries of the former Soviet bloc; 10 of the 13 applicant countries come from that bloc.

I have changed my mind about Turkey. I was interested to hear what the hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) said in a most persuasive speech and what the Foreign Secretary said when he opened the debate. The idea of a democratic, Muslim, European Turkey being part of the EU, if it can meet the necessary tests, is indeed attractive. I do not claim to know a great deal about Turkey. My family has visited the country twice in 100 years. I was there about 12 years ago on a business trip and my father was at Gallipoli in 1916, but I know enough to agree with the verdict that has been given in the House: it is right that Turkey should be encouraged in every way to join the EU and the negotiations should proceed as smoothly as possible.

In relation to the middle east and Muslim issues, I hope that at the Council the EU as a whole will do what it can to encourage the partners in the middle east process—Israel and Palestine—and indeed the United States to re-engage in the process as aggressively as possible. I realise that the Quartet has the greatest responsibility, but a clear message from the Council that it attaches importance to the resolution of the dispute between Israel and Palestine would be of immeasurable help in addressing the broader middle east questions that we face. I hope that such a message will come out of the Council.

The second principle that Governments should always bear in mind at Council meetings relates to the general direction in which they want the EU to move. In a sense, we are always at a time of decision about that, but the prospect of enlargement makes the decision starker than normal. People sometimes say that we face a choice between two models in Europe: heterogeneity or homogeneity; diversity or integrationism.

However, there is a third choice and it is interesting to observe that the draft constitution highlights the fact that that third choice is a more realistic possibility than it has been for a long time: renegotiation of or withdrawal from all but the free trade aspects of the Union. The draft constitution contains a procedure for voluntary withdrawal from the Union, which has been broadly welcomed by the Convention. Mr. Giscard d'Estaing has said that countries choosing that route would have a similar status to members of the European Free Trade Association because:

> "We have to abrogate the . . . treaties that exist. If a country says that it does not like the new treaty, there's no existing structure for them to cling to, they cannot seek refuge in the old agreement . . . you can maintain an economic role, but you can no longer be in this political system."

The prospect of that looser arrangement, which has been attractive to many people in the UK, will be more realistic if the wishes of the Convention are fulfilled. I think that would be the wrong direction to take and that the middle way advocated by the Conservative party for many years, characterised at the last general election by the phrase "In Europe, not run by Europe", is the right way. It is a route of heterogeneity and diversity—of variable geometry—and I hope that it will be the Government's guiding star, too, although I do not think that it will be.

The third principle relates to what Britain's position should be and it flows from what I have just been saying. It is clear that Britain's future is inextricably linked to the EU and will become more so as the Union enlarges. In his opening remarks, the Foreign Secretary gave a dramatic portrayal of just how large the new EU will be in geographical and population terms. Britain's unique status in the world will thus become even more important—it will be at the centre of Europe, of the Commonwealth and of the relationship with the United States of America.

It is right to say that the Prime Minister's skilful handling of issues relating to Iraq and weapons of mass destruction has currently enhanced our relationship with the USA. We thus have a unique and historic opportunity, which is growing in strength, to broker our relationship in those three areas.

Those of my constituents who write to me advocating withdrawal from the EU—I am glad to say that it is a small number at present—should realise that our relevance to the Commonwealth, the USA and the world would diminish significantly. But—and it is a big but—we can be close to and at the heart of Europe while remaining critical of individual decisions taken by the Union. Too often, the Government have made the mistake of not being sufficiently critical. They have embraced changes when they did not need to do so and received nothing in return. I am thinking especially of the opt-out from the social chapter.

The fourth principle is that the Union has to be outward looking. It has been said repeatedly, but it cannot be said too often, that there is still a danger that the EU will not be as outward looking as we want it to be. Changes in world trade and the irresistible trend towards globalisation mean that we must not get sucked into an inward-looking, protectionist, high social cost economy. All the dangers are still there, especially in respect of social costs. I urge the Government to be very wary. I am not convinced that they have been. Individual directives have caused great concern, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) pointed out at the beginning of the debate. We constantly talk about the dangers, but we must also understand them and work them out in practice during the negotiations at the Council.

The fifth principle is flexibility. In order to advance, the EU does not have to be more integrationist; it must be more flexible and more accommodating to the needs of more different nations. The degree of integration that the EU has already achieved would surprise its founding fathers—the Monnets of this world—and they would not want to drive that integration much further. The original treaty of Rome, amended at Maastricht, talked of

> "creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen".

That must be remembered. We are talking not about a union of states but about people who believe that they belong together in peaceful coexistence. Many people on the continent often forget that.

Variety—the sixth principle—is obviously important. One-size-fits-all policies never would work in the EU and they will work even less well in the new enlarged Europe. That is especially true as regards the single European currency and interest rates, but that debate is for another day.

Crucially, in the run-up to the possible new constitution, the seventh principle should be listening to what people actually want from the EU. We can think of countries in the EU that have failed to listen effectively to what their people wanted and the consequences have often been difficult and painful for the whole union.

We have to use our sovereignty to advance the interests of those who elected us. That is what we are talking about, and it will be much more complex in an enlarged EU. Given the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe, we as parliamentarians have to be increasingly aware of the need to be accountable to our electors for the way we choose to use that sovereignty.

I am generally opposed to referendums. I cannot remember how I voted during the Maastricht debates on the question of a referendum. In fact, I cannot even remember whether there was such a vote.

Mr. Spring: Was my hon. Friend a Member of Parliament then?

Mr. Luff: I certainly was a Member of Parliament at the time, but I have no recollection of how I voted. I rather hope that I voted against a referendum because referendums were then strange and alien tools in the British constitution, but this Government have made them commonplace.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): That is an exaggeration.

Mr. Luff: There will be a whole stack of referendums in the so-called regions of England if the Government have their way. Referendums were held in Scotland and Wales. There will be referendums everywhere we turn, and I am glad to say that there will be a referendum on the single European currency if the Government ever have the courage to put that before the British people.

Angus Robertson: What about the Belfast agreement?

Mr. Luff: I very much thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding me about the Belfast agreement. So referendums are much more commonplace than they were. If we can have a referendum on the question of whether Birmingham should run Worcestershire's affairs—I emphatically think that it should not—there should be a referendum on a new constitution for Europe, if there is to be one, preferably before the treaty is ratified, not afterwards. I hope that that referendum will take place at the earliest possible stage.

The trouble is that the Government do not look for the right things at Council meetings and that so much of what Europe needs to do is rather boring and nitty-gritty. The great aspirations of enlargement are obviously important—we share them—but proper reform of the CAP is central to achieving them. That is said in every debate ahead of a Council meeting, but it just does not happen. Before the Berlin meeting, which took place three or four years ago, we were told that a major reform of the CAP had been achieved and that it would permit enlargement of the EU.

Nothing of the kind had been achieved at that Council meeting. Jacques Chirac talked into the early hours of the morning and continuously negotiated the CAP, wearing down the other Heads of State. The tape recordings were still being transcribed many days, if not weeks, later to work out exactly what had been agreed because the Prime Minister wanted, possibly quite reasonably, to cling to the rebate as the essential achievement of that meeting. He was prepared to squander any progress on CAP reform to hold on to that rebate. That may or may not have been the right tactic, but I wish that he could have been more effective in securing CAP reform.

Every chance must be seized to advance CAP reform, but it is just not happening. CAP reform is in the interests of the taxpayer and the farmer, as well as those of the developing world, so I hope that the Government will insist that CAP reform is pursued at successive Council meetings, as well as at every other opportunity.

I am not convinced that the fisheries issue should be on the agenda at the Council meeting. I am persuaded that the relevant DEFRA Minister, who has rather more experience of such issues than those who will attend the Council meeting, should pursue those negotiations. However, that is clearly another issue of great importance.

We still have not completed the single market. Public procurement remains a scandal in the EU. Unless those issues are addressed effectively, how can we say that the Government are negotiating in the interests of Britain and, indeed, an enlarged EU? The European negotiations that we need to permit enlargement are about very practical issues designed to make Europe work better and to be more diverse. That will strengthen, not weaken the EU.

The Prime Minister often says that the Conservative party is the enemy of Europe and that it is full of extremists who want to destroy the EU. He regularly says that literally and by implication. I think that he is absolutely and completely wrong. To belong to a club, to be critical of that club and to argue for its improvement is to support that club. To turn one's eyes from the problems that exist is to be an enemy of that club. I fear greatly that by driving the countries of the EU to excessive conformity—to bureaucracy rather than democracy—he risks a reaction that can destroy the EU, which he claims to support.

The Prime Minister risks economic failure through single interest rates; institutional gridlock, as issues are not properly devolved to national Parliaments but are maintained at European level; possible American hostility to the EU, as it seeks to assert itself against American interests, which is a matter of great concern; and, above all, a reaction of the peoples of Europe against the old federalist agenda, to which he and the Government are still tragically wedded. In a sense the issues never change, but, as we face a very exciting chapter in Europe's history, they have probably never been more important.

7.55 pm

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): I shall begin with the parochial, by reassuring the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). He is clearly losing sleep worrying about the possibly aggressive expansionist plans of Birmingham vis-à-vis Worcestershire. He may sweat at night worrying about lebensraum, but I reassure him that we have no such

[Mr. Siôn Simon]

desire. In fact, we are sufficiently incapable of running Birmingham to be by no means keen to run Worcester any more than it wants to be run by us.

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): What about Sir Albert Bore?

Mr. Simon: I am sure that Sir Albert can hear from where he is.

Mr. Spring: In Birmingham, but not run by Birmingham.

Mr. Simon: Exactly.

I also wish to reassure the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), who is personifying—indeed, embodying—the Scottish National party in its entirety tonight, as well as the Welsh National party and apparently all the Irish parties. My constituency is entirely urban. It is in the middle of Birmingham city centre. It includes spaghetti junction. It is almost as far away from the sea as one can get. I know nothing about fish. There is no point intervening to ask me about fish. I have nothing to say about them.

Mr. Bryant: Is my hon. Friend aware that Winston Churchill once said that Baldwin was thoroughly bored by Europe and that Chamberlain thought that Europe was no more than a greater Birmingham?

Mr. Simon: I have nothing to say about that, but I thank my hon. Friend for that instructive intervention. I was terrified for a horrible moment that it would be about a piscine matter.

I hope that I have dispatched the parochial, so I wish to join the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire in offering my right hon. and hon. colleagues on the Treasury Bench some morsels of principle that they might take with them to Copenhagen and which they might, I hope, bring back again and continue to deploy thereafter. Two principles—maxims might be a better word—could be usefully applied widely in European matters. First, please let us get on with things to the greatest possible extent. Secondly, it would be wrong to say, "Start being honest with people", but perhaps I can recommend a move to an even more candid style of discourse.

For example, let us apply those two principles to the euro, setting aside, for the sake of argument, the Chancellor's five economic tests. For debating purposes only, let us assume that the tests could be met pretty much at any time and that the real political dynamic is not about the five economic tests, but about winning a referendum. [*Interruption.*] I am assuming that as a debating point for the sake of argument. There seems to be an assumption that the polling data militate against a referendum because there is apparently a significant, consistent majority of people who say that they would not vote in support of the euro. However, that number is offset by an almost equivalent number of people who say that they believe that euro entry is inevitable. The latter number is not a quirky figure but a significant percentage. The chattering classes dismiss it as a manifestation of the general contempt in which the public hold them—they think the public believe that they will implement that chattering class-project, whatever the people want. That tells us more about the chattering classes than about the people. Commitment to a referendum must be absolute, and we can adopt a new currency only if people vote for it. Everybody knows that.

When someone tells the pollsters, "I'm not going to vote for a single currency, but I think it is inevitable" they mean, "I'm instinctively suspicious of foreigners and loath to give up the pound, to which I have a sentimental attachment, but I'm not stupid—I know that a historic tide is swelling beneath me. I do not feel any enthusiasm for the euro, but I accept that it is right and I am going to vote for it." I am trying to gird the loins of my ministerial colleagues. "Opposed to entry" means emotionally and romantically opposed, and "I believe entry is inevitable" means "I know that it is right and I am going to support it."

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): As the hon. Gentleman is talking about the Government being truthful, does he accept that if there is a single interest rate it follows, as night follows day, that there must be greater power at the centre, particularly over taxation, to deal with the consequences? Greater harmonisation of taxes is inevitable, whatever verbal assurances have been given by the Government. That has been recognised by Hans Tietmeyer, so why will the Government not admit it?

Mr. Simon: As the hon. Gentleman knows, I do not speak for the Government. However, what he proposes may be fair. I am not terrified of foreigners—I quite like them—so I would not consider a little more harmonisation, fiscal co-operation and, indeed, other non-damaging forms of co-operation, the end of the world.

That brings me to the need to tell the truth. For a Labour Member, I have an unusual number of Tory friends. I talk to Tories more than usual—perhaps even to a dysfunctional extent. I can even say that some of my best friends are Tories. For the past 10 to 15 years they have talked about such issues and asked repeatedly, "Why do you people want to do this? Why do you feel like this? Why do you line us up with the frogs, jerries and all those dastardly foreigners when you could be magnificently, proudly and beautifully English?" They cannot get their heads round that.

I am not English. I was born in south Yorkshire, grew up in Birmingham, a quarter of my family is Marseille Corsican, my name is Siôn Llewelyn, which is as Welsh as its gets, and my kids have Welsh names. A couple of weeks ago in west London, my sister had her first child, whose father is an Ulster Protestant who supports Republic of Ireland sports teams. A lot of the time, the concept of Englishness is simplistic, which may colour my approach to integration.

There is something else that Tory Europhobes hate. The last thing they want to hear about and the most disastrous example of how bad things can possibly be is Tuscan evenings—the sun gently setting over San Gimignano, Vesuvius viewed from the Golfo di Napoli, Fellini, "La Dolce Vita" and all that malarkey, the

Vieux Port at 9.30 pm as the children and prostitutes come out to play. Tory Europhopes hate that rosy European dream, as well as Stendhal, Mozart, Strindberg, Mahler, Michelangelo, Racine, Flaubert, Baudelaire—all those centuries of amazing art, history and culture in common. Historically, we have been embarrassed by all that stuff, but we are wrong. We dare not tell people about those Tuscan evenings, but we should admit that there is nothing wrong with them or thinking that way—it is about vision, dreaming the dream and thinking big thoughts, and we should not be ashamed of that.

Obviously, the integrationist project—I have no problem calling it that—is about more than that. The shadow Foreign Secretary repeatedly used the word "integration" as if it were akin to molestation. However, I am an integrationist. I am not frightened of foreigners, and do not consider myself better than the French or Italians. The project has practical benefits, which Members have talked about today and will continue to talk about. However, it is also visionary, and we should not be frightened to say so. I am not ashamed of dreaming the dream, as the people who dreamed it in the past have brought us to the decent, liberal, humane, prosperous, plural society in which we have the privilege of living.

To recap, continental Europe is a nice place with nice people. We have a shared history and culture, and in many ways its people are just like us—they are no better and no worse than us. There is nothing to be afraid of.

Mr. MacShane: Does my hon. Friend recall that the previous Leader of the Opposition made a speech in which he said that if people voted Labour, England would become a foreign land? Somebody wrote to *The Times* saying, "Yes—could it be the south of France?"

Mr. Simon: I thank the Minister for making my point more eloquently than I ever could have done. However, I suspect that he will not be quite so keen to support my next point.

If we are shy about telling the truth about Europe, we are terrified of going a step further and admitting that some foreigners influence our legislative process. Bedraggled clichés about being run by unelected bureaucrats in Brussels stem from disingenuousness or illiteracy. However, as qualified majority voting is extended, some of our laws are increasingly inspired by foreigners. That is okay, because they are not foreigners but Europeans, like us, and we should not be afraid of them. Why should we assume that my constituents, who have never had the opportunity to vote for my hon. Friend the Minister, are instinctively more attached to him than his counterparts elsewhere in Europe—

Mr. Bacon: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Simon: No.

Mr. Bacon: The hon. Gentleman asked a question—will he give way?

Mr. Simon: I have not finished asking it yet.

Why should we make that assumption when the Minister's counterparts have been directly elected by our fellow Europeans elsewhere in the European democracy?

Mr. Bacon: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a simple answer to his question? People in this country can understand the Minister when he stands at the Dispatch Box, and read parliamentary debates and court judgments, but they cannot do so for the whole of Europe.

Mr. Simon: The hon. Gentleman assumes that my constituents are monolingual and incapable of understanding foreigners. He may be speaking for his constituents, but he should not presume to speak for mine because they are a highly educated, multi-skilled, multilingual, multicultural bunch.

The late Mick McGahey came back from the Soviet Union and was asked what he found there. As succinct and eloquent as ever, he said, "People."

Mr. Todd: He did not say it like that.

Mr. Simon: It would be wrong for me to do an impression. Mick McGahey did not say, "Happy people", but his point was that people are people—my people are like your people. We do not have to be afraid of foreign people. No one is diminished by being European—it does not make me less British or less of a Brummie or the Italians less Italian. What we do not need is fear and bunkerite isolationism. We need a little imagination and courage, and a continuation of the progressive and confident way in which the Government have dealt with the matter so far.

8.10 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): I speak on behalf of the Scottish national party and Plaid Cymru and do so gladly, especially after the earlier contribution from the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who gave a broad sweep of the vision of enlargement. Although I do not subscribe to the entirety of the vision painted by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon), it is a vision in general that we need to retain. While we are speaking about technical matters, we should understand how important enlargement is to everybody on the European continent.

I speak in the debate with mixed feelings. I am a great supporter of enlargement, both on a political and a personal level. On a political level, I think that I am right in saying that my party is the only party represented in the House that has Europe at the core of its central policy platform, and independence in Europe as our main policy. That policy is being pursued by all the countries acceding to the European Union at present.

On a personal level, I am a product of integration, my father being Scots and my mother coming to this island as a refugee after the second world war. I therefore have a degree of mixed identity and I have no fear of losing my identity in an enlarged and enhanced Europe. Despite all the criticism that I could level at the UK, being in a Union has not made me any less Scots, and I

[Angus Robertson]

am sure that the European Union in the future will not make a Frenchman any less French or an Estonian any less Estonian.

The downside for me in the debate, with which I shall deal later, is the matter of fishing. I shall speak first about enlargement. My party and I are strong supporters of enlargement, in part because of the tradition in Scotland which has viewed our historic nation as having long and good relations with the nations of central and eastern Europe. That was brought home to me only last week when I met the mayor of Tallinn, a former Prime Minister of Estonia, who proudly took out his membership card for the Scots club in Tallinn. There is a link between Scotland and many of the countries of central and eastern Europe. The SNP welcomes enlargement as being good for a peaceful continent and for enhancing prosperity, co-operation and an improved environment.

It is estimated that enlargement will create about 300,000 jobs across the EU, which will benefit many thousands of people in Scotland and throughout the entire continent, as companies take advantage of trade opportunities. It cannot be lost on anybody looking at enlargement from a Scottish perspective that more than half the enlargement candidate countries are the same size as Scotland or smaller—Slovakia, Lithuania, Latvia, Slovenia, Estonia, Cyprus and Malta are all roughly the same size as Scotland or smaller. I was reminded of that last week when the Foreign Secretary, in a speech to the Press Gallery, waxed lyrical about the new proud nation state that had so recently gained its independence—that is, Slovenia. Like the other nations acceding to membership of the EU, it is aiming to be independent within Europe, something that I would like to see for Scotland.

Not only Slovenia, but other countries too have had to think long and hard about that. I look back to Lithuania and remember my party's former deputy leader, the late Dr. Alan McCartney, who worked closely with Vytautas Landsbergis, the first President of an independent Lithuania. It is clear that all the candidate countries are looking forward to accession and to playing their role in a confederal Europe, without losing their identities.

All those countries will have a guaranteed seat at the top table of the Council of Ministers. They will have permanent representation on the Council, the right to nominate a Commissioner, and considerably more Members of the European Parliament per head than Scotland. They are rightly set to enjoy first-class status, while Scotland unfortunately does not, but that is no bar to all those countries rightfully taking their place.

I endorse entirely the view expressed by many hon. Members in all parts of the House with regard to Turkey's possible membership in the future. The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) made a strong case for that. Having spent most of my working life on the continent in Austria and Germany, I can pay tribute to the substantial contribution made to those societies by people of Turkish origin. I look forward to their country being a full member of the European Union.

With reference to reform of the EU, which is central to the work that is taking place on the Convention and which is tied to enlargement of the EU, I put on record again my support for the proposed reforms to improve the efficiency of the EU, bringing it closer to the citizen, and supporting transparency, accountability, democracy and subsidiarity—for example, with the opening of proceedings of the Council of Ministers. At least we will be able to see what Scottish Executive Ministers are doing when they say that they are playing an important role at Council of Ministers meetings.

However, it is supremely ironic that while the EU is becoming more transparent, European policy within the UK remains confidential. The concordats ensure that discussions between the UK Government and the Scottish Executive are secret. Both the Scottish Parliament's European Committee and the House of Commons European Scrutiny Committee have called for changes in that regard.

On the likely constitution or constitutional treaty, I am glad that the Conservative party takes the view that that should be put to the people in a referendum, although that is not entirely consistent with the party's view of previous treaties, which were of equal or greater significance. The Scottish National party has been consistent.

Mr. Spring: If there is an overarching constitutional treaty, it changes the fundamental base of the relationship between the member states, which has up to this point been intergovernmental.

Angus Robertson: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. That is one of the reasons why the SNP has a standing policy. We would like a constitution or a constitutional treaty put to the people in a referendum, because we support such a treaty. We want it to be endorsed by the electorate so that it has the full mandate of people in Scotland and anywhere else that would choose to hold a referendum.

I shall touch briefly on the workings of the Convention, noting that there are no Scottish Executive or Scottish Parliament representatives on the delegation from the UK to the Convention, despite the fact that First Minister Jack McConnell, in an article in *Business a.m.* on 20 December last year, said that he had

"pledged to fight for a place on the convention".

Of course, he failed.

Unlike the UK, Germany takes the role of its devolved areas, the Länder, seriously, with the Premier of Baden-Württemberg, Erwin Teufel, being a full member of the German delegation. Mr. Teufel has argued for better rights for devolved Governments in the EU in the Convention, whereas the UK has not. The UK Government's representative, Peter Hain, has spoken in the Convention six times. His contributions amount to 2,869 words and he has never mentioned Scotland once in his contributions. He mentioned Wales once, but only in connection with where his constituency is, not in terms of how the EU should progress and Wales's place within it.

I am pleased that there are two democratically elected Scottish representatives involved in the Convention process, although not through the Scottish Executive or the Scottish Parliament. It will not surprise the House that both are members of my party, Professor Sir Neil MacCormick MEP for the Greens/European Free Alliance group, and Councillor Keith Brown of

Clackmananshire council. We will continue to make the case for the improved representation of Scotland in the EU, with equality of status and the same rights and obligations as other EU countries. At a time when more decisions are being made at a European level, it is essential for Scotland to be there and that way we would at least ensure 100 per cent. attendance at key meetings, as opposed to UK Governments, both Tory and Labour, who have terrible records in representing Scotland. That for me is a positive vision of Scotland's place within a changing Europe, and that is why I welcome what is on the agenda of the Copenhagen summit. However, I come now to what is not on the agenda, which disappoints me greatly—namely, fishing.

I have reason to believe that the Foreign Secretary would not have mentioned fishing at all were it not for the fact that I intervened on him during his opening speech. The right hon. Member for Devizes made no mention of fishing either. He spoke about competition policy, the CAP, European security and defence policy, European monetary union, the Convention—the list goes on, but fishing was not on it. Perhaps the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) will be able to say when he replies what the Conservative party's official policy is on the question that I am about to raise, which is the unmitigated impending disaster for the fishing industry, and not just in Scotland. Anyone who listened to the "Today" programme this morning will have heard concerned fishermen from North Shields. Fishermen from around the coast of this island and Northern Ireland face disaster if the Commission's plans go through.

In a recent article in the *Daily Record*, the Prime Minister put a figure of 14,000 on those in the fishing industry who are under threat. Unfortunately, that seems to undermine the warning by the Scottish Executive that the figure is over 40,000, many of whom are likely to lose their jobs.

I appeal to Members representing constituencies south of the border to imagine the prospect of more than 100,000 people losing their jobs within a short matter of months as a direct result of EU policy. Imagine the Front Benchers of a British Government not raising that at the most important meeting that the EU can hold. It is unimaginable that Jacques Chirac, facing the prospect of 100,000 French farmers losing their jobs, or Premier Aznar facing the prospect of 100,000 Spanish fishermen losing their jobs, would not raise those matters in a Council meeting, especially a summit meeting.I have grave concerns that Government policy on this is completely out of sync. I note with interest that the Secretary of State for Scotland tried to persuade us yesterday in the Scottish Grand Committee that the Prime Minister has said that

"he has already raised the matter at the European Agriculture and Fisheries Council." —[*Official Report, Scottish Grand Committee*, 10 December 2002; c. 12.]

I have followed EU business for a long time and I have never heard of a Prime Minister taking part in a European Agriculture and Fisheries Council. The Prime Minister takes part in summit meetings of Heads of State and Government. That is what will take place at the end of this week and that subject is not on the agenda. We are repeatedly told, because apparently the UK Government think it important, that the Prime Minister did talk with Franz Fischler on 14 November in what was described as a short meeting, and that was confirmed earlier today by his office.

I am glad that the Minister of State is here because I intervened during questions to raise the matter and he said:

"Of course every one of the 15 EU member states will have pressing problems that it will want to place on the agenda at Copenhagen. "—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 149.]

I note with interest that there is no mention of the fishing industry on the agenda. I have confirmation from the Prime Minister of Denmark, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, who holds the presidency of the EU, that an important issue for the Government of Spain is set to be debated—the Prestige disaster. Hon. Members will know about the oil spill off Galicia, which is tremendously important, and understandably so for the people of Spain. Their Government have made the effort to have the matter put on the agenda, yet the UK Government have not made a similar effort with regard to fishing.

I asked the House of Commons Library yesterday if it would produce a list to show how often member states have put matters of vital national interest at the top of the agenda of European Council and summit meetings, and it ran to five pages. I summarise by mentioning that in 1965 France secured veto powers on CAP reform, in 1983 the UK raised the budget rebate, and in 1992 Spain raised cohesion funding—the list goes on. With an impending disaster in the Scottish fishing industry, people in my constituency and throughout the coast of Scotland and elsewhere in the UK cannot and will not understand why the Government are not batting for them at the most important meeting that can make decisions, or seeking to impress on other Governments that it is imperative to deal with the issue.

Mr. Hendrick: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Angus Robertson: I shall not, because I am in my last minute. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand.

I have come to this debate with a heavy heart and with mixed feelings, because I am a convinced and proud European who is over the moon about the prospect of enlargement. It breaks my heart to stand here and persuade representatives of any democratic Government to stick up for people. Having marched with the steelworkers at Ravenscraig and Gartcosh with colleagues from the Labour party, I thought that there would be an understanding of what mass wholesale unemployment would mean, and I hope that the UK Government will make that effort and raise the matter at the Copenhagen summit. Every single effort needs to be made to secure the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people.

8.25 pm

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): I am pleased to take part in the debate as we enter a new era in the development of Europe. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) made a case for Scotland's involvement in that, and I hope that in future Yorkshire will also have its chance to have its voice heard in Europe as the regional agenda develops in Britain.

[Ms Meg Munn]

Like the hon. Gentleman, I also claim mixed parentage. My father was born in Yorkshire and my mother, alas, was born in Lancashire, so there are some differences there. I am reassured by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon), who is no longer in his place, that even people in Lancashire are people.

Since the second world war it is good to say that much of Europe has enjoyed peace and stability, and I hope that enlargement will mean much greater peace and stability throughout Europe. Last month the Prime Minister described the forthcoming enlargement as the creation of a new Europe by free will. Unfortunately, we know that many of today's threats come not from within individual countries but from terrorism. I believe that together in Europe we can work with the other parts of the world to try to continue in the peace and stability that we have all enjoyed for many years.

The EU has greatly boosted trade, jobs and the economy. We have heard today, and have been encouraged by it, positive speeches on both sides of the House about the EU, and a real desire to see how it can develop.

South Yorkshire has recently benefited from objective 1 money and I hope that with the enlargement of the EU there will be a commitment to achieve development across all of Europe's regions. We see within our own country how some regions have not done so well in the economy, hence the reason for the structural funds that have come to areas such as mine. It is important for stability, peace and justice that huge disparities are avoided in wealth, health and development throughout Europe and ultimately the whole world. Of course, there are many other issues as well as security and economic success. Increasingly, we have environmental concerns that do not stop at national borders.

We have often heard the European Union criticised for being complex and a difficult institution for its citizens to understand. Some take the view that there is a disconnection between the European institutions and the citizens of Europe and that that has led to apathy, so I should like to discuss an area that has been little mentioned, but was brought to my attention yesterday when the Select Committee on Education and Skills met members of the British Council. I refer to European education programmes, which should spread out and benefit all countries, including those that are joining the European Union as well as those that are already members.

The British Council runs many of the European Union education programmes in the United Kingdom. The number of programmes is probably greater than many hon. Members think, as they span the entire breadth of our education systems. For example, school education and joint curriculum projects operate between schools and colleges, giving staff training opportunities and allowing them to develop networks with teachers in other countries. Two such projects exist in Sheffield.

On adult education and lifelong learning, the aim is to improve the availability, accessibility and quality of adult teaching and learning by supporting European co-operation projects, learning partnerships, staff training and the development of networks across countries. If we want a Europe in which adults have the skills and abilities to work in the sort of jobs that will arise in the next decade, adult skills and education are very important.

The Lingua programme promotes the learning of foreign languages. The hon. Member for Moray might like to find out a bit more about it, as he was somewhat sceptical about the ability of this country's citizens to read and converse in other languages. As a linguist, I think it is very important that we promote the learning of languages in schools and for adults. The Lingua project supports the raising of awareness of language learning opportunities and seeks to develop such opportunities. As people get to meet the citizens of other European countries and learn about them, it is only natural that they should learn their languages. That enriches our culture and makes us all Europeans, as my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) said.

Arion study visits are themed study visits for education decision makers. Again, they involve the sharing of education issues and ideas across Europe. The Government have rightly made education our No. 1 priority, and I should like to see it on the European agenda as well.

In addition to the programmes run by the British Council, there are other European Union educational programmes such as Erasmus, which relates to higher education and aims to encourage co-operation between European universities and support the mobility of students and staff and the development of joint programmes and courses and thematic networks. I was heartened by the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson), who recognised that the development of the European Union is not only about economics, peace or defence, but about culture and learning.

Of course, education has an intrinsic value, but it is especially important for the European Union in promoting co-operation and understanding between countries as we stand at the threshold of an enlarged European Union. By learning languages, we can begin to recognise the importance of the knowledge economy, in which people can benefit from being able to converse in another language in terms of trade between countries. In England—I say England advisedly—we are too often happy to sit back and allow other people to deal with things because they speak English. Is it not time that we learned those other languages so that we can expand our trading and cultural links as well?

Programmes such as those that I have mentioned support and create opportunities for all our citizens. I believe that enlargement provides opportunities not only to secure economic development, but to promote through such programmes understanding and co-operation across an increasing and I hope ever-enlarging number of countries. I firmly believe that enlargement will bring greater stability and prosperity to increasing numbers of people and that all European citizens will be working together for a more peaceful, prosperous and stable world.

8.34 pm

Mr. Shaun Woodward (St. Helens, South): We are holding an important debate on an important subject, and considering an important meeting in Copenhagen in the next few days.

Britain's future unquestionably lies at the heart of Europe. I speak from experience when I say that we also unquestionably have the right Government to negotiate that future. I say that with some pleasure because in a former guise in another party I spent some time undergoing the twists and turns of trying to explain to my constituents and activists why I was pro-European, how that view could be accommodated with going no further into Europe, the way in which Europe presented all sorts of problems, and that closer integration was not a good idea.

In the debate, Conservative Members expressed similar conundrums, which individuals are trying to solve. When the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) spoke about the reasons for a new constitution, I wondered whether the Conservative party was prepared genuinely to consider what the Government are trying to achieve. The Prime Minister made it clear in Cardiff last week that we need a proper constitution for Europe because of the EU's expansion to 25 members. Without change, it is impossible to take forward such a Europe in the way that we support. The Prime Minister spelt out that we want a constitution,

"which makes it clear that the driving ideology is indeed a union of nations and not a superstate".

Secondly, he made it clear that

"the Convention is proposing a radical strengthening of the subsidiarity principle."

Subsidiarity will not be compromised but enshrined. The Commission and the Council are currently judge and jury. The Convention wants national Parliaments to be given new early-warning rights. They are important because if sufficient national Parliaments object, the Commission's proposals will require revision. That means expanding the principle of subsidiarity and giving national Parliaments in a union of nation states greater control. It makes perfect sense for us to go back to the treaties and create a sensible, simple constitution in plain language.

At Copenhagen, two crucial issues will be considered: enlargement and the future political architecture of the EU. That is necessary because we are entering a new phase in this millennium. Interdependence means the expansion of the global economy. However, there is a dark side to that. It includes the problems of climate change; trans-border crime, and AIDS and HIV. The list is long. We must have effective structures for dealing with them. They must be flexible but integrated in order to work. Archbishop William Temple once said that the art of government was creating structures in which

"self- interest will prompt what justice demands."

Structures and integration therefore matter.

Of course, democratic accountability is critical in that architecture. People feel stronger if they have a greater sense of democratic accountability. A constitution would ensure that it was enshrined in a principle that underscores enlargement in the next few years.

The right hon. Member for Devizes spoke of failures in the EU under the Government. He should visit the north-west, where two thirds of our exports go to the EU. He should witness the 400,000 jobs that have been created in the north-west and which depend on our exports to the EU. There has been £5 billion of inward investment in the north-west. Structural funds are being poured into Merseyside. The infrastructure projects in my constituency include roads, railways, new schools, new equipment, community projects, regeneration, and two new business parks. We even hope that we will get money for rebuilding or finding a new home ground for the Saints. All those projects are due to structural money from the EU.

The summit will critically tackle where we go from here. We face many problems. Twenty-five years ago, the EU constituted 15 per cent. of the world's population; the figure is now nearer 5 per cent. In the early 1980s, there was a 10 per cent. gap in GDP per capita between the peoples of Europe and those of the United States. Today, the figure is closer to 42 per cent.

Unquestionably, we must do something about improving economic performance and reviving failing economies. We must increase our markets and make them more efficient. I say to Opposition Members that it is impossible to make the single market work without further integration. It is absurd for Conservative Front-Bench Members, as architects of the single market, to argue for less integration in the context of the single market. External Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten recently observed that in Europe at present we are seeing a unique experiment in regional integration. It is unique for a number of reasons, but it is absolutely unique across the globe.

We must look at the important question of Turkey. The Foreign Secretary was right to refer at the beginning of his speech to Turkey's accession to the EU as an "obligation". This weekend, we shall look to the summit as much to see what it says about Turkey as to see how that reflects what it says about ourselves. Our response to Turkey's accession is, as much as anything, about the kind of Europe we want to create. Do we want a Christian club for reactionary economies or a dynamic union of nation states focused on improving the economic performance of those countries and providing security and a climate free from terrorism?

In that context, I refer to the lamentable remarks that former President Giscard d'Estaing made recently about Turkey joining the EU. He said that those who support Turkey's accession are enemies of Europe. He said that Turkey is a different culture, with a different approach and a different way; that Turkey is a country that is close to Europe but it is not a European country. Those arguments—those prejudices—are serious, because when Giscard d'Estaing speaks, he speaks for many, albeit not a majority, who would prefer to see the European Union as a club, not an effective single market working for the peoples of nation states.

What are former President Giscard d'Estaing's objections? His first is a prejudice about the religious nature of most of the peoples who make up the European Union. That argument excludes the 18 million Muslims who are already a critical and well-integrated part of it. He regards the admission of more Muslims as potentially destabilising. His second objection seems to be about Turkey's size: it has a

[Mr. Shaun Woodward]

population nearly the size of Germany's, so it is too large and its backwards economy poses a threat. I understand that what he proposes for Turkey is a trade association with the European Union, but not full integration. On that, he is entirely wrong. It would be a terrible backwards step for us were we to go with that advice.

This is about the kind of Europe that we are trying to shape, and how the political architecture that we are forging can best serve the peoples of these nation states. Former President Giscard d'Estaing has been economical with history. He forgets, for example, that at the time of his own presidency, Turkey was already on its way to membership. He forgets that, back in 1963 when Britain's membership was vetoed, Charles de Gaulle recognised that Turkey was indeed a European country.

More compelling today, however, is the logic of Turkey joining. In 1989, the Berlin wall fell and we saw the curtain lifted for a new generation, with hope and possible prosperity offered to it. Today, the curtain can be lifted between the east and west. Former President Giscard d'Estaing fears that Turkey as part of the EU bordering on Iraq would be dangerous for the EU. I believe that the opposite is true: it is a real opportunity. As John F. Kennedy said when he was at the Berlin wall in the 1960s, "Freedom is indivisible", and as Attaturk said 75 years ago,

"Countries vary, but civilisation is one."

Geographically, Turkey offers us an opportunity to create a bridge between the east and the west. It stands at a crossroads between Europe, the middle east and central Asia, yet it serves not as a bridgehead between east and west, but as a bridge to unite civilisations, providing an opportunity to bring 80 million Muslim people into the institutions and ideas of Europe. Three years ago, former President Clinton paid a visit to Turkey. While he was there, he said:

"When people can celebrate their culture and faith in ways that do not infringe upon the rights of others, moderates do not become extremists and extremists do not become misguided heroes."

There is a lot for us to learn in those words. There is also a lot for us to learn by thinking about what we might lose if we do not embrace Turkey.

Turkey sits on the eastern flank of NATO. It is a strategic ally of Israel, a buffer against Iran, and an ally against Saddam. In the past, it has been a shock absorber against an expansionist Soviet Union, and today it absorbs the Russian pressures on the middle east. It is a bulwark against Islamic fundamentalism. In short, Turkey offers us the chance of having a window into the Islamic world. We have made many mistakes in the past in relation to Islam. Today we see new contours emerging in the post-cold war world, and we can see the importance of this new order. In the past, the United States and the European Union have missed the opportunities to create new paradigms with which to deal with Islamic fundamentalism. Today, Turkey gives us that chance.

The old Turkey of 70 years ago has gone. It has begun a journey, and that journey is now advancing at speed. This Turkey is drawn by European values such as democracy. It has abolished the death penalty. It has also outlawed torture, and punishes those who are guilty of it. Its "Midnight Express" culture is giving way to one in which it is trying to establish freedom and human rights. As the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) rightly observed, the Turkish model, with its 80 million Muslim people, is a democratic alternative to the models of Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is important that we embrace it.

Turkey has the strongest economy in its region. President Giscard d'Estaing's question about whether Turkey is European is simply the wrong question to ask today. The right question is whether the European Union can afford not to include Turkey. That question whether to include Turkey and offer it a real prospect of accession is central to the success of this weekend's summit, and central to all those in Copenhagen who are framing the architecture for successful European Union enlargement.

8.48 pm

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am delighted that we are having our third debate on European affairs in 10 days. We have now had two in the Chamber, and one in Westminster Hall earlier today. I was intrigued to hear the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) assert that the Conservatives had many warm things to say about Europe. When his boss, the right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), spoke earlier, he gave away the Tories' understanding of Europe when he gave us his little vignette on European weather. He seemed to think, in his "little Englander" way, that the isobars that wave across Britain are somehow entirely British, and that French, Spanish and Italian isobars never have anything to do with this little island, which is more precious than anywhere else. It reminded me of the approach to foreigners adopted in "The League of Gentlemen", in which anyone who goes into the little shop is told: "This is a local shop, sir, for local people." It is a bit depressing to hear that the Conservative party still has such outmoded views.

Someone once said of the BBC that it was the greatest cultural invention of the 20th century. I believe that the European Union is probably the greatest political invention of the 20th century. It is certainly one of the greatest feats of diplomatic engineering. Countries that were at war not only in the last century but across the last 10 centuries and countries that not long ago had fascist or left-wing dictatorships have managed to find peace with one another; countries that had communist dictatorships will soon enter the EU; and countries that had and have great industrial muscle and might will soon join countries that have had little industrial might over the past 250 or 300 years. There is a common endeavour of abandoning Europe's history of rich and poor countries, areas and regions, and trying to abolish grinding poverty across the whole of Europe. That is a significant political and diplomatic achievement.

Part of that success has relied on the enormous flexibility that the Union has been able to establish. Despite the fact that the original founding fathers of the European Economic Community—they were, in the main, men—had a clear idea in their mind, which, as Members have said, is not one that many in the Chamber would share, we have none the less been able to move through major transitional periods, such as the

accession of the United Kingdom and that of Spain and Portugal, with their history of fascist dictatorship. Over the next 18 months, we face the accession of 10 new members, but all that shows the enormous flexibility in the EU, which has been part of its phenomenal strength.

As we shall see, enlargement will bring many changes to trade, which other Members have mentioned. It is worth bearing in mind the fact that when Spain acceded to the EU, British trade with it increased by 40 per cent. across the next five years. We can probably expect significant additional prosperity for this country as a result of enlargement.

Significant philosophical changes in the understanding of the EU will come about through enlargement. For a start, the old-school idea of the EU, whereby it was seen as a club whose members shared a virtually identical cultural, philosophical and historical heritage, will disappear. In other words, the old grand tour vision of Europe—the Prado, Louvre, Uffizi and Parthenon version of the EU—will go. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's remarks on why Turkey should not be part of the EU reflected that old grand tour understanding of Europe, which will now finally disappear.

Enlargement will also mean a far more diverse understanding of the term "liberal democracy". That will help the EU to establish a much greater and more sensible understanding of subsidiarity. The EU will involve not only republics and constitutional monarchies, which function in many different ways, but countries such as this, which have asymmetric devolution, and such as Belgium, which is barely a country at all in respect of its degree of devolution. The EU will also involve republics formed out of revolution and republics formed after the end of communism. It seems clear to me that we must have a greater understanding of a Europe of the regions in which the regional and individual identities of each different country will be far more significant.

On an issue that is perhaps significant to British understanding of the EU, some major institutions in each member state will start to change how they operate. For example, the understanding of British people about what constitutes a public service broadcaster is far different from that of people in Poland or Hungary. Over the years, the model that we have espoused—a free press and an independent public service broadcaster—will increasingly become that for the rest of the EU.

Significant institutional change will be necessary. Although I do not want to go over last week's debate, it is essential that we achieve much greater clarity about the respective roles of the Commission, the Council, the Parliament, the member states and the EU as a whole. It seems to me that ordinary members of society, ordinary members of the public, need to understand where authority lies in any given area. Unless we can provide a set of treaties, a constitution, making that much clearer, we will do ourselves a great disservice.

Although Anders Rasmussen is doing a wonderful job and will, we hope, do an even more wonderful job over the next few days, I feel that the current stop-start presidency often gives the many industries that rely on decisions made at EU level a sense of instability and uncertainty. They do not know how fast an individual directive or area of policy is proceeding until they discover the current presidency's criteria and priorities for the next few months. That is why I passionately believe in a much more long-term presidential system, which would also give us a better understanding of the significance of elected Governments in the Council of Ministers—hopefully more transparent than in the past—as opposed to the Commission.

Incidentally, it would be nice if the process of enlargement ended transmigration between Brussels and Strasbourg, which must be one of the craziest things that diplomacy has ever led to.

I also think that some of the Commission's institutions need to be strengthened. This is not always a popular view, but I feel that the competition directorate in particular must, in years to come, play a vital role in ensuring that the concept of state aid is not abused, especially in new member states, where the history of intervention in industry is very different from that in established EU countries.

The Trade Commissioner will, I think, play a far more significant role in the next 10, 15 or 20 years. There will undoubtedly be times when the EU wants to stand four-square with the United States, and unless we have a Trade Commissioner who can do that robustly we will again do ourselves a disservice.

There will clearly be many challenges relating to crime and defence, and we will need to strengthen our competences in those contexts. In one respect, however, I think that further accessions may lead to a significant turn towards Britain. I expect English to become, increasingly, the language of the European Union. That is already happening in many European debates. It is no longer a case of English, French and German; nearly everyone speaks English. There will, of course, be a consequence for the English language, whose future now lies more in the hands of non-native than those of native English speakers.

The problem of MEPs' pay and conditions will have to be resolved before the entry of the new member states.

Many Members have referred to Turkey's accession. I agree wholeheartedly about Turkey's strategic significance, but I reject the argument advanced by some that as only a small part of its land mass is in the historical continent of Europe, and much is beyond the Bosphorus, we should not entertain the idea of its membership. Like others, I also reject the rather anti-Islamic argument that some have advanced. It always strikes me as ironic that a profoundly anti-Islamic view should exist in many southern Mediterranean European countries in particular, while at the same time a passionately partisan view is adopted on the issue of Palestine and Israel. That has always struck me as a contradiction. Mr. Giscard d'Estaing said that Turkey was Islamic while Europe was fundamentally Christian. Let me remind him that the Moors defined much of Spanish culture, and that without that history Spain would not be the country it is today.

One other issue will impinge rapidly on the United Kingdom by virtue of enlargement of the European Union: UK membership of the euro. It is getting ever clearer that all the states that are seeking to become members in the next 18 months will be fast upon the escalator to joining the euro. I have a profound worry that this country will be trying to chase the coat tails of the Polish Prime Minister when it comes to our own membership.

[Mr. Chris Bryant]

There are dramatic dangers in Britain staying out of the euro, not least a fall in inward investment, which we are already beginning to see. Investment in France and Germany as a percentage of their gross domestic product has risen since the euro began, whereas in the UK it has dipped in the past two years. We already know of the logistical and cost problems for any UK business that trades in the rest of Europe. At the moment, 57 per cent. of our trade is with European countries in the eurozone. For all those businesses, there are additional costs to our remaining isolated from the euro. The chairman of the British Tourist Authority has argued that tourism in Britain is already losing out by many millions of pounds a year because American long-haul visitors are deciding to visit the rest of the Europe and not the UK because of the euro. Many European travellers are deciding not to come to Britain.

I also worry that we will be sitting on the political sidelines in Europe with other people deciding our economic destiny if we do not join. There are the dangers of the shocks of exchange rate volatility, which dramatically affect in particular manufacturing industry but nearly every aspect of the British economy.

Many arguments are advanced against the UK joining the euro, not least that there will be a significant restraint on UK spending, despite the fact that the French and Irish economies manage themselves differently: 33 per cent. of GDP is spent as opposed to 50 per cent. of GDP by this Government. We would have similar flexibility.

One could advance many arguments. Some people argue that the UK will survive well on its own, that that is what is happening at the moment, that we are doing better than the rest of Europe, so why on earth should we bother? I say to those people: we will be able to survive as an economy on our own—as a niche. If we stay isolated from the euro we will become a niche market, with all the dangers that that entails: we will be prone to the ups and downs of the world economy, and threatened by exchange rate volatility. Of course, we could survive as a country—with higher prices than in the rest of Europe, with fewer jobs than in the rest of Europe and with less economic clout.

9.3 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): The forthcoming summit in Copenhagen will deal with enlargement, which will bring together the nations of Europe on the basis of free trade, international agreement and co-operation founded on current democratic institutions. It will mean a Europe capable of looking after our interests in a global context. It will mean a bigger trading area to create even more prosperity and more jobs. That is why the Government support enlargement: it is good not just for the applicant countries but for the British people.

Europe in the previous century was for the most part divided: there were two world wars, millions of people were killed, and nations across the continent lived in fear of each other. What has been achieved in the past 50 years is astonishing, and history is accelerating. The achievements of the last 50 years outweigh those of the previous 2,000 years. National barriers to goods, people and services have been swept away by the European Union. The development of international road, air, rail, energy and information networks has turned the globe into a village and Europe into a neighbourhood—a community two clicks of a mouse away. These networks are the arteries of the European economy, and the health of that economy is totally dependent on the ability of goods, services and capital—and people—to flow freely around Europe.

An enlarged Europe will bring even more prosperity to its citizens. This is about a strong Britain in a greater Europe. At Copenhagen, EU Heads of State and Government are expected to take all the necessary decisions to conclude accession negotiations with the 10 candidate states identified as ready for EU membership: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia are all destined to become EU members.

The European Council is also expected to decide on a detailed road map for the future accession negotiations and preparations with Bulgaria and Romania, and on the next stage of Turkey's candidacy. I have been fortunate enough to visit Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia this year to look at their preparations for entry into the European Union. I have also visited Romania, which, with Bulgaria, will have all the 31 chapters required for accession closed by 2004, ready for it to enter in 2007.

The popularity of the European Union in those countries is enviable. They all recognise the potential for peace, prosperity and security that membership will bring. It is lamentable that the Conservative party always chooses to attack and denigrate what many other nations hold in high esteem.

Turkey's new Government and eventual accession hold the key to two major problems—

Mr. Bacon: Can the hon. Gentleman give an example of what he says we attack that other nations hold in high esteem?

Mr. Hendrick: The very institutions that bring prosperity and peace to Europe, such as the European Commission. From many Conservative Members, we have heard nothing today but regular attacks on the European Commission and the other institutions.

Mr. Bacon: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, earlier last week, the Court of Auditors of the European Union qualified the Commission's accounts for the eighth year in a row, and that his constituents and mine, as taxpayers, work hard to earn money that they then lose through fraud?

Mr. Hendrick: All institutions lose money. The hon. Gentleman's local authority and mine will have outstanding debts and money that has—

Mr. Bacon: Qualified accounts.

Mr. Hendrick: I am not going to get into a discussion with the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Bacon: Obviously not.

Mr. Hendrick: The hon. Gentleman has made his points, and they do not stack up.

I was talking about Turkey. The willingness of Europeans to accept a predominantly Muslim but secular democracy into the European Union will, as many of my hon. Friends have said, send a signal to all the Muslims in the world that the west is not anti-Muslim, and that the European Union is about peace and democracy, not race and religion.

As I said earlier, I also believe that Turkey's accession would solve the problem of a divided Cyprus—if Kofi Annan's plan has not solved it beforehand. The economic and political security that Turkey's and Cyprus's membership of the EU could add to the military security already provided by NATO would help to remove the scars of a divided island.

Too often we hear from people who should know better that Britain and the rest of Europe are anti-Muslim. Turkey is a key opportunity for Europe, and should be seen as a problem only in so far as it still has to meet the Copenhagen criteria.

With anything up to 25 nations as members, the reform of EU institutions such as the Commission, the Parliament and the Council of Ministers is also on the agenda. The Danish presidency has responded positively to that agenda by producing a report detailing many of the discussions so far and describing three models of presidency reform.

The first option maintains the main features of the current rotating presidency, while extending the co-operation between successive presidencies. I would call that the least change option. It would improve presidency preparations and handovers, but not alter significantly the workings of the presidencies themselves. In an EU of 25 nations, the current model, even in an enhanced form, would be unworkable.

The second option combines an institutional presidency for the Council's co-ordinating chain—the General Affairs and External Relations Council and the Committee of Permanent Representatives—that could be chaired by the secretary-general/high representative or his representatives, with a system of rotating presidencies or elected bodies for most other Council configurations. That model seems arbitrary, and I am not sure what advantages it would bring.

The third option offers the prospect of a team presidency. The team could be composed of three to five members, selected according to criteria such as geography and size, for a given period—one and a half years or two and a half years, for example—renewed at fixed intervals or through a rolling system. That seems the most exciting proposal. It offers a much wider involvement in the presidency, along with maximum co-operation between member states.

I understand that the Danish presidency has proposed strengthening the role of the high representative to respond to the problem posed by the presidency's role in external relations. Proposals include chairing certain Council meetings; representing the EU in international organisations or in meetings with third countries; negotiating international agreements in respect of common foreign and security policy, and in European security and defence policy; submitting proposals; informing the European Parliament; and supervising EU special envoys.

As the European Union enlarges still further, there will be an increased need for a coherent voice to express the EU's general views on both soft and hard diplomacy issues. The ideas put forward by several member states on an elected president of the European Council are also important. This variant could be combined with the second or third of the models that I have mentioned. A European Council president would be elected for a longer period—up to five years—prepare and preside over the European Council, and represent the EU in relations with third countries at heads-of-state level.

In the absence of a European Government, that proposal would go a long way towards giving the EU the identity that it currently lacks. For all the importance of the President of the European Commission and the Council of Ministers, citizens view them with scepticism, and as not being their own. An elected president would give them a figurehead—someone with whom they could identify. I look forward to a successful summit in Copenhagen, and I wish our Government representatives all the best in their deliberations.

9.12 pm

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): I must apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for being unable to be present for the opening speeches; however, I wanted to get in on this matter if possible.

I want to raise an issue that I do not suppose has been raised by anybody else in this debate or elsewhere: the relationship between the European Union, ourselves, the United States and the International Criminal Court. That issue should be debated in this place, and the Government should make a statement on it. Less than two years ago, this House passed legislation on the ICC. For many of us, it was a matter of great pride that we ended something that started at Nuremberg. There were obstacles in the way for many years, but ICC legislation is now on our statute book, and 85 countries throughout the world have ratified the ICC.

However, the ICC is now in danger because of the actions of the United States. The US is not merely saying that it does not agree with the ICC; it is trying to eliminate it. It is doing so, first, by threatening to withdraw peacekeeping forces around the world unless agreement is reached that American forces and personnel will not be subject to the ICC. Secondly, it has passed the American Service Members' Protection Act 2001, which prohibits US involvement in peacekeeping unless US personnel are excluded from the powers of the ICC. Ultimately, it gives the US the power to liberate any American personnel who are kept in The Hague.

Thirdly, the US actively pursued countries to sign bilateral impunity agreements. That is of great significance, as the EU was at the forefront of establishing the ICC. Unless the EU and those countries seeking full EU membership act in a united and co-ordinated fashion, there will be a severe danger that the ICC will be undermined.

When the US approached the EU with the idea of establishing bilateral agreements to exclude US personnel from the activities of the ICC, I hoped that the UK would take the lead and say that that was not on. I hoped that we would say that the ICC could have no credibility if the most powerful nation in the world were excluded from its provisions. Instead, however, the UK sought to establish that there could be bilateral agreements with the US if they followed certain principles.

[Tony Worthington]

I do not have time to go into those principles, as I want other hon. Members to be able to contribute to the debate. Also, I am aware that my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe will not have time, when he replies, to give me the answers to the several questions that I want to raise. However, I hope that he will assure me that he will respond in writing later.

First, will my hon. Friend the Minister describe the current state of negotiations between Britain and the US over an impunity agreement? We know that the Americans have been seeking bilateral agreements with each of the countries in the EU. What stage have those negotiations reached? I think that the House should be told.

Secondly, the EU laid down various principles for the conclusion of bilateral agreements. Have the Americans accepted the European conditions as to when an impunity agreement can be signed, or do they consider the conditions to be inadequate? I believe that about 14 bilateral agreements have been signed so far. The countries that sign such agreements tend to be placed under great pressure by the US. For example, the US has negotiated very aggressively with East Timor and said that it will withdraw resources unless that country agrees to a bilateral agreement. Have any of the agreements signed so far been ratified by the Parliaments of the countries concerned?

Does it remain a condition of EU entry that countries should sign up to the ICC in its entirety, or has that requirement been dropped? What legal advice have the Government received on whether it was legal for the UN Security Council to defer for one year the application of the ICC to the US? Also, what legal advice have the Government received regarding bilateral agreements that conflict with the intentions behind the International Criminal Court Act 2001 that we passed less than two years ago? What has priority—the intentions and contents of the 2001 Act or a bilateral agreement?

This is an important issue. I realise that the Minister cannot answer it fully in 15 minutes. However, the negotiations on legislation that mattered so much to the Labour party in establishing an international criminal court are very important. Does he agree that we should be kept in touch with what is happening if actions are taken that will inevitably weaken something that we created less than two years ago?

9.20 pm

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): I have listened to the debate with great interest for the past two hours. I am conscious that there is at least one other Member who wants to speak, so I will be very brief.

Having listened to a number of contributions, I want to respond particularly to that of the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon), who, unfortunately, is not in his place, and to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant). The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington said that Conservative Members were against Europe and what he called Tuscan evenings. I have to say that I have spent some of the happiest days of my life sitting in deckchairs in Tuscany looking at the towers of San Gimigniano. I had hoped for a rather more profound contribution.

The Italian writer Primo Levi, in one of his greatest books, "I sommersi e i salvati"—"The Drowned and the Saved"—said that as a Jewish holocaust survivor, he could not accept that people should be judged because of the group to which they belonged. He wanted to be judged, above all, as an individual. None the less, he had to accept that there was such a thing as a Hispanidad, a Deutschum and an Italianata, without which there would be no purpose in being a nation.

I think that we have fundamentally misjudged the extent to which there is an emotional glue—here I agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda—that binds the European Union project together. I am talking about people's experiences when Italy, Germany, Spain, Portugal and Greece were fascist dictatorships—some of them even in my lifetime—the experience of the low countries as areas for war and, above all, the experience of France, which was invaded three times by Germany in 70 years. Even if there are good and rational reasons why people might object to this project, I believe that many people are beyond those rational arguments because the emotional glue is so strong. I do not necessarily blame them for that—it is probably right. Fundamentally, however, they underestimate—as I suspect that many people in the House of Commons do—the absolute difference between their situation and ours. We underestimate their emotional glue and they underestimate our tradition and attachment to parliamentary self-government.

We are faced with a project that already has, or will soon get, a Parliament, a flag, an anthem, a currency, a central bank, a driving licence, a passport, a concept of citizenship, a legal system with a hierarchy of courts and a Supreme Court, a criminal justice system with a public prosecutor and a police force, an army, a president and a constitution. That is not what the people of this country wanted or will ever want. I believe that they will uphold their right, expressed through the House of Commons, to be a self-governing democracy, capable of making their own laws, making their own arrangements, setting their own taxes, issuing their own currency and controlling their own destiny.

9.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): It will come as no surprise to hon. Members that I want to focus my remarks on the accession of Cyprus to the European Union.

Let me set the scene by agreeing with almost everyone that the UK is and will be a champion of enlargement in Europe. Ten countries are looking to enter the European Union in 2004 and although they are at various stages of the negotiating process, and there are one or two hiccups, there is a strong political will for that to happen.

I strongly believe that Turkey should be given a date for accession—as several hon. Members have said—although that will be controversial in some quarters. Hon. Members have referred to human rights and the related issue of minorities, as well as democracy in Turkey and the role of the army. Although progress has to be made on all those matters, we should remember that the package of measures passed by the Turkish Parliament earlier this year was deemed to be a good start to the process.

As an hon. Member said earlier, the election process cleared out—if I may use that phrase—all the old guard, the old faces who turned up regularly in Turkish Governments. We have hopes that the new Government will be much more progressive and that they will recognise what needs to be done if the country is to enter Europe in the future.

As I said, I want to concentrate my remarks on the accession of Cyprus. First, it needs to be said loud and clear that Cyprus more than meets the accession criteria. However, the problem for Cyprus is different from that of the other nine states because the island has been divided for the past 28 years. We must give the highest priority to trying to end that division before the accession of Cyprus.

In many international forums nowadays, we talk about the failure to implement UN resolutions. Over the past 28 years, there have been a number of UN resolutions on Cyprus, so its case is stronger than most. A further problem is the continuing isolation of the Turkish-Cypriot community and its relative economic decline during the past 28 years. The Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities in the UK greatly want the island to be reunified. There are thus many reasons to give that priority. There have been many, many attempts to deal with the problems in the past so if we are not successful, for whatever reason, we should recognise that, as has been said many times, Cyprus should none the less accede to membership.

There are three reasons why that is important. First, Cyprus has developed extremely close ties to the EU. It may come as a surprise to some Members that those ties go back as far as the association agreement that was signed in 1972. The history behind that is that when Britain was in the process of entering the EU, Ted Heath went to Cyprus and said that the Cypriots should be thinking along similar lines. They did not take that step then, but entered an association agreement. That was followed, in 1987, by a legal framework, which is still in existence.

Cyprus made its first membership application in 1990—12 years ago. In 1993, the EU recognised for the first time that the Government of Cyprus could make an application on behalf of the whole island. All the subsequent Councils—Luxembourg in 1993, Corfu in 1994, Essen in 1995 and so on—recognised the validity of Cyprus's application.

In 1998, it was agreed to start accession negotiations and the watershed came at Helsinki. In that connection, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House, who was then Foreign Secretary. He played a role in resolving the controversy at that time by saying that Cyprus should accede but that all relevant factors should be taken into account. That view still stands.

Since 1998, all the progress reports have stated positively that Cyprus should be able to enter the EU. Indeed, the last report, before the Council meeting in September, confirms once again that Cyprus fulfils the political criteria, that it respects human rights and freedoms, that it has developed a market economy and can compete within the EU. Indeed, there is talk of Cyprus joining the euro almost as soon as it enters the Community. It will indeed be a member.

Everyone realises that there are still one or two things to iron out as regards the acquis communautaire, but no one sees that as a stumbling block. We would then see the culmination of the closer and closer relationship that has developed between the EU and Cyprus.

Secondly, there has been all-party support in the House for Cyprus's membership. I can trace such support back to the 1997 Labour party election manifesto, which gave priority to the enlargement process. More importantly, that manifesto refers particularly to Cyprus's application to join the EU. Indeed, an accompanying document was issued at the time in the name of my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. It was called "Labour on Cyprus" and stated:

> "We all want Cyprus to join as a united island. But we are clear that accession must not be made conditional on settlement and that there must be no right of veto for any third party."

That policy was adopted across Europe at the Helsinki conference. I could quote one ministerial statement after another—indeed, I could quote Opposition Members who sit on the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benches—all confirming and underpinning that policy.

If we are to be entirely consistent, if we are to recognise our long-term commitment to Cyprus and, indeed, if we are to maintain the integrity of our position and that of Europe, it is critical that Cyprus should enter. Given all the commitments that I have mentioned, we should not countenance the loss of credibility that would occur—not only in the United Kingdom and on the island itself, but across Europe—if Cyprus were not to enter.

Thirdly, I want to consider the phrase "all relevant factors", which was arrived at during the Helsinki meeting. All sorts of people have interpreted that phrase and related it to the UN negotiation process. I shall briefly mention the background to those negotiations because the Whip is waving at me even though I thought that I still had another four minutes to speak. The background includes UN resolutions, the high-level agreements that were reached and the acquis communautaire. The Cyprus Government have lived within those agreements and tried to interpret them constructively; so much so that, in June this year, the UN commended them on being constructive in trying to assist and on being flexible in trying to reach an agreement.

It was not possible to reach an agreement, but the recent framework agreement produced by the UN Secretary-General shows that all the political parties—not only Greek Cypriot, but Turkish Cypriot—have agreed that that document can form the basis of negotiations. So people are working constructively, but there are problems. I often read about the difficulties, and I was somewhat embarrassed and saddened by the comments made by Mr. Denktash on returning to Cyprus a couple of days ago, but we need to maintain a positive attitude to the process. That has been done in Cyprus, and it is what we should do. With good will, we can move towards a settlement, but I return to my original point: if that settlement is not achieved, we need to accept that Cyprus should join the EU.

9.33 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): Today we are certainly at a critical and historic juncture in the EU's development. We are on the brink of enlargement and, will effectively make history in Copenhagen, as the EU is extended to many of our eastern European friends, as well as, of course, Cyprus and Malta. There have been many excellent speeches today—of course all with the theme of welcoming the enlargement process—and I should like to mention one or two of the hon. Members who have spoken.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) talked about Cyprus, as indeed the hon. Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) has done. There is cross-party support and understanding on that issue. We earnestly hope that a settlement will be reached, but, of course, if that does not happen, it cannot in any way be allowed to impede the process of the Republic of Cyprus into full membership of the EU. I agree with the right hon. Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) who talked about the historic fulfilment of a process and said how remarkable it was that we had overcome obstacles that hindered us for many decades and reached this point. My hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) said that there was still work to do and talked about the need for judicial reform in the accession countries, and for transparency and efficiency in the European Commission. The hon. Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore) talked about rapprochement between Greece and Turkey, which is very important. Many hon. Members have welcomed Turkey's progress towards accession to the EU and the resulting positive developments.

My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) talked about Turkey and withdrawal. We want an EU that works for its members so that the question of dismemberment and withdrawal does not arise—we are dedicated to that aim. The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) talked about Tuscan nights and all sorts of things. I am not quite sure what his two principles are but he certainly spoke powerfully. The hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) also talked about Turkey and, importantly, fishing. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has written today to the Prime Minister asking him to raise the specific issue of the common fisheries policy in Copenhagen. I believe that all hon. Members accept that that problem needs to be resolved.

The hon. Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) was right that enlargement is an extraordinary event. His many achievements include writing "Glenda Jackson—The Biography", but I do not know how many copies have been sold. However, he talked about the relationship between the Commission, the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament. Last week, the debate on the Convention on the Future of Europe demonstrated the Government's flabby attitude. We need a practical, step-by-step process to enable the EU to face up to the challenges of the 21st century, and in last week's debate, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) set out in detail the building blocks that are vital to reconnect the EU to its members and tackle the democratic deficit. It was saddening but not entirely surprising that the Minister for Europe failed to respond to any of my right hon. Friend's practical and imaginative suggestions, and concluded:

> "We finish where we began, alas, on the debate between those in the House who want a stronger and more effective European Union in which nation states have a clear and defined role, and those who want us to leave the European Union. That, again and again, is the difference."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 723.]

He missed the point entirely. Throughout the European Union, there are people who either wish to withdraw from the EU or oppose its enlargement. That view is more widely held in some countries than here. Conservative Members are trying to address the issue head-on by making constructive policy suggestions. That is the real difference between the Opposition and the Government both now and in last week's debate.

In the past five and a half years, members of the Government have made many accurate criticisms and observations about the EU's structures and direction—they have spoken of the "elites" of Europe and a sense of disconnection. However, despite their analyses of the problems facing the EU, they have failed to secure the return of even one increasingly centralised power to national Parliaments. It was instructive that not one Government Member has mentioned the role of national Parliaments—they speak the language of subsidiarity but have consistently failed to deliver.

Mr. Woodward: I remind the hon. Gentleman that I talked extensively about the role of national Parliaments, but he was not in his place.

Mr. Spring: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, and will read what he said in *Hansard* with great interest.

Two years ago, before Nice, the then Secretary of State talked about the extension of qualified majority voting by the French presidency. He ruled it out in advance and said that the vast majority of proposals were unacceptable. In practice, as we have seen time and time again with this Government, they meekly accepted a clear majority of the proposals that had nothing to do with enlargement.

Similarly, we witnessed the creation of the European rapid reaction force. We are, of course, committed to enhanced pan-European defence co-operation, but that must be achieved under the umbrella of NATO. Again, before St. Malo, the Prime Minister made it clear that he did not want an EU defence capability outside NATO, but at Nice that is precisely what was signed up to. Once more, the Government gave way.

It is hugely important that we continue to engage with our US ally. We are already seeing defence spending levels that are wholly inadequate right across the EU. I note that in Germany the defence budget is to be cut still further. In addition, the Government should clearly have refused to allow the charter of fundamental rights to go forward. We were told that it was simply proclaimed on the sidelines of Nice and that it would have no legal significance greater than the content of the *Beano*. As always, the Government were wrong. The Commission stated at the time:

> "In practice, the real question is when and how it"—

that is, the charter—

> "should be incorporated in the Treaties".

The Government speak about constructive engagement, but do not stand up for their beliefs and give in, time and again.

The same thing is now happening on the proposed constitution. We were told one thing, and in practice something entirely different has emerged. It will simply lead to a great expansion of judge-led law in this country. During the debate last week, we heard much justification from the former Minister for Europe, now Secretary of State for Wales, for horizontal articles that would somehow

"block the charter from being invoked to change nationally determined domestic law."—[*Official Report*, 2 December 2002; Vol. 395, c. 681.]

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) pointed out clearly in the working group that that was simply not the case, and that the great arguments that had been advanced by the Government and won by the Government, according to the right hon. Member for Neath (Peter Hain), were not true at all.

The Government have been in office for five and a half years, and we are entitled to make judgments on their conduct of foreign policy in relation to the EU and elsewhere. When the Government came to office, we witnessed the extraordinary event of the then Foreign Secretary announcing a foreign policy based on ethical considerations, with the bizarre and offensive implication that distinguished former Foreign Secretaries such as my noble Friend Lord Hurd and Sir Malcolm Rifkind pursued an unethical one in their defence of UK national interests. Over a period of five years, as with any Government, there will be high and low points. My right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes has freely acknowledged recently the constructive role played by the Foreign Secretary in securing the Security Council resolution in respect of Iraq.

However, nowhere has an ethical dimension of foreign policy been more blown to smithereens than by the way the Foreign Secretary and the former Minister for Europe have conducted themselves with regard to Gibraltar. Never can a Foreign Secretary have acquired the dubious distinction of infuriating not only the people of Gibraltar, but British public opinion, and sending the Spanish Government up the garden path. It was a fantastic diplomatic failure. It is not only those on the Opposition Benches who take that view. The Foreign Affairs Committee report spelled that view out clearly.

The Prime Minister has spoken of a unified foreign policy, whatever that means. Of course, we do not favour a common foreign policy that would deprive Britain of an independent capability to pursue our national interests. The UK is at the centre of many concentric circles—the EU, the UN Security Council, NATO, the G8 and the Commonwealth, which, coupled with our history, places us in a unique position for a medium-sized power and gives us unparalleled global reach. Our country, able to pursue these links and operate freely in international affairs within these circles, offers considerable benefits to the EU. Those are a bonus, not something to be given up.

Of course, increased co-operation in foreign affairs is desirable, but when the EU needs to come to a common position—for example, on the issue of Zimbabwe—difficulties can arise, as in the meeting between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific countries on the question of visas. I hope that the Minister will refer to that, as it is a matter of genuine concern. I hope that the Minister will explain when he replies how we are to send a clear message when we have such problems with international organisations linked into the EU.

Europe faces a massive challenge post-enlargement. The EU has been hugely successful in keeping the peace on the continent, developing the single market and bringing the people of Europe together, but it has been less good at forging an economic environment that will enable it to compete in the 21st century.

The culture of centralisation and harmonisation runs powerfully in the EU and must be fought against because it undermines its success. That is the challenge. The EU was originally forged in the cold war era when the bloc mentality prevailed. It is perfectly understandable that the attitudes of a generation of European leaders were influenced by that, but the time has now come to move on.

We, in contrast to what has substantially become a mentality that is frozen in time, have set out a clear vision, as my right hon. Friend did last week, and a set of steps, which will reconnect the people of Europe with the EU and offer the necessary flexibility to the accession countries during the next few years. That will enable us to escape the bloc mentality that has informed much of the European debate in order to offer the much needed flexibility necessary for the EU to thrive and prosper.

History is to be made in the next two or three days. Let us embrace the challenge that it offers, but offer the people of Europe, both in the existing and the accession countries, structures with which they can feel comfortable. For that we need fresh and radical thinking. History, in turn, demands that of us.

9.46 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I, too, have a printed out, pre-cooked and pre-digested speech, but as Minister for Europe I am trying to respond to debates and to have a conversation about Europe. If the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) will forgive me, I would rather not reply to each point in his pot-pourri of ideas, which contained every cliché and obsession about Europe of the past 20 years. He referred to the problem of the bloc mentality. My difficulty in debating with some Opposition Members in particular is their blockhead mentality.

In his opening remarks, the shadow Foreign Secretary condemned the idea of an integrationist approach to Europe. I want to integrate in NATO and in the World Trade Organisation. I have no problems with our integrating in Europe. The right hon. Gentleman accused us of being instinctive integrationists. For my part, I plead guilty. He is an instinctive isolationist. From the 1930s, through imperial preferences and right back to Tory support for the corn laws, that problem has condemned the Tories to year after year in opposition.

The hon. Member for West Suffolk said that the Conservatives are all in favour of Europe. In a speech on 9 May 2002, the shadow Foreign Secretary said that EU enlargement had always enjoyed the support of the

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

Conservative party. It had its own referendum only a few months ago and it booted out the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), whom the shadow Cabinet had selected to represent the Conservative party on the Convention, and through a free vote of all its Members elected the right hon. Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). Speaking for the Conservative party on the Convention on Radio 4's "Analysis" programme on 5 December, he said that he was very worried about enlargement—that it was one of those unexamined good ideas that people were afraid to oppose but had not really thought through the consequences of. He went on to say that it would be extremely expensive. That is the formal voice for transmission to Warsaw, Prague and Bratislava of the Opposition Front Bench, but where is their real voice? There is only one Member on their Back Benches now. He spoke well, but the rest are utterly absent. I do not think that the burghers of central and eastern Europe, the folk of the Mediterranean who are coming into the European Union or even my very good friends in Gibraltar will be very impressed by the emptiness of the Opposition Benches during this important discussion.

We have heard some constructive speeches. In particular, excellent speeches about the importance of Turkey's entry into the European Union and the rightful claims of the people of Cyprus in that regard were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Hendon (Mr. Dismore), my right hon. Friend the Member for Swansea, East (Donald Anderson) and my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love). I think that they spoke for the majority in the House and across the party divide.

I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz) for his congratulations and prescience. His blessing upon my head has turned out to have put me where I am. I hope that I will last at least as long as he did. He emphasised the need for reforms and spoke about the case of Lady Catherine Meyer, which concerns many of us in government. There is a problem, as the German court system does not work in accordance with norms that have been agreed elsewhere in Europe, and if we are to secure justice for Lady Meyer we need a more integrated approach. There is no justice to be gained for her from the Tory approach.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore), who spoke for the Liberal Democrats, welcomed enlargement and referred to the need for common agricultural policy reform. I think that he spoke for many in the House. Along with the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson), he also referred to the very serious crisis that faces the fishing communities and fishing folk of Scotland. The subject is technical and I am not entirely sure that it will not be best dealt with at the specialist council, where moves can perhaps be taken forward under qualified majority voting. I assure both hon. Gentlemen that I have had a discussion with my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary on the Bench tonight and that we will discuss the matter with the Prime Minister tomorrow. The tactics of exactly how an issue should be brought to the fore in the European Union are difficult and need to be considered. They must also be put into effect in the most efficient way. One can always pick up a megaphone and shout across the channel, but I am not sure whether that is the best way of advancing the cause of Britain, Scotland and the fishermen. None the less, I promise to keep in the closest touch with hon. Members from Scotland about the issue.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), who is not in his seat, made a very constructive speech. *[Interruption.]* I see that he has been transposed to the Front Bench. He made an important speech in which he referred to the need for discussion at Copenhagen about the Israel-Palestine dispute. I assure him that that will be discussed—indeed, Foreign Ministers are already discussing it—and I hope that there will be a positive declaration on it.

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) made a remarkable speech. He promised to be candid, which makes me think of the lines of a former Foreign Secretary, the great Lord Canning, who said that of all the ills that heaven can send,

"save me . . . from the candid friend."

My hon. Friend took us to the highways and byways of Tuscany and San Gimignano, and called for us all to be honest with people. He also said that his first and most important principle was to get on with it, so I propose to do exactly that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Ms Munn) called for more focus on language learning in Europe, and my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Bryant) said that English was going to be an increasingly dominant language in Europe. Indeed, when I heard the Foreign Ministers of the accession countries making their presentations at my first Brussels General Affairs Council meeting, they all spoke English. However, we make a huge mistake if we believe that a monolingual Britain will make advances in a European Union, let alone a globalised community.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley gave excellent examples of programmes. I should like her to send details to Opposition Front Benchers. Although I am sure that they are all gifted linguists, or can certainly do wonderful things with their tongues, it would be no bad thing for them to learn a foreign language and thus understand the cultures of the countries with which we must communicate. Indeed, 10,000 EU students are studying in UK universities and approximately 1 million students from the EU study in universities outside their countries. I welcome that development. We must look forward to the new Europe that is being built by younger people and students in their universities, not the Europe of separated nation states, closed borders and frightened peoples, to which Conservative Front Benchers bear witness.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda made the important point that the European Union is the world's greatest experiment in liberal democracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) said that the achievements of Europe in the past 50 years outweighed those of the past 2,000 years. The shadow Foreign Secretary, who is muttering, read history at Oxford. I believe that he got only as far as Hobbes and the invocation of the war of all against all. I do him an injustice because I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a convinced European. He does not believe a word of the anti-European drivel that his leader forces him to

pump out. Conservative Members should pay attention to the recent intervention by Lord Heseltine, a great Conservative.

My hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda mentioned the increase in trade. He is right. Trade with the accession front-runners from the former Soviet bloc has increased by 400 per cent. since 1990. That is 10 times the growth of the UK's trade with the rest of the world.

My hon. Friend the Member for Clydebank and Milngavie (Tony Worthington) posed an important set of questions. He is a former Minister, and he was extremely courteous in saying that I could write to him with the replies. I shall do that.

The hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) made a fine, short intervention in which he talked about the emotional glue that holds nations together. He is right, but we can all

"call spirits from the vasty deep"

to quote Hotspur, and turn them into fears. We have a choice: we can live under the shadow of our fears about Europe or in the sunshine of our hopes and the vision of our ambition. The House and the country want to live with ambition and hope.

Reference has been made to referendums that might be called on various aspects of Europe, but two great consultations on Europe have taken place in the past five years. One happened in 1997 and the other in 2001. In both cases, the British people had a simple choice: yes to Europe or yes to the Conservative party. There was no contest.

I hope that in our next debate, we can set aside the clichés, talk to each other and find ways in which to reconnect the great Conservative party to its internationalist and European tradition. To that end, I shall not invite my hon. Friend the Member for St. Helens, South (Mr. Woodward), who made a powerful and eloquent speech, to recross the Floor because he is happy here and we want him with us.

At some stage, the Conservative party will have to talk sense on Europe. Conservative Members had a choice tonight—at the beginning of the debate and at the end—but, once again, we heard nothing from them. They have missed the bus on Europe and they have missed any chance of connecting with the British people.

It being Ten o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the House lapsed, without Question put.

Winter Fuel Payments

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.— *[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

10 pm

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): During a bitterly cold week such as this, it is appropriate and timely to debate entitlement to winter fuel allowances. I welcome the fact that pensioners are entitled to claim them, although a decent basic state pension might be a better alternative. We might question the eligibility of pensioners who over-winter in places such as Guadeloupe, Martinique, southern Spain or the Canary islands—hardly cold weather areas—for claiming the £200 winter fuel allowance.

The real issue, however, is the denial of winter fuel payments to severely disabled people. Although it was a fully costed Liberal Democrat manifesto commitment in the 2001 general election, this is not a party political issue. The hon. Member for Kingswood (Mr. Berry) submitted early-day motion 289 on the subject in October 2001 and I submitted early-day motion 209 14 days ago. The two motions were signed by more than 170 Members from every party in the House—Labour, Liberal Democrat, Conservative, Plaid Cymru, Scottish nationalist, Ulster Unionist, Social Democratic and Labour, and Democratic Unionist.

In the other place, Lord Ashley of Stoke, Lord Rix and Lord Addington have all pressed the Government—to no avail—to reconsider on this issue on a number of occasions.

The all-party Trade and Industry Committee report on fuel poverty, dated September 2002, recommended:

"An increase in the level of benefits for particularly vulnerable groups is another obvious way of tackling fuel poverty. The Winter Fuel Payment has been of benefit to pensioners. We urge the Government to look at extending this to other vulnerable groups. For example, there is a powerful case for extending the winter fuel payment to disabled people whose condition requires extra spending on heating."

The all-party parliamentary group on disability has challenged Ministers several times on this issue, and many disability organisations are campaigning on the matter. They include Disability Now, the Disability Rights Commission and 21 other groups at the last count. Ann Robinson, chair of Energywatch, gave evidence to the Trade and Industry Committee, saying that she, too, supported payment of the allowance to severely disabled people.

Why does such a wide range of people, parties and expert groups believe that severely disabled people should qualify for the winter fuel allowances? Disability Now launched the campaign in October 2000 with a survey of its readers. More than 4,000 disabled people and their supporters responded. Of those, 1,800 severely disabled people filled in a questionnaire explaining how they manage and why they need the winter fuel payment. Their comments have much in common: they cope as best they can with extra layers of clothes and hot water bottles, by living in just one room in the house, missing out on holidays, skimping on food and by, as some describe it, hibernating. They all say that the £200 would allow them to turn on or turn up their heating. There is a widespread dread of heating bills, and some people are still paying them off over the summer. Those

[Paul Holmes]

are exactly the arguments that we used to hear on behalf of pensioners before they became entitled to the allowance.

In July 1999, major Government research, "Disability in Great Britain", found that disabled people most frequently put fuel and transport at the top of their costs. The research found that many severely disabled people with impaired walking function and care needs experience severe financial hardship because they are at home most of the time with no job and they need to maintain a constant temperature, including at night. As a discrete group, they are as likely as, if not more likely than, the broad, heterogeneous group of people aged over 60 to experience financial hardship and fuel poverty. Leonard Cheshire, in its research, found that one third of the disabled people in its survey could not afford to meet the extra heating costs arising from their disability, and that they had a lower average income than did the general population.

Severely disabled people often need extra heat and hot water because of their medical or physical condition. Because they are often housebound, they have to keep their heating on all day—unlike those who go out to work—and they often have to keep it on all night because of their disability. It has also been pointed out in the Government's 1999 research and by Leonard Cheshire that such people are often in financial hardship.

Given some previous answers from Ministers, it is likely that we shall hear tonight that the disability living allowance can be used to cover heating costs. The need for extra heating is not, however, one of the eligibility criteria for disability living allowance. The mobility component of the allowance is awarded when someone needs help with mobility outside the home. It has nothing to do with heating requirements. The care component of the disability living allowance is awarded when someone needs substantial help with personal care. It does not even cover the full cost of such care. For example, two hours of care per day at £5 an hour is £70 a week. The disability living allowance care allowance is £37.65 a week. Despite that, disabled people are also told by the Government to put their disability living allowance towards any extra clothing requirements, laundry costs and special food requirements that may arise from their disabilities. Just how far is this one allowance supposed to stretch?

Another Government response has been to refer to the availability of insulation grants, but Tricia Higgins wrote to Disability Now to say:

> "My pain levels are massively increased, and my mobility greatly reduced, during cold weather because I cannot keep the house warm enough. I live in a modern bungalow, with all the insulation, draught proofing, double glazing, etc., but because of my limited mobility and poor circulation I have major problems in keeping warm—like many other people around the country. I would simply like to be able to keep my living room and bedroom warm enough so that I don't suffer so badly during cold weather, without building huge debts—is that too much to ask? Apparently for this government, it is."

The Government have also argued that older people suffer the most from fuel poverty, and that that is why they, and not disabled people, are targeted for the winter fuel allowance. Even if that were true, it would not represent a humane and just approach to severely disabled people. Lord Ashley was given figures from the 1998 follow-up survey to the English house conditions survey that showed that, while 29 per cent. of pensioner households were in fuel poverty in 1998, 22 per cent. of disabled households were also in fuel poverty—a not dissimilar proportion.

The Government have also said that additional payments are available for people on income support—the disability income guarantee, which provides an extra £11.05. The introduction of this payment in 2000 was an admission that the existing support was inadequate, but it is only £11.05, not £200. Furthermore, it is only available to about 130,000 adults and 30,000 children who need 24-hour care. It will not help people with mobility impairment, for example, who need extra heat but have lower care needs, and so do not qualify.

Lord Ashley has argued that the Government's refusal to extend winter fuel payments is "illogical, anomalous and unjust". He has said that severely disabled people suffer from immobility in the cold just as much as pensioners and, in some cases, more. The hon. Member for Kingswood has said that the Government's position on this matter is "incoherent". I hope that the Minister will reconsider this illogical, anomalous, unjust and incoherent position, and end this powerful injustice that discriminates against severely disabled people.

10.9 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) on securing this debate on an important subject at a very appropriate time. May I say at the outset that the Government do, of course, take the issues concerning people with disabilities very seriously? That is why we have provided extra cash benefits—social security benefits—for this group of at-risk people, as I shall demonstrate later. However, we introduced winter fuel payments during our first winter in office specifically to help older people with their heating bills. Research from the 1996 English housing condition survey showed that about half the households in fuel poverty contained someone aged 60 or over—only 4 per cent. were headed by a person receiving disability living allowance or their partner. We wanted to ensure that no pensioner was afraid to turn up the heating in cold weather, such as the spell that we are experiencing, owing to a worry over cost. Now, more than 11 million older people in about 8 million households are receiving help with their heating costs. We are proud of that.

The winter fuel payment cost some £1.7 billion last year, but as usual, the speech from the Liberal Democrat Benches was a cost-free zone. There comes a time in grown-up politics, however, when people have to discuss the cost of their proposals.

Paul Holmes *rose—*

Malcolm Wicks: Obviously, I want to respond to the points that the hon. Gentleman has made, but of course this is his debate, so I am happy to give way.

Paul Holmes: As I pointed out, the 2001 manifesto was fully costed and it said where the money would come from and where it would be spent. The argument depends on the number of severely disabled people: if it were about 1 million, the cost would be £200 million while the cost for the maximum suggested—1.7 million people—would be £340 million. That compares with the £1.7 billion paid out to 11.5 million pensioners last year.

Malcolm Wicks: Yes, indeed. We are spending the £1.7 billion and we are, perfectly properly, spending a considerable amount more on benefits for people with disabilities. At some stage, those on the Liberal Democrat Benches must get out their calculator and work out whether all their demands on the public purse add up to a penny on income tax, which seems to be their main funding commitment in the 21st century.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Cheap, cheap.

Malcolm Wicks: It is not cheap. The Liberal Democrats are proposing quite an expensive policy and they need to do their political arithmetic.

The hon. Member for Chesterfield did not allow for the fact that those receiving the winter fuel payment include about 850,000 people who get DLA and all 1.3 million who get attendance allowance, as they are over 60. He talks about people with disabilities as if none are receiving the winter fuel payment—large quantities of them are. In fact, about 60 per cent. of all people with disabilities already get the winter fuel payment, which he does not seem fully to understand.

Of course we are aware that people with disabilities can face extra costs in doing what others take for granted, especially, perhaps, younger people. That is why there are specific benefits available for disabled people in recognition of their extra costs. Let us consider the benefits available. The hon. Gentleman predicted that I would talk about DLA, but why should I not do so? I do not know whether he understands the public expenditure implications, but that allowance alone costs £7.6 billion in the current year. Quite properly, a considerable sum of public money is being spent on one allowance; he referred to it rather pejoratively as just one allowance. Does he have any understanding of the considerable support that that money gives to people with disabilities? He simply did not recognise that.

The care component of DLA ranges from £14.90 to over £56 a week, and the mobility component is up to £39. That means that the maximum DLA is over £95 a week. DLA is a contribution towards extra costs resulting from the effects of disability and the amounts payable are not based on the calculation of specific costs. People are free to spend the money according to their priorities and needs. I repeat that the amount we are spending, well over £7 billion, is considerably more than that involved in what could in a sense be described as the rather modest proposal presented by the hon. Gentleman.

Disability living allowance is a contribution to the extra costs facing people with disabilities. It never constituted a guarantee to cover every extra penny that a person might spend. In the late 1980s, however, the then Government commissioned four surveys from the Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys to provide comprehensive information about people with disabilities. The results showed that the then benefits were well directed towards the most common costly disabilities. In most cases it was found that the amount was more than enough to cover disability-related expenditure. That is why disability living allowance, which is increased each year in line with prices, continues to be paid according to a person's care and mobility needs, and allows that person complete freedom in terms of how the benefit is spent.

We give extra financial support to the poorest people with disabilities. For example, a severely disabled person receiving the highest rate of care component—more than £56—and a higher rate of mobility component—more than £39—of the allowance could be entitled to both the disability premium of £23 and enhanced disability premium of more than £11 in his or her income support. That represents some £6,700 extra benefit per year. In dismissing this as a single allowance, the hon. Gentleman deliberately understated the amount that we are giving people with disabilities.

The new disability income guarantee from April 2001, which includes the enhanced disability premium in the income-related benefits, is helping 125,000 of the poorest severely disabled people under 60, ensuring an overall income of at least £144 a week for a single person over 25 and £189 for a couple. This is detailed arithmetic and comes rather late in the day, but I am forced to present it here because of the rather cursory way in which the hon. Gentleman has dismissed the considerable support that the Government, on behalf of the wider community, are properly giving to people with disabilities.

From April 2002, young people disabled early in life who have not had the opportunity to work can receive up to £28 a week more in incapacity benefit than they would have received under the old disablement allowance. Since October 2000 families with a disabled child have received extra help through the disabled child tax credit, and from April 2001 very severely disabled adults and children can receive the enhanced disability tax credit. Both are part of the working families tax credit and the disabled persons tax credit. Those disability and enhanced disability elements will be carried forward into the new child tax credit and working tax credit, which replace working families tax credit and disabled persons tax credit next April.

People whose income support includes a disability premium are also entitled to cold weather payments. If the average temperature drops below zero degrees centigrade for seven consecutive days, a payment of £8.50 is made automatically. Such extreme circumstances may well be recognised, and the payment triggered, during the current cold period, but it will be up to the Met Office to decide. The amount that needs to be spent is only one element of the problem of fuel poverty, however. Fuel poverty is caused by a combination of factors including poorly constructed and poorly insulated houses, inefficient heating systems, under-occupancy and fuel prices as well as low incomes.

Tackling fuel poverty in the United Kingdom is one of our key priorities. That is why a number of measures have been introduced to ensure that by 2010 no

[Malcolm Wicks]

vulnerable household will have to struggle to heat its home. Those measures are detailed in the Government's document "The UK Fuel Poverty Strategy", which we issued on 21 November 2001. Its publication followed a wide-ranging consultation, beginning in February 2000, with some 300 interested parties. The fuel poverty strategy sets out a comprehensive package of initiatives designed to meet specific targets for the reduction of fuel poverty throughout the United Kingdom. The measures deal with factors causing fuel poverty, in particular, energy efficiency and fuel prices. They include a cut in VAT on fuel and radical improvements to the home energy efficiency scheme.

In June 2000, the Government launched the new home energy efficiency scheme to help those households most at risk from cold-related ill health. The scheme is now marketed as warm front, and offers a range of insulation and heating measures to those who receive certain benefits. Both attendance allowance and disability living allowance are benefits that can entitle a person to help from the scheme. The grant maximum for people under 60 has been increased to £1,500 this year.

The warm front team acts as the delivery mechanism for the scheme. It recognises the wide range of organisations that are involved in identifying households in need and in delivering help to them: voluntary organisations, doctors, health professionals, social services, local authorities, as well as the installers and scheme managers. I have been referring to England but, of course, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have similar schemes.

I hope that hon. Members will see from what I have said that people with severe disabilities can, and do, receive considerable help. I hope that hon. Members will encourage their constituents to claim the help that they are entitled to. However, we are still convinced that winter fuel payments should remain targeted at the people they were introduced to help: older people.

Richard Younger-Ross: I fear that the Minister is missing a key element of what my hon. Friend the Member for Chesterfield (Paul Holmes) was saying. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches would not decry a lot that the present Government have done to help disabled people; we welcome it. However, the Minister is not recognising the essential difference for people who are very poor and struggling. If they are on benefit, by definition, they do not have a lot of money. They would never argue that being on benefit makes them wealthy and gives them a lot of disposable income. Ministers and Members of Parliament do have disposable income. We spend our money throughout the year without regard; it is easy. Winter budget and summer budget differences are key for people who are poor. If they spend more money in winter, it is difficult to cope. The winter fuel allowance picks that up and recognises the difference between summer spending and winter spending.

Malcolm Wicks: In many respects, the essence of the winter fuel payment scheme is its simplicity. It goes to all older people without a means test. It does not have the complexity of income-tested schemes—of course, we need income-tested schemes in certain sectors—and it is geared towards older people, because of our recognition that older people, although in a variety of housing and financial circumstances, are more at risk of the cold physiologically.

Of course, it is always easy—I do not mean that pejoratively—for Back Benchers to suggest ways in which other groups, often with great needs, should be allowed to benefit from different social security entitlements. I can well imagine someone in an Adjournment debate making an eloquent case as to why winter fuel payments might go to poorer families with children under five, for example. One could put together quite a good speech on that issue, but the winter fuel payment is a benefit that works because of its simplicity. I have also argued that considerable resources are expended, properly, in other ways on people with disabilities, some of whom depend on their homes virtually 24 hours a day, while some, because of the disability living allowance and mobility component, can go into the community and work in the mainstream labour market like the rest of us can. To say that it would be a very targeted benefit if we provided it to all people on disability benefits is a little inaccurate. It is easy to come to the House and argue that we should spend public funds in other ways.

One of the reasons why I am pleased to be here is that at least we are discussing a winter fuel payment scheme; if we did not have a scheme we could not discuss it. This reminds me of debates about whether the minimum wage should be higher. I welcome those debates, because we now have a minimum wage and winter fuel payments—thanks to this Government.

I have not come here tonight just to read a speech written by my Department to defend our policies—although I am happy to do that. As long ago as 1972, as a young social scientist, along with consultants in geriatric medicine and other scientists of different kinds, I took part in the first ever survey of environmental conditions and body temperatures affecting elderly people in Britain. We published our work in the *British Medical Journal* in 1973, and produced the first ever estimate of the extent to which our elderly people are at risk from low body temperature.

Some years later I wrote a book called "Old and cold: hypothermia and social policy". I assure the hon. Member for Chesterfield that whatever our differences, I have a deep commitment to the issue. We can argue about the extent to which other groups should be included in the policy, although I am proud to make a robust defence of our position, and our policies on disability and winter fuel payments.

Although I am proud of the progress that we have made over the 30 years since I did my research with others, I am nevertheless struck by the fact that as we meet tonight in a well heated House of Commons, the cold spell is currently affecting at-risk people. Despite our efforts with home energy efficiency, with winter fuel payments and in other ways, there will be people who take to their bedrooms at 6 or 7 o'clock this evening because that is the only warm place that they have.

I know that the excess winter mortality rate in this country, compared with that in other European countries—not least the cold countries of Scandinavia—is far too considerable. I am not complacent, but I am confident that we have in place fuel policy strategies, insulation strategies—and yes, our winter fuel payment schemes too—allied to our other policies on employment and disability, which one day, although sadly, not tonight and not yet, will consign the problem of fuel poverty and the "old but cold" issue to the place where they belong: the dustbin of British social history.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-seven minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 12 December 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TREASURY

The Chancellor of the Exchequer was asked—

Public Spending

1. **Ann Winterton** (Congleton): What representations he received in advance of the pre-Budget report on the targets he has set for outputs from public spending. [85247]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Numerous representations are received in advance of the pre-Budget report on a range of matters, including individual targets. Departments are responsible for delivering, and reporting progress on, their own public service agreements.

Ann Winterton: The Chief Secretary will be aware that concern about the Government's high rate of tax and spending growth featured in the International Monetary Fund report published this week, which highlights the need for effective and efficient delivery for taxpayers' money. Is he aware of the national health service data published today which show that up to April this year NHS funding was up by 21.5 per cent, but that hospital treatment outcomes are up by only 1.6 per cent. and hospital admissions are down by 0.5 per cent? When will we see real reform for real public service improvements—or will it be the same old story of missed targets, more tax and spend, and more failure?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Lady's strictures are misconceived. I am well aware of the IMF report. It states that the economic achievements of the Government are due in no small part to our sound macro-economic policies. That was not something that could ever have been said about the achievements of the hon. Lady's party when it was in office.

In fact, the NHS figures reveal that there has been an 11 per cent. increase in the number of patients admitted to hospital against the comparable figure for 1997–98. The number of medical procedures taking place has increased by almost 1 million. That is a record to be proud of—resources accompanied by reform delivering results.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): The three primary care trusts in Doncaster will see an increase in their funding of more than 30 per cent. over the next three years. When I was elected in 1997, there were huge health inequalities in the area and we have been trying to put that right. Although much has been done, we still need to focus on primary care to ensure that people do not develop diseases that may kill them later on in life.

Mr. Boateng: My hon. Friend makes a good point about the importance of ensuring that we address inequalities—hence the appointment of a Minister for Public Health, as well as our continuing drive to reduce inequalities, using targets, and the announcements made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for Health yesterday. Again, that amounts to resource, reform, results.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): As the Chief Secretary knows, the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health think that an important contribution to greater outputs from public spending on the health service can be made by foundation hospitals. The First Minister for Wales and the Secretary of State for Wales disagree. What is the Treasury view?

Mr. Boateng: The Treasury view was made clear by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer when, in the course of the pre-Budget report to the House and subsequently, he made repeated reference to the benefits—actual and potential—of foundation hospitals, in terms of delivering resource with reform and meeting local needs according to the concerns of local people. That is something that Opposition Members should welcome.

Mr. Howard: We know why the Chancellor did not answer the question: because he told *The Guardian* less than a month ago that he was opposed to foundation hospitals. He thinks that they give NHS bosses too much power, so why will the Chancellor not tell the House what he told *The Guardian*?

Mr. Boateng: Not that *Guardian* breakfast again—how many times is that meal going to be regurgitated by the right hon. and learned Gentleman? He has the facts. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor supports foundation hospitals and so should the shadow Chancellor.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): Does my right hon. Friend agree that even those of us who take a special interest in Treasury affairs may be in danger of valuing improvement only by measurable output? For instance, the replacement of tricyclic drugs by modern drugs that has taken place in the NHS has transformed the lives of many patients, yet it is not measurable at all. Does my right hon. Friend also agree that the Conservative policy of not increasing funding is inherently implausible—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Boateng: I agree with my hon. Friend on both counts—especially the latter. My hon. Friend's first

point was extremely important: we need to get targets right. We need to ensure that they are not seen as an end in themselves but as a drive—a goad—to improve performance. That is what we are doing and I should have thought that it would be welcomed by hon. Members on both sides of the House, including the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton), who shares with me real concern about adoption policy. She would be the first to admit that the target of a 40 per cent. increase in adoption has helped to drive improvements in that area.

Business Taxation and Regulation

2. **Mrs. Cheryl Gillan** (Chesham and Amersham): What estimate he made in advance of the pre-Budget report of the annual cost to businesses of new (a) taxes and (b) regulations introduced since May 1997. [85248]

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The Government's corporation tax changes introduced since 1997 have reduced business taxes. We now have the lowest corporation tax rates in the United Kingdom's history. The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are fair and effective, balancing enterprise and encouraging productivity with protection for the individual.

Mrs. Gillan: I think that businesses listening to the Minister's reply will believe that she does not live in the real world. Is it not the truth that the burden of taxation and regulation on businesses has rocketed under this Government? From 1997 to the end of this Parliament, the director general of the CBI says that the Government will impose £47 billion of extra business taxation. That is equivalent to the entire gross domestic product of Wales. Is that not a shocking statistic? Does it not show that Labour is no friend to business in this country?

Dawn Primarolo: I am afraid that the hon. Lady, who I know is genuinely concerned about this issue, has incorrect information. For instance, she refers to the CBI's figures, but those figures, which are not a fair reflection, include the windfall levy—a manifesto commitment and an imposition to ensure that the taxpayer had a fair return on the public utilities after the previous Government had sold them off. If the hon. Lady looks at international comparisons, particularly those recently published by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, she will see that, if we take corporate tax income and employers' social security contributions, Britain is in the third lowest category among all our competitors. Our tax system, with corporate taxes going down—30, 19 and 0 per cent.—is the correct way forward, and the hon. Lady needs to tell us how much lower the Conservatives would go than zero.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Without revisiting the arguments about the supplementary charge on corporation tax for the oil and gas industry—that is now a settled matter—will my right hon. Friend consider what can be done to encourage more new exploration for oil and gas, which had almost fizzled out before the Budget? The energy review tells us that we need all the oil and gas that we can get. That is an important source of tax revenue, and undiscovered fields pay no tax at all.

Dawn Primarolo: I know that my hon. Friend takes a keen interest in the oil and gas industry. I also know that he is aware that the 100 per cent. tax relief and the abolition of royalties were introduced in recognition of the importance of continuing to ensure exploration for the national resource in the North sea for the benefit not only of those companies and jobs, but the taxpayer. I should like to reassure him that the Government continue to listen carefully to the industry and to follow developments closely to ensure that the changes that we have put in place deliver exactly the types of issue and investment that he wants to see, as do we.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Are the Government proud that, according to the OECD, taxes are now rising more rapidly in this country than in any other major country, eroding our competitive advantage? How is it that similar countries are able to cut taxes while improving their public services, but this Government have done the reverse?

Dawn Primarolo: The right hon. Gentleman will see from the pre-Budget report that taxes fell in this country as a proportion of national income. Given that he is a keen reader of the OECD's reports, he will also know that the OECD says that we have the lowest barriers to entrepreneurship of any major economy and that Britain is one of the best places in the world to do business.

National Debt

3. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): What he estimates will be the levels of (a) national debt and (b) borrowing in each of the next five years; and if he will make a statement. [85249]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Figures for public sector net borrowing for future years are 24, 19, 19, 19 and 20 billion pounds. That is 2.2, 1.6, 1.6, 1.5 and 1.5 per cent. of gross domestic product. Public sector net debt in future years will be 32.1, then 32.4, 32.6, 32.7 and 33 per cent. of GDP. We consistently meet all our fiscal rules.

Michael Fabricant: The Chancellor has given a detailed answer, but can we believe any of it any more? If we consider the five-year forecast that he made for borrowing, he said that there would be £30 billion-worth of borrowing in last year's Budget, which went up to £66 billion-worth of borrowing in the pre-Budget report. It then went up to £72 billion in this year's Budget, and to more than £100 billion in this year's pre-Budget Treasury forecast. Does not the Chancellor now admit that all his bombast and all his predictions have come to nothing, and that his credibility gap is about as—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Brown: We have the lowest inflation for 30 years, the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years, the lowest unemployment for 25 years, and debt as a share

of national income is at its lowest for 100 years. The accurate figures are those that I just read out to the hon. Gentleman. He must recognise that if we want to continue to run a successful economy and spend money on public services, the policy to be pursued is that being pursued by this Government. I remind him that, at the general election, he promised in his manifesto that he wanted to spend more money on police and hospital services. Those things must be paid for.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the hon. Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) has flair, but not in the area of the economy? He should stick to other subjects. If he reads the pre-Budget report, he will see the figures set out. Will my right hon. Friend agree that the UK has among the lowest levels of public debt in Europe, and that he is on track with regard to his economic cycle?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend, who takes an interest in these matters as Chairman of the Treasury Committee, is absolutely right. Debt in the United Kingdom is about a third of GDP, whereas, in France and Germany, it is between 40 per cent. and 45 per cent. of GDP. In America, it is more than 40 per cent. of GDP. In the euro area, it is more than 50 per cent. of GDP as a whole. In Japan, it is nearly 70 per cent. of GDP. We have reduced debt, and the reason why we are able, as an economy, to have monetary and fiscal stability in a period of difficulty, is that we have taken the difficult decisions since 1997, from which we are reaping benefits.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): Given that the Chancellor's plans for a return to sustainability, on his Budget plans, depend on a return to sustainability in personal budgets at a time when house prices have been booming and personal debt has risen to a peak of 111 per cent. of annual personal income—as compared with the late-1980s, when it was just 85 per cent.—what are his plans for achieving a sustainable end to the housing boom without a bust? Does he agree with Chris Allsopp of the Monetary Policy Committee, who said that he should now consider micro-economic policy or financial regulation to ensure that that happens?

Mr. Brown: If we had taken the advice of the shadow Chancellor who lives in Truro rather than the shadow Chancellor who lives in Folkestone, we would have had a no-speed economy. The hon. Gentleman's advice was that we should have raised public spending at a time when we were cutting debt. It is because we cut debt that we are in a position, during a difficult period for the world economy, to continue to grow.

On housing, the hon. Gentleman knows that house prices relative to income are relatively high for new buyers. He also knows, however, that mortgage costs relative to average income are very low. Whereas, at the beginning of the 1990s, they were about 36 per cent. of average income, they are now between 13 per cent. and 15 per cent. of average income. That is because we have low inflation and low interest rates. It is about time that the hon. Gentleman recognised that, under this Government, in a very difficult world economic situation, we continue to have an economy that has grown every quarter since we have been in power.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Allowing for the borrowings that the Chancellor will have to use, will he ensure that growth within business continues to be encouraged, and that future research and development takes place in this country, through his excellent method of tax credits?

Mr. Brown: We have the second best tax system for research and development of any of the major industrialised countries. That is because we now have a research and development credit for large firms as well as small firms. We are prepared to listen to business on the subject of improvements that, even now, can be made in that tax credit system, because, for 20 years, Britain fell behind by failing to invest in research and development. We are determined to make those investments, and the research and development credit is one part of that.

Mr. Howard Flight (Arundel and South Downs): The House will have noticed that the Chancellor has dropped his boom-and-bust mantra about how his economic management has ended the economic cycle. Could that have something to do with the recent criticisms of his economic management by the IMF and the Bank of England and with the alarming news that Standard and Poor's has just listed the UK, for the first time ever, as an economy facing major potential stress on its banking system because of the possible bursting of the house price bubble and ballooning consumer debt problems? What assumptions has he made in his borrowing forecasts about house prices, consumer debt and the implications for the economy of the warnings not just from the IMF, the Bank of England and Standard and Poor's but from the permanent secretary that house price—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have counted several questions.

Mr. Brown: The Standard and Poor's assessment was made about both Britain and America and it was answered by the Bank of England, which the hon. Gentleman also cited in his argument. The IMF praised the macro-economic management of our economy and also said that the banking system was in a very good position to withstand difficulties. The IMF has therefore also answered Standard and Poor's. The fact of the matter, which the hon. Gentleman cannot understand, is that whereas inflation was at 10 per cent. at the beginning of the 1990s, in the last world downturn, and interest rates were 15 per cent. under the previous Chancellor, inflation is just over 2 per cent. and interest rates are at 4 per cent. We have the macro-economic stability that the Conservative party never gave us.

World Poverty

4. **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): What assessment he has made of the role of international trade in the reduction of poverty in the poorest countries. [85250]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The World Bank estimates that full trade liberalisation globally could lift 300 million people out of poverty by 2015. We therefore seek significant reform from the

European Union's mid-term common agricultural policy review and from the World Trade Organisation ministerial stocktake in Mexico in September.

Mr. Tynan: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Is he aware that the poorest farmers—the 25 million coffee-growing farmers worldwide—are suffering enormous hardship because of the price of coffee? Will he examine the coffee rescue plan promoted by Oxfam as it would make a tremendous difference for those farmers? Will he seek international support for that plan?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He and people in his constituency have taken a long-term interest in development. On Oxfam's proposals for coffee, he may know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry held a meeting with non-governmental organisations, the World Bank, the European Commission and others last Monday to consider these very issues. There are many things that we can do, but we cannot take up Oxfam's proposal to destroy 5 million bags of coffee. That would not be in the best interests of everybody. However, we are trying to help growers to diversify and we are trying to expand trade opportunities.

Africa is an important issue for many people here. Although it has 12 per cent. of the world's population, it has only 2 per cent. of the world's trade and 1 per cent. of its investment. Our African initiative is trying to rectify many of those problems.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Is it not clear to even the most unreconstructed old socialist that free trade enriches nations while trade barriers impoverish them? Is it not the poorest countries that benefit most from free trade? Will the Chancellor and his colleagues therefore work a good deal harder to ensure that we eradicate tariffs and barriers in Europe and the United States?

Mr. Brown: I agree about the importance of trade, but the hon. Gentleman should agree that we have done more than previous Governments to try to remove barriers to trade. First, on the common agricultural policy, the waste of money is a feature of the mid-term review, and we are pushing for change on that. Secondly, on trade generally, the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. Two thirds of the poorest people in the world live off the land, and agricultural protectionism costs $20 billion to the poorest countries. It is precisely for those reasons that, at Cancun in Mexico, we are determined to reach a settlement that is fair to the poorest countries.

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his policies. When some of us visited Rwanda recently, we found that they were very welcome there. However, the strong feeling was expressed that, whereas the World Bank appeared to be aware of the problems, the IMF seemed to be somewhat less sensitive to them. Will he use his considerable influence to ask the IMF to focus on the real problems of countries such as Rwanda?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his question. I know he takes a particular interest in such matters. The improvement in education as a result of increased development spending in Rwanda and many other African countries are no doubt welcomed by all hon. Members. On the role of the IMF, we have got rid of the old structural adjustment facility, which caused difficulties for many African countries. We now have joint IMF-World Bank work on poverty reduction strategies. Those have been reviewed during the year and we hope to make improvements. We want better joint working between the IMF and the World Bank to ensure that they concentrate on tackling poverty through economic growth.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Pursuant to the Chancellor's answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), does he agree that the abandonment of the common agricultural policy would help to improve world trade and relieve poverty?

Mr. Brown: We want significant reforms in the common agricultural policy. We believe that that is of use to the developing countries, Europe and Britain in particular. We also believe that those countries joining the European Union should not be led to expect that an unreformed common agricultural policy will benefit the 4 million farmers who could be demonstrators in Brussels against further change. For all those reasons, we favour fundamental reform.

5. **Mr. Kevan Jones** (North Durham): What contribution the UK is making to meeting the 2015 targets for reducing world poverty. [85251]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Meeting the 2015 targets requires not just debt relief and more aid, but new means of financing development. Today I am sending to the Chairmen of the Treasury and International Development Committees and placing in the Library further details of our proposed international development finance facility. I am grateful for all-party support, and the Secretary of State for International Development and I will publish a prospectus on that important new facility in the new year.

Mr. Jones: I thank my right hon. Friend for that answer. Does he recognise the important contribution that NGOs such as Oxfam and Church groups—for example, those in my constituency—have played in highlighting world poverty? Will he outline what role those organisations can continue to play in the ongoing Government campaign to eradicate world poverty?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who takes an interest in such matters, as do many members of his constituency, especially the Churches. The role of NGOs in promoting debt relief was central to our efforts. I think every hon. Member would agree that the Churches made an enormous difference, not only in Britain but internationally. I want the NGOs and the Churches to help us to take forward the next initiative that we should all support, which is not just debt relief, but a proposal that could release up to $50 billion extra a year—$10 billion for education, $10 billion for health, and $20 billion or more for anti-poverty programmes.

Only by doing that will we meet the 2015 targets of providing every child with primary schooling and cutting poverty in the [illegible]st countries by a half.

Sir Teddy Taylor (R[illegible]nford and Southend, East): Would not the Chancellor be able to do more for good causes such as reducing world poverty if he had not obliged the Bank of England to lose a massive amount of money by forcing it to sell its gold at an average of $270—it is now worth more than $325—and to invest the money instead in currencies like the euro, which have no great future at all?

Mr. Brown: The decision to sell gold was right. The only problem was that it should have been made 20 years ago under the previous Government. It is sad that the hon. Gentleman always turns a question on overseas aid, which is about the poorest countries of the world, into a question that reflects his obsessions with the European Union.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): NGOs have said that AIDS is the biggest threat to delivering the 2015 goals and it has been recommended that we should increase our support for AIDS from £200 million to £750 million. Has the Chancellor assessed that recommendation?

Mr. Brown: We continue to consider all proposals. I think the most important report is the Zedillo report, which came out a few months ago. It contained information on what we need to spend on education, health and anti-poverty programmes. The effectiveness of aid must be improved, and I am sure all hon. Members would agree that major improvements are possible. Even now, we see the waste of resources in the famine of Africa, which could be avoided. At the same time, we need additional money. That can only come from either a Tobin tax or something similar, but there is no support for that, or our new international finance facility, which I hope, as I said, will enjoy all-party support.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): The note published by the Treasury today says that it is willing to give a long-term commitment to support an international financial facility, which is genuinely welcome. However, can the Chancellor give some indication of the size of the commitment that he and the Treasury envisage for such a facility to meet millennium development goals, as that may well encourage other countries to sign up? I think that we all accept that that has to be done together and cannot be done by the UK alone.

Mr. Brown: The hon. Gentleman is Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development, and he will know that I appreciate the all-party work that it does. We will have increased our aid budget from 0.27 per cent. when we came to power to 0.4 per cent. by 2006, thus releasing substantial extra money, and have persuaded the European Union that on average Europe's aid budget should be 0.39 per cent. America will have made a substantial commitment of $5 billion extra by 2006, and it is on the basis of those commitments that I believe the new international finance facility can be built. Of course, we are prepared to make a further contribution over the next few years. We are ready to pay our share, but we obviously want to talk to other countries that have expressed an interest.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): While everyone appreciates what the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for International Development are doing, real progress world wide will only be achieved if the Americans stop trade protectionism and increase their development assistance. Will my right hon. Friend use his undoubted influence in the United States to get it to follow our lead?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. When he was at the Department for Overseas Development, he played a prominent role in many countries in pushing a social justice agenda as part of the global economy. I continue to talk to the American Administration and, since last week, have been talking to the new Secretary of the Treasury. I appreciate the work that the previous Secretary and his predecessors did to promote international development aid. America will have made a commitment of $5 billion by 2006 and, at the same time, as part of the world trade negotiations, has said that it is prepared to remove all tariffs—that is its latest initiative. I believe that there should be a response from the Europe Union, and there is a chance that in Mexico in September there will be progress on trade while, at the same time, we are making progress on the Monterrey proposals for an increased development budget. It is heartening that there is support from Members on both sides of the House for those moves.

Economic Growth Forecasts

6. **Mr. David Ruffley** (Bury St. Edmunds): What his assumptions are in arriving at his revised GDP forecasts announced in the November pre-Budget report. [85253]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): The Government expect a gathering in the pace of global recovery, with G7 GDP growth forecast to rise from 1½ per cent. in 2002, to 2¼ per cent. next year and 3 per cent. in 2004. As a result, UK GDP growth is expected to accelerate from the second half of next year.

Mr. Ruffley: Will the Chief Secretary confirm that as a direct result of the Chancellor's over-optimism and imprudence those juggled forecasts now rest on three assumptions—an upturn in world trade, a wing, and a prayer?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman, I know, takes a keen interest in these matters. I heard him only this morning talking on the "Today" programme about toxic cocktails—now he is over-egging the pudding. He needs to reflect and recognise that the assumptions outlined by my right hon. Friend are based on a rigorous assessment of the factors underlying trend growth, which were published in the pre-Budget report. He knows the assumptions in tables A and B very well, and knows that they are prudent, rigorous and in line with the broad breadth of independent forecasters. He should at least give some recognition to that fact.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): The pre-Budget report shows that my right hon. Friend anticipates a greater contribution to future growth from business investment. What measures is he introducing to encourage that?

Mr. Boateng: Business investment is key to our continued performance, hence the importance of the 2000 enterprise zones, not least in the most disadvantaged areas; the measures that we are introducing to increase R and D, not only in small and medium-sized enterprises but in large enterprises; and the measures on skills announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. All of that will improve and enhance productivity, and promote business investment.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): How would the GDP estimates be affected by a war in Iraq? The Minister will be aware of the work of the Congressional Budget Office in the US, which suggests that even a short and successful war and reconstruction could cost $150 billion—1.5 per cent. of GDP. Are such estimates relevant to the UK, or will the Treasury publish its own independent estimate?

Mr. Boateng: The hon. Gentleman will have seen the assumptions made in the PBR—for instance, in relation to oil prices at $25.10 and constant thereafter. He is aware of the prudent provision that we have made through the £1 billion that has been set aside for contingencies. He is also aware—these risks are again reflected in the PBR—of the risks attendant on the geopolitical situation, including Iraq. All those assumptions are contained in the PBR, which takes full account of the factors that he raised.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend about the assumptions concerning employment growth? Since 1997 there has been a massive number of new jobs. Unemployment in Dudley has gone down since 1993 by 70 per cent., but the Joseph Rowntree Trust has just reported that there are still significant numbers of unemployed people—mainly sick, disabled and lone parents—wanting jobs.

Mr. Boateng: The Joseph Rowntree Trust made it clear in its report that although there are always risks in this area, we are broadly on track to meet our targets in relation to child poverty. The assumptions made in relation to employment are based on independent forecasts and analysis. We are confident that the measures that we are taking, not least to make work pay—work is the surest route out of poverty—will allow continuing improvements in the number of children taken out of poverty; 200,000 were taken out of poverty last year, and there is every expectation that we will meet our undoubtedly challenging targets in that regard.

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): I welcome the proposal made by the Chancellor in answer to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones). He does indeed have support for those proposals from the Conservative Opposition. Will the Chief Secretary tell us why the Chancellor blamed his failure to meet his Budget forecasts on falls in world growth and world trade, when the forecast for world trade this year, on page 152 of the pre-Budget report, was only ¼ per cent. lower than the Budget forecast, and the forecast for G7 growth has not changed at all? Is not the truth that it is not the forecast for the rest of the world that was downgraded, just the forecasts for this country?

Mr. Boateng: I welcome the right hon. and learned Gentleman's earlier remarks in response to my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's earlier answer. I draw the right hon. and learned Gentleman's attention to the fact that last year saw the sharpest slowdown in world growth for almost 30 years. The world's largest three economies, Japan, Germany and the US, were in recession. There were massive falls in the equity market. Despite all that, our growth was the fastest of all the G7 economies last year. The right hon. and learned Gentleman ought to recognise that and give credit for it, rather than continuing to cast himself in the role of Cassandra and Jeremiah.

Poverty

7. **Mr. Terry Rooney** (Bradford, North): What measures the G7 is taking to improve literacy in developing countries as part of tackling global poverty. [85254]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): The new G7 education initiative has been decided because 113 million children do not enjoy primary schooling and 88 countries are missing the target that everybody should have primary schooling by 2015. Britain will be investing £1.3 billion in education in the poorest countries in the coming five years, and further funds for education are a critical element in our proposed international development finance facility.

Mr. Rooney: I thank my right hon. Friend for his answer and for his undoubted interest in the subject. What was the outcome of the "Education for All" donor consortium meeting in Brussels on 27 November?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. He, too, has taken an interest, both in his constituency and nationwide, in these matters. There are two initiatives that are moving forward on education. The first is for seven small countries, including Nicaragua, Niger and Mauritania, where the World Bank is running a fast-track initiative so that countries that are making progress will be in a position to meet the 2015 targets. The second set of initiatives is for the larger countries. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development is particularly concerned about India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Nigeria, where huge amounts of money will be needed if we are to meet the 2015 targets. That is why she is allocating £1.3 billion from her budget over the next five years. Almost half that money will go to Africa and a great deal of it will go to India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Two initiatives are therefore moving forward: the G7 initiative for the smaller countries and her initiative, which is operating

with other countries through the G7, for very large countries that are simply not meeting the necessary targets.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): Last month I had the opportunity to visit a combined primary and secondary school in Uganda that had been built with proceeds from my constituency. Indeed, the school is named Bexhill high school. I was extremely impressed by that voluntary initiative in Uganda, but incredibly concerned about the systemic corruption that I saw not only in Uganda, but in Kenya. Can the Chancellor reassure the House that the huge amount that is destined for the poorest people in Africa will reach them and not be diverted, as so much other aid money has been, to line the pockets of the ruling elite?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman's constituents who have been part of the initiative in Uganda. While he is right that there is a major corruption problem that must be dealt with as part of the international finance initiative—that is very much one of the requirements for further development aid—he cannot say that progress is not being made in Uganda. Progress is being made on education, partly because of the proceeds of debt relief received by Uganda in the past few years. Uganda is now moving from a pupil-teacher ratio of 100:1 to one of 50:1 and to a situation in which it can genuinely say that every pupil who goes to school will have a roof above their head. That is a major initiative in Uganda that is designed to achieve 100 per cent. primary education enrolment in a short period. Progress is being made, although we must guard against corruption in every sense.

Roger Casale (Wimbledon): May I thank my right hon. Friend for the work that his Department is doing to eliminate poverty around the world and to raise educational standards? If an international consensus is to emerge on the measures and resources necessary to eliminate poverty, it is vital that he continue to articulate the same values and vision and to show the same leadership as he has shown previously and that led to the establishment of the millennium development goals in the first place. Will he and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development redouble their efforts to strengthen international commitment to his proposal for a new Marshall plan for Africa?

Mr. Brown: My hon. Friend and his constituency take an enormous interest in such issues; I believe that churches and NGOs in Wimbledon have played a very important role in the campaigns that have taken place. He is absolutely right that there is now a unique world situation in which all international organisations—the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the United Nations, the World Trade Organisation and the OECD, as well as individual Governments—have signed up to the millennium development goals. We must meet those goals by 2015, so it is incumbent on all of us to raise the necessary resources. That is why we are working with other finance Ministries to see whether that international development finance facility, which is the means by which we could double development aid, will be possible over the next few years.

One other measure that my hon. Friend would understand is reform of the European Union's aid budget. It is intolerable that only 38 per cent. of EU aid goes to the poorest countries. As a minimum, we expect that level to be raised to 70 per cent. by the measures that we are introducing.

Penrose Inquiry

8. **Mr. Peter Luff** (Mid-Worcestershire): What recent representations he has received from or on behalf of policyholders in Equitable Life about the progress of the Penrose inquiry; and if he will make a statement. [85255]

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): I have received a number of representations from policyholders about the progress of Lord Penrose's inquiry. I understand that Lord Penrose has now examined the vast bulk of the documentary evidence and has begun a programme of witness interviews. He has said that he hopes to report to Ministers next summer.

Mr. Luff: That is a very long time away. Does the Minister understand that the many thousands of policyholders who have lost out so badly through the Equitable Life scandal—they include many hon. Members, of whom I am not one—would be forgiven for thinking that when the Government face a problem that they think might embarrass someone else, such as the BSE scandal, they hold a major public inquiry, throw resources at it and hold it in public, but when they face a scandal that might affect them, they starve the inquiry of resources, hold it in private and will not even allow an interim report to be published?

Ruth Kelly: I completely understand and sympathise with the position of policyholders at Equitable Life. I certainly understand the distress and indeed anger that they feel regarding some of the events that have occurred and their desire for a quick resolution and progress on the inquiry. However, I draw to the hon. Gentleman's attention the fact that this a judicial inquiry, headed by a senior Scottish judge who understandably wishes to produce an authoritative, thorough and accurate report of events dealing with the actions not only of the regulators, but of Equitable Life over a period spanning 50 years. That will necessarily take a significant time, although Lord Penrose is determined to proceed as quickly as possible.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I appreciate that my hon. Friend shares the concern about the policyholders and understands the trauma that they are going through, especially those who are at retirement or approaching retirement. I appreciate also that the report will come through next summer, if it is on course. However, that seems a long time away. I wonder whether any discussions have taken place with the inquiry to ascertain whether additional resources could be made available to shorten the time that is taken. If not, will my hon. Friend make such an approach?

Ruth Kelly: Lord Penrose is free to suggest any addition to resources that he feels is necessary. He has not requested more resources than he has currently

available to him. I would like to make a comparison with the ombudsman's inquiry, in which I know Members are interested. She says that her inquiry, which is focused only on the action of the Financial Services Authority over a two-year period, is so complex that she feels unable to give an authoritative account of that short period—that is inquiring into one of the actors—until at least June next year. It is appropriate to view Lord Penrose's progress in that context.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I entirely accept the sincerity of what the Minister has had to say. All of us who have constituents who are faced with this appalling situation have great concern. However, what message does she have for current annuitants who have found themselves, only in recent weeks, being made aware of a 30 per cent. reduction in the pension on which they rely upon to live? I would be interested to know what message she has at this juncture, given the dire circumstances in which they find themselves. As has been said, we have many months to go until the Penrose inquiry finally reports.

Ruth Kelly: The situation of with-profit-annuitants to which the hon. Gentleman refers is one that strikes a chord with many people who are, in a sense, locked in to Equitable Life and do not have the freedoms at their disposal that other categories of policyholders enjoy. However, I would point out the case that Equitable has made when it judged these decisions, together with the FSA. It is that with-profits-annuitants continued to enjoy quite a significant rise in their policy values when others were already experiencing cuts in their policies. So the recent cut was to bring them into line with the experience of other policyholders.

We continue to work closely with the Inland Revenue to ascertain whether there is any way in which we can facilitate in general the transfer of annuitants from one company to another. That is not particularly in the case of Equitable Life, but for all annuitants who feel that their choice is a one-off decision made for life over which they have little control.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): When our constituents listen to our proceedings on this issue, they are aware of the ever-lengthening delays that have been mentioned and the lack of Government leadership. They find that combination soul-destroying. Yet the Government could give them immediate reassurance by making one clear commitment. It is that if the inquiry finds that the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry failed in their regulatory duty, will the Government provide policyholders and annuitants with appropriate compensation? Yes or no?

Ruth Kelly: It would be ridiculous of me to pre-empt the potential findings of the inquiry. The important fact is that it was the Government who set up an independent judicial inquiry, headed by one of the most senior judges in Scotland, with commercial and accountancy experience in his background. That is what the policyholders were requesting. It is something that the Conservative party welcomed at the time.

World Bank/IMF

9. **Brian White** (Milton Keynes, North-East): If he will make a statement on how he monitors and measures the performance of the World Bank and IMF. [85256]

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Through a British initiative, a new independent evaluation office, which monitors and measures the International Monetary Fund's performance was created last year. We also support the review of the poverty reduction strategies of the World Bank and the IMF. They replace the structural adjustment facility.

Brian White: I welcome those changes. However, does my right hon. Friend accept that much of people's distrust of international organisations such as the IMF is based on their past practices, which were not open to the public? Will he help to ensure that such organisations are much more open and that the work of the independent evaluation office is much more widely known in this country?

Mr. Brown: As my hon. Friend knows, when the IMF reported on the British economy, the reports were not normally published. All are now published, and I hope that every country will publish the reports that the IMF gives them. That is one method of increasing transparency and openness. It is also important to monitor the IMF to ascertain whether it is doing a good job. That is the purpose of the independent evaluation office.

It is also crucial that the IMF and the World Bank work well together. That is why the structural adjustment facility, which was unpopular and, as my hon. Friend said, played a large part in annoying the poorest countries, has been replaced by poverty reduction strategies, under which the IMF and the World Bank must work together.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): I should have thought that the Chancellor was far too busy monitoring the Prime Minister's performance to find time to monitor that of the IMF. However, the IMF is certainly monitoring his performance and becoming increasingly unhappy about it. Does he therefore believe that our Prime Minister will follow the example of his other friend, President Bush, and sack his Treasury Minister?

Mr. Brown: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman, who takes an interest in such matters, read the IMF report. It states that our

"economic achievements are due, in no small measure, to the government's sound macroeconomic policies".

It also states that the existing monetary framework has delivered impressive results. It goes on to praise the fiscal policy that the shadow Chancellor opposes.

Sir Peter Tapsell: Read on.

Mr. Brown: I would be happy to read on, but Mr. Speaker will not allow me to do that, as I have found on previous occasions.

The IMF and I agree that we must be vigilant about excessive and inflationary wage claims. People must show the necessary responsibility so that we can maintain the low inflation and interest rates that are important to the economy's stability and growth. I hope that hon. Members of all parties agree that we must not allow inflationary wage claims to affect inflation or interest rates.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): What support have the World Bank and the IMF given to the Chancellor's proposal for an international financing facility? Are they talking to the United States Administration about whether any of the additional $5 billion that they are putting into aid would be a contribution to my right hon. Friend's proposed new fund?

Mr. Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend who has taken a long-standing interest in such matters. Important conversations, from the Government's point of view, about the new facility have taken place with the managing director of the IMF and the president of the World Bank. Both have given us a great deal of encouragement, but financing the facility depends on action by individual national Governments.

I am encouraged by the responses from European Finance Ministers and the interest of the US Administration. We are at an early stage, but I believe that, with the support of the churches, non-governmental organisations, business organisations and all parties, the British initiative, on an all-party basis, can make enormous progress with other countries around the world.

Growth Forecasts

10. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): What assessment he has made of the accuracy of Treasury growth forecasts over the last three years. [85257]

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): Government forecasts are based on a realistic assessment of economic developments and prospects, and are broadly in line with the latest assessments from several leading independent forecasters. In recent years, GDP growth out-turns have tended slightly to exceed forecasts.

Mr. Goodman: At the time of the Budget, the Government's growth forecast was 2.5 per cent., and it is now 1.5 per cent. Will the right hon. Gentleman concede that the Treasury's forecasts have been humiliated? Why were the independent forecasters right and Ministers wrong?

Mr. Boateng: It was, in fact, 2 to 2.5 per cent. The underlying question that the hon. Gentleman needs to address—and the assumptions on which our economic forecasts are based—relates to the soundness of the underlying macro-economic policies that the Government have pursued. That is why we are able to read an IMF report, which says of our performance—

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Selective.

Mr. Boateng: No, it is not a question of being selective. This is continuing from where my right hon. Friend left off. The IMF report says:

> "As in the past, the Pre-Budget Report . . . provides a transparent and comprehensive account of the government's economic policies."

Those policies are sound and on course, and we intend to stick with them.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): How significant does my right hon. Friend find it that we have had a public sector surplus in four of the five years of this Labour Government, while the previous Conservative Government managed to achieve that in only four of their 18 years?

Mr. Boateng: Very significant, it will surprise no one to know. We took some hard decisions in the early days of this Government—decisions that Conservative Members opposed—such as those relating to the independence of the Bank of England and to our public spending plans. Taking those decisions has put us in a position to weather the international storm.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Will the Chief Secretary explain why the pre-Budget report summary leaflet that the Treasury has sent to the public to explain the pre-Budget report does not mention the fact that the growth forecasts were downgraded, or that any borrowing was going to take place? In fact, the only way to work out that there is going to be a deficit is to subtract one pie chart on the back of the leaflet from the other one.

Mr. Boateng: The Chancellor announced all the figures in the course of his statement. The pre-Budget report is published as it is. The hon. Gentleman knows what is contained in tables A and B. He is merely pointing out the virtues of a summary.

Small Businesses Insurance

11. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): What steps he is taking to protect small businesses from increases in insurance costs. [85258]

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The Government are aware—as are hon. Members on both sides of the House—of the recent rises in insurance premiums.Following wide discussions, including with the Treasury, the Department for Work and Pensions has now begun a formal review of the operation of employers' liability insurance, the consultation on which is to be completed by the end of February. On Tuesday this week, the Office of Fair Trading announced a fact-finding study into the wider market for liability insurance.

Tony Cunningham: I met a constituent recently who has a climbing wall in Keswick. Last year, his insurance premium was £1,600; this year, it is more than £10,000.

I welcome the long-term review, but will the Minister tell the House what is being done in the short term to help constituents such as mine?

John Healey: I recognise the importance of such firms in my hon. Friend's constituency and, more broadly, in Cumbria. The Government cannot, of course, intervene in relation to the terms and conditions of insurance policies or in individual cases. The Department for Work and Pensions is conducting its review, and the Government have also emphasised to the Association of British Insurers the importance of the problem that my hon. Friend has starkly illustrated. The association is now working closely with brokers, business bodies and trade associations to maximise the availability of affordable insurance for precisely the kind of firm that my hon. Friend has described. He might like to encourage his constituent to investigate that matter further.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the hon. Gentleman not understand the urgency of this? Businesses in my constituency and across the country are having to cease trading because they simply cannot get the insurance that the law requires them to have. In cases in which there is a requirement for insurance and none is available, do not the Government have a responsibility to provide a form of insurance of last resort?

John Healey: Of course, the Government appreciate the problem. Every Member of the House has such firms in their constituency. I say again that it is not the Government's position to intervene in individual terms and conditions of insurance policies, or in individual cases. That is why we have been working with the Association of British Insurers to encourage it to take the action that it is taking. That is precisely the way in which we try to tackle these problems. If the hon. Gentleman has firms in his constituency that are in that position, I recommend that he suggest that they contact their trade associations, their professional bodies or the ABI, because that is the way in which we are trying to tackle the problem.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business of the House for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 16 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Hunting Bill.

TUESDAY 17 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill.

WEDNESDAY 18 DECEMBER—Consideration in Committee of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

THURSDAY 19 DECEMBER—Motion on the Christmas recess Adjournment.

FRIDAY 20 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week after the Christmas recess will include:

TUESDAY 7 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for the first two weeks following the Christmas recess will be—

THURSDAY 9 JANUARY—Debate on Housing Benefit Reform.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Debate on the E-Transformation of Public Services.

It may be for the convenience of the House if I announce that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will make a statement on the Government's pensions Green Paper next Tuesday.

Members will notice that this week we have experimented with the recommendation of the Modernisation Committee that ministerial statements should be distributed in the Chamber after the Minister has sat down. I hope that that has been a help to Members.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for letting us have the business for next week. Is not it now time that we had an urgent debate on blind trusts, which seem neither blind nor trustworthy? If blind trusts are to have a role in public life, surely at the very least we should be absolutely certain that the beneficiaries neither know what is going on nor have any control over what is going on, if indeed that is the object of the exercise. We need a debate to clear up who defines the role of blind trusts and who polices them, because if figures in public life are to resort to such things it is vital that we all trust them. As that seems sadly no longer to be the case, we must deal with this issue responsibly and urgently.

Not unrelated to that matter, it is time that we had a proper look at the ministerial code, which is supposed to provide a framework for the ethical conduct of Ministers. Is not the code written by the Prime Minister, policed by the Prime Minister and monitored by the Cabinet Secretary, who is appointed by the Prime Minister and reports to the Prime Minister? Is not there a circularity about that? If we are to have trust in Government, we should be able to trust something as key as the ministerial code. I hope that the Leader of the House will give us a proper debate on this issue so that we can sort it out and restore some integrity to the Government.

Yesterday, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister whether we could have an independent inquiry into, among other things, the ministerial code, the abuse of the civil service that seems to have taken place recently and the role of the No. 10 spin machine. To our astonishment, the Prime Minister said:

"all questions have been properly answered." —[*Official Report*, 11 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 247.]

Even if that were the case yesterday, today there have been some startling revelations in a newspaper familiar to the Leader of the House—none other than *The Scotsman*, which is not regarded as a bête noire of No. 10.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Andrew Neil.

Mr. Forth: At least, I did not realise that it was. As far as I know, it is not one of the usual suspects. If Labour Members are telling us that *The Scotsman* has now been added to the lengthening list of newspapers that they want to ignore in all circumstances, that is another fact that we should add to this ghastly mix.

If the Prime Minister will not set up an inquiry, will the Leader of the House tell us who will? Otherwise, these matters, which are disturbing the public as well as hon. Members, will go on and on indefinitely, and that does neither the Government nor this country any good.

Mr. Cook: I shall endeavour to restore some sanity and perspective to this matter, although after the last week or two I appreciate the great difficulty of doing so.

Let me deal first with the narrow question of blind trusts. Is the right hon. Gentleman seriously arguing that a Minister is not entitled to use his assets to purchase a flat for his son or daughter to live in while at university? That was the implication of his question. The right hon. Gentleman said that the beneficiaries should not know what was going on. Is he seriously arguing that the trustees should have purchased a flat in Bristol and refused to tell the Blairs where their son was going to live? Is that really what he is trying to tell us?

The right hon. Gentleman is of course right to say that these questions have been answered before. They are answered in a letter from the Cabinet Secretary to one of his colleagues, in which the Cabinet Secretary rightly points out:

"Ministers' ownership of one or more family homes has never been seen as creating a conflict of interest".

As for the allegations in *The Scotsman*, I am sure the right hon. Gentleman is aware—although he did not mention it—that Carole Caplin made a statement this morning rebutting some of them, and I understand that the others are being rebutted even as we speak. *[Interruption.]* Of course they are being rebutted. They are being rebutted by respected press officers in the civil service—career civil servants.

After two weeks of poring over this matter, no one has established that Mrs. Blair has done anything improper or illegal. If she stands accused of anything, it is trying

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to provide secure accommodation for her son so that he can attend university, and being a loyal friend. Those are things for which many married women up and down the country will applaud her. They will not join in the cheapjack attempts to make party political capital out of families.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I hope that we can proceed to political matters, and not bring families on to the Floor of the House.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I want to refer to the much wider issue of the use of civil servants to deal with what are not properly Government matters. I hope the Leader of the House will now be able to tell us when he expects to present legislation relating to the civil service, and when he expects to receive the report from the Wicks committee on the use of political advisers and the way in which some civil servants seem to have been put in a difficult position in the political process.

I also want to refer to an issue that has arisen many times before at this point in the week: the fact that the media seem to be informed about important Government statements before Members of Parliament. Today, the media clearly received the strategy for sustainable farming and food, the Government's response to the Curry report, long before it was available to Members. Indeed, we were given press statements from the National Farmers Union before we saw documents that are extremely important for this afternoon's debate. Will the Leader of the House think about that again?

I hope that the Leader of the House has had time during his busy week to look at the first report of the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform, signed by 24 Members of both Houses. If he has, I hope that he noted that we have disposed of the argument that a second Chamber with a substantially elected element automatically challenges the pre-eminence of this House. That myth has gone for good.

When does the Leader of the House expect a debate to take place in the two Houses, and when does he expect us to be able to vote on certain options relating to the composition of the second Chamber. When that happens, if the two Houses choose a different option, will the decision of the elected Members of this House—which everyone keeps telling us must be pre-eminent—prevail?

Mr. Cook: The Wicks report is a matter for the Wicks committee, not for me. I have no information on when the committee might be able to report, but we will consider carefully whatever observations it may make about the civil service, and the possible implications for legislation.

I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about statements coming to the House first. We have tried hard to ensure that that happens, and I think that hon. Members will accept that there have been some improvements. However, it has been common practice for a long time for reports that will become public to be available on an embargoed basis to those bodies most likely to be approached for comment. I think that it would have been wrong for the Government to have sought to conceal it from the National Farmers Union, but we will certainly try to ensure that this House is the first place where any document goes public.

On the second Chamber, I welcome the report of the Joint Committee; I congratulate it on having achieved its own deadline and on the effort that has gone into the report's preparation. I particularly welcome the fact that one of the first criteria that the Committee identifies as appropriate to a second Chamber is legitimacy. Legitimacy in the modern world is served by representative character, and one way of securing a representative character is by having an elected element.

We naturally wish to proceed with a debate on the report as soon as is practical; I anticipate such a debate taking place in January. There will, of course, be a free vote in both Houses. It is consistent with our commitment to a free vote that both Houses may come to a different conclusion. However, I do not think that it would help the temper of the debate or be diplomatic of me to suggest which view should prevail in those circumstances.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Is my right hon. Friend aware of the mounting concern across the nation created by the operation of some claims management organisations that aggressively tout for business on the so-called no win, no fee basis? During his busy life, has he managed to see any of the excellent exposés by the BBC's "Watchdog" and "The Money Programme" that demonstrate how the unscrupulous activities of such organisations cost taxpayers and businesses millions of pounds? Is it not time for an urgent debate in the House to examine where we draw the line between giving people with limited resources the opportunity to pursue legitimate claims while curbing the cancer of cynically touted and, in some cases, bogus claims?

Mr. Cook: I hear what my hon. Friend says and am glad that he has been able to put those observations on the record. I share his anxiety at our society's increasing trend to become more litigious. I believe that the people who are most likely to gain are those who make their livelihood from pursuing claims rather than the innocent people on either side of the case.

In some cases, the no win, no fee arrangement may be appropriate. I acknowledge that many people have been enabled to appear in court on the basis of just such arrangements. However, my broad experience of the legal profession is that whoever makes money out of a case, it usually includes the lawyers.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement or a debate on the preparedness of this country for terrorist assault on the basis that we may have to face, unexpectedly, attack by means of chemical or biological weapons? As part of that debate, may we consider what, if anything, remains of the former civil defence arrangements for facing the threat of attack by nuclear weapons, what remains of the doctrine that was then in place and what it is wise to confide to the public, bearing it in mind that despite recent remarks about the

wish not to create panic, the British public is rather good about not panicking when they are told the facts and the dangers that they have to face?

Mr. Cook: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the calm and stoicism of the British public. I wish that those sterling British qualities were more often demonstrated by the press that sells to the British public. On defence against such an attack, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that several measures have been put in hand to strengthen those protections and make sure that we are up to speed. I am not sure, however, that a sensible way of approaching such a debate would be to go back to the historic arrangements and see whether there should be a natural continuum. The historic arrangements for civil defence were put in place when we anticipated a possible major attack by another major state power armed with substantial nuclear arsenals and other weapons. That threat has receded in the modern era. We are faced with a quite new and, until recently, unanticipated threat of a major attack by a terrorist organisation that is a non-state actor. That certainly puts an obligation on the Government to ensure that they are in a good position to protect the public, but it is a different threat and may require different solutions.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): Can my right hon. Friend arrange for an emergency debate—or, better, a statement from a Minister from the Department of Trade and Industry—about the situation of the deep-mine coal industry? Maltby colliery in my constituency is under threat, primarily because of the cheap coal coming into Europe from different parts of the world. We cannot compete with that, and frankly, the investment aid programme now being touted by the DTI will not help in any way whatever. We need a reintroduction of the operational aid for Maltby and other collieries in the same situation. We are about to lose 30 million tonnes of reserves: great assets for this country that will be locked away for ever if action is not taken quickly.

Mr. Cook: I entirely understand the enormous importance of this issue to my right hon. Friend's constituents, as well as the importance of deep mine coal to our country's long-term strategic energy resources. I will draw his remarks to the attention of Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and ensure that they respond.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Will it be possible to have a debate in the near future on immigration and asylum policy? I, for one, am extremely concerned at the letters that I am receiving, across the political spectrum, from people saying that they might be tempted to vote for extreme parties because the issue is not being taken seriously by the mainstream political parties. The figures are worrying. Sir Andrew Green mentioned 250,000 people a year coming into this country. The problem is especially severe in the south-east, where there is great pressure on housing.

Mr. Cook: I do not think that any serious observer could argue that either the Government or the Opposition have failed to take seriously the issue of asylum and migration, which has certainly been a major element of debate and legislation in the House, and has been a high priority for the Government. Through our actions, we have shortened the time taken to reach an initial decision on an asylum application, and we have increased the rate at which failed applicants are removed from the country.

We are faced with a change across the whole of Europe, and it must be said that our actions compare reasonably favourably with the statistics for other European countries. We especially welcome the fact that the number of illegals arriving at Dover has dropped dramatically over the past few months. We will certainly continue to do all that we can, partly because it is an important issue but partly also because of the point that the hon. Gentleman made: this serious matter, which we must address soberly and with priority, should not become the basis for the election of extremist parties, which would bring much hardship and injustice—which would have nothing to do with asylum and migration—to the nation and to those who vote for them. With that in mind, it is important that those of us who raise this issue should also stress our personal commitment to ensuring that we have in Britain a tolerant and open multicultural society.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is the Leader of the House aware that today is the last day on which the House of Commons can object to a minute laid by the Secretary of State for Transport offering a very considerable indemnity to London Underground in order, he says, to get one of the tube contracts signed by 31 December? We have a foreshortened time to debate the subject, and it seems odd that one contract should take precedence over all the others. Will he ask the Secretary of State to come here and explain what is so urgent, why this has happened and why we have not been given the normal time in which to object to the contents of the minute?

Mr. Cook: No, I will not ask the Secretary of State to come and make such a statement. This issue has been before the House for a number of years and has been repeatedly debated. I have said from the Dispatch Box several times, as has my right hon. Friend, that what is necessary for the people of London is to get a modernised underground system with the substantial investment that is there waiting for it. Frankly, if it is necessary for us to take such steps to remove barriers that have been put in the way by those who are responsible for London transport, it is important that we should do so. I cannot believe that people outside this place who use the underground would share my hon. Friend's view that we should do anything that would hold up that investment.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Given the encouraging remarks by the Minister for Europe in last night's European Union debate about the Foreign Secretary's now intending to discuss the crisis in the fishing industry with the Prime Minister before this weekend's European summit, can the Leader of the House confirm that that crisis will be placed squarely on the agenda over the weekend and that the Prime Minister will do everything that he can to ensure that it is addressed?

Mr. Cook: In my experience of European summits, there are two ways in which the agenda can be progressed. One is within the formal Chamber, and the other, which is sometimes more satisfactory, is at the

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margins. There will doubtless be discussions about this matter at the Copenhagen summit. As I have repeatedly said before, we must not lose sight of the root problem, which is that cod stocks are collapsing. They must be managed and conserved, and if there are no fish left in the sea, there will be no fishing either.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): The Leader of the House told us that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will make an oral statement next week. Can he assure us that outcome of the consultation on the size of the Scottish Parliament will be announced as an oral statement in this House next week?

Mr. Cook: I can assure my right hon. Friend that I am well aware of the interest in this matter—indeed, I take a close interest in it myself—and I anticipate that the House will wish to hear by means of an oral statement the outcome of the review.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Does the Leader of the House accept that his disingenuous response on the issue of blind trusts will be deeply unacceptable to most people in this country? There is considerable uncertainty, in that the Prime Minister has one idea of blind trusts, and the rest of the country has another. The matter therefore needs to be clarified by a statement by the Prime Minister, from the Dispatch Box, on blind trusts. Finally, does the Leader of the House accept that two flats were involved, and that the second flat constituted a speculative investment that it was quite wrong to make from a blind trust?

Mr. Cook: I would not characterise my reply as disingenuous—frankly, I thought it was passionate and blunt.

Mr. Forth: It was both.

Mr. Cook: It was both passionate and blunt.

Mr. Forth: And disingenuous.

Mr. Cook: I do not accept that it was disingenuous. What is the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) saying—that the Blair family were not entitled to have access to their funds in order to provide accommodation for their son to attend university; or is he seriously arguing that the Government's whole housing and economic policy would be warped if they purchased one flat for renting? If he is labouring under such a delusion, he should look at the letter from the Cabinet Secretary, which explicitly rebuts that allegation. I come back to the—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say again that we are treading on the area of the family, and, with the greatest respect to the Leader of the House, I do not want this to happen on the Floor of the House.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that in the past week another startling announcement was made about Members of Parliament that has been largely ignored by the press? I am referring to the publication of the Register of Members' Interests. If he has time to read it, he will be shocked to learn that one Tory MP is picking up probably £200,000, and another—the previous Chancellor of the Exchequer—is getting more than £100,000. I have already mentioned the previous Tory leader, and another half a dozen Tories are making more than £75,000. People out there are not too concerned about blind trusts; they are concerned about the fact that it is high time that we had legislation to insist that Members of Parliament be well paid, and have one job and one job only.

Mr. Cook: I am very glad that my hon. Friend has been able to put the record straight about the omission of these very important facts. I hope that his contribution will be given greater prominence tomorrow than those concerning the Prime Minister and his family.

On legislation to ensure that MPs have only one job, we have always—

Mr. Forth: What about Ministers?

Mr. Cook: Ministers are constrained already in terms of what they can undertake. They are Ministers of the Crown, who are answerable here. If the right hon. Gentleman is suggesting that MPs should cease to be MPs when they become Ministers, we will end up with a sad Parliament indeed. Ultimately, this is a matter for Members. Most important of all, it is for their constituents to decide whether they wish to re-elect them.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I draw the Leader of the House's attention to early-day motion 78, which concerns the postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks on more than 300,000 carers who are meant to be caring for vulnerable adults. It states:

[That this House agrees with the Home Secretary that the function of the Criminal Records Bureau is to reduce the risk of abuse by ensuring that those who are unsuitable are not able to work with children and vulnerable adults; deeply regrets the decision of the Home Office and Department of Health to postpone criminal records checks on 300,000 care home staff, agency nurses, agency domiciliary care staff, residential family centres, and adoption centres; is concerned that the establishment of the Protection of Vulnerable Adults list has been postponed indefinitely; believes that in reducing demand for CRB checks Ministers have put the lives of vulnerable people at risk; further believes that this announcement should have been made by way of a statement in the House, not as a written answer in the House of Lords on a Friday afternoon; calls on the Home Secretary to make a statement on this matter; and further calls on the Home Secretary to publish the report of the Carter Inquiry into the Criminal Records Bureau and Capita.]

May we have a statement on, or an opportunity to debate, the progress of the CRB, not least to obtain an explanation from the Home Office as to why it has so far taken more than a month to answer questions that I tabled as a result of a written statement made in the House of Lords on a Friday, when there was no other opportunity for Members to scrutinise it?

Mr. Cook: We have repeatedly said that the performance of the Criminal Records Bureau has been unacceptable, and that is why we have taken steps to ensure that we increase its throughput. There has been a substantial rise in the number of cases that it is capable of clearing per week, and we will continue to work to clear the backlog. It is entirely sensible and rational that, faced with the CRB's inability to cope with current demand, we should establish priorities. It is very important to ensure that the CRB's priority is to focus on those who have access to children, to ensure that they are protected. When we have secured that priority, we can move on to the other cases.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): Will my right hon. Friend find time for the House to debate the work of the Child Support Agency? The promised review of the implementation of its procedures is more than 12 months overdue. Some 30 per cent. of families who are entitled to maintenance are not receiving it, thereby causing greater poverty among children. When the Department for Work and Pensions is asked for explanations, it has little to offer. If the CSA were a local government body, it would be charged with failing its responsibilities, and the Government would threaten to send in private operators. Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time that this House was allowed to debate the work of the CSA, with a view to improving its efficiency?

Mr. Cook: It is of course open to hon. Members to pursue any matter of concern to them through the many avenues available in this House, and to raise such issues if they feel that their constituents have been particularly badly treated by the CSA. However, I should remind my hon. Friend that one of the first pieces of legislation that we introduced was concerned with trying to ensure that the CSA was better able to perform its job. Since then, there has been some improvement in its performance, and I have noted that the number of complaints in my own constituency has declined. On the issue of principle, we fully agree that those who are legitimately and legally liable to maintain their children should be obliged to do so.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will the Leader of the House find time for a debate on the so-called Cliffe airport consultation, so that Ministers can explain to the House why they refuse flatly to attend a public meeting in my constituency, which I am prepared to arrange for them, to explain this Labour proposal; so that they can explain why they flatly refuse to answer my parliamentary written questions on this issue; and so that they can explain why they flatly refuse to reject the "crosswind" runway option, which will result in the over-flying of Canvey island, Hadleigh and Leigh-on-Sea 24 hours a day?

Mr. Cook: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman has now secured a very comfortable paragraph in his local paper through that intervention; that of course is the important function of the House of Commons. I understand entirely his concern, and he will doubtless welcome the fact that there are now an additional four months in which this matter can be debated and examined. I am familiar with the area that he refers to, and I fully understand the powerful environmental considerations.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): May we have time for an emergency debate on the lack of co-ordination between the former public utilities? Last week, hundreds of thousands of gallons of water entered the gas main in the Belgrave area of Leicester, causing 1,500 people to be without heating for several days. It is astonishing that no formal mechanism exists to enable Severn Trent to talk to Transco and to East Midlands Electricity, now Powergen. I know that this problem is the result of privatisation that was undertaken by the previous Government, but it is important that we have a debate, so that we can formalise the relationship, so that my constituents will not have to face any more days without heating, and so that they can get compensation from one of the statutory authorities.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a very valid issue, and many of us will have similar experiences. In my own constituency, a repair to the electricity supply in the street resulted in the loss of the water supply, and the repair to the water pipe resulted in the loss of the gas main. I therefore fully understand, and sympathise with, the position of his constituents. I shall consider the point that he makes, and invite Ministers to reflect on whether a more legal remedy could be made available to those who suffer interruption.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the inside cover of today's Order Paper regarding forthcoming Westminster Hall Adjournment debates? I hesitate to ask whether a genuine mistake has been made or whether there has been an inadvertent change of procedure about which the House was not advised, but I note that subjects can be requested only from certain Departments, one of which is that of the Advocate-General. The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that I have made it my mission in this Parliament to hold the Advocate-General to account. I hold the hon. and learned Lady in the highest regard but as she appears unable or unwilling to answer on any particular issue at Question Time, what will she do during a whole half-hour Adjournment debate? Where is the right of an individual Member of Parliament to table the Adjournment debate of their choice—perhaps on an issue that is topical in their constituency—rather than having to ask for a debate on a subject answerable only by those particular Departments?

Mr. Cook: If I apprehend the end of the hon. Lady's question, she was referring to the new procedure recommended by the Modernisation Committee and on which we voted in October, which provides that debates in Westminster Hall will follow a weekly rota. The delay involved for any one Department is thus only a week. There was unanimous agreement among all parties in the Committee and the recommendation was not disputed in the House.

The change does not in any way remove the exposure of Ministers to debate in Westminster Hall, nor does it reduce the right of Back Benchers to seek debates. It means only that they have to fall in with a fortnightly

[Mr. Cook]

rota, which will ensure that they can hold their debate within two weeks. In all the circumstances, that is not unreasonable.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Will my right hon. Friend make time for an early debate to assess whether the five economic tests to join the euro have already been met? I ask because, today, the Labour Movement for Europe, which is widely seen as a Government front organisation, stated that the tests have already been met, thus calling into question the integrity of the Treasury's assessment. Will my right hon. Friend also tell us whether the Government's position, which we could discuss in such a debate, is that:

"If we don't have a referendum next year, Britain ain't going to be in the euro for eight years at least"?

Is that the Government's position, and does the Leader of the House accept or repudiate it?

Mr. Cook: I do not understand the eight-year calculation that my hon. Friend has just announced—indeed, I am almost tempted to hold a debate in order that he might explain that slightly surprising conclusion. The Labour Movement for Europe speaks for itself; it does not speak for the Government. When the Treasury has carried out an assessment of the five economic tests, I am sure that it will want to tell us.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): The Leader of the House is obviously aware of the growing crisis in the small firms sector as a result of soaring liability insurance premiums. What does he say to a south-coast firm in the insulation business that requires cover of £5 million to secure contracts from its regular customers? This year, the business was able to secure cover of only £1 million at a cost of £8,000, whereas last year £12,000 bought cover of £10 million. The small firms sector needs immediate action, not a report that may come out in four or five months.

Mr. Cook: I understand the urgency of the issue and the impatience of those who are affected. However, to be fair, we cannot take action until we are clear about the best action to solve the problem. That is why the Chancellor indicated in the pre-Budget report that we were carrying out a short review. It will not be of immense length—it will not take minutes and last years. It is important that before we take action we should consider carefully whether it is right, but no one on the Government Benches underestimates the importance or the urgency of the situation.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I welcome the circulation of written statements when they are made to the House. I also welcome my right hon. Friend's statement that we will have an early opportunity to debate the report published yesterday on House of Lords reform. At the end of the debate, will we be able to vote on the seven options set out by the Joint Committee, or does my right hon. Friend plan to separate the votes from the debate itself? Will we have an opportunity to vote on the peculiar suggestion that we need at least 600 Members in the second Chamber?

Mr. Cook: All parts of the report will be available for debate and I am sure that hon. Members will want to express their views on each paragraph. My hon. Friend identifies one issue on which the House will certainly hold divided views.

As regards arrangements for the vote, it is important that both Chambers try to march together when taking their decisions. We shall need to hold consultations and discussions on the matter. I note that the report suggests that initially there should be a take-note debate that is open and that there should be a subsequent opportunity for a Division, which would, presumably, be separated by a period of time from the actual debate. Obviously, we shall give close consideration to that recommendation and we shall consult the other place in order to find a common way forward.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Will the Leader of the House find time to read early-day motion 270?

[*That this House welcomes the launch of Action for Blind People's new campaigning group, People in Action and their first campaign, Work, Rest and Play, which will work to challenge inequality, promote social inclusion and change attitudes about blind and partially-sighted people; supports Action for Blind People in its mission to 'inspire change and create opportunities to enable blind and partially sighted people to have equal voice and equal choice'; believes that the services provided by Action for Blind People in the areas of work, housing, leisure and support enable blind and partially sighted people to transform their lives; and calls on the Government to address inequality and inconsistent provision, to promote opportunity and choice for all blind and partially-sighted people and to raise awareness of the issues affecting visually impaired people.*]

It welcomes the campaign by the charity, Action for Blind People, to emphasise the difficulties faced by blind people, in particular the fact that the unemployment rate for blind people is 75 per cent. May we have a ministerial statement on what the Government plan to do about that?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue that is of real and immediate concern to many of our constituents. We understand the difficulties that people who suffer from any form of disadvantage face in securing employment, and that particularly embraces those in the blind community. I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government are committed to equality of opportunity and to trying to ensure that there is no discrimination, for whatever reason, against people seeking employment in the work force. We shall certainly consider ways in which we can be of assistance in trying to reduce the disturbing figure cited by the hon. Gentleman.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the full and final report by George Bain on the firefighters' dispute will be published on 16 December. May we have a guarantee that the Deputy Prime Minister will make a statement on the Floor of the House so that we can question him about the final Bain report?

Mr. Cook: The Government attach the greatest importance to the Bain review and to the final report and we look forward with great interest to its conclusions. Of course, we fully understand that the

House will want to hold a full exchange of views about the report. To be fair to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, he has always shown willingness to make statements on the issue to the House. No one could fault him on his willingness to come to the House to give an account of the Government's position and to ensure that it is kept fully informed.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): May I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the report commissioned by the Prime Minister and published by the strategy unit in September, entitled "Private Action, Public Benefit"? It examines the law and regulatory structure for the charitable sector. Charitable purposes were last defined in statute about 400 years ago, so the report has been widely welcomed. The consultation period finishes at the end of this month, so will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on the report, in Government time, so that the Government can take the mind of those Members on both sides of the House who, for obvious reasons, have considerable expertise in such matters? I am sure that such a debate would result in a better end to the consultation process.

Mr. Cook: I entirely share the hon. Gentleman's view that it is time that we addressed both law and convention on charities, which require modernisation. I regret that I cannot possibly offer time for a debate on the issue before the end of the month as there are only five sitting days left. However, the subject could usefully be ventilated in the debate on the motion for the Christmas recess and if the hon. Gentleman would like to do so, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary will be delighted to respond.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): This week, the Audit Commission published its comprehensive performance assessment of local authorities. May I draw my right hon. Friend's attention to the grievance felt by some local authorities, not least my own—Bury metropolitan district council—about the final grading that they received? Authorities are concerned not only about the grading itself but also about the discrepancies between the final grading and the written report that accompanied the CPA. Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in view of the enormous growth industry in auditing and inspection regimes for local authorities, national health service trusts and further education colleges, as well as the continuing work of Ofsted in the schools sector, there is an argument for a public debate on the way in which the Government deal with the audit and inspection functions and on the criteria that are used in those inspections?

Mr. Cook: I would not have the temerity to comment on the individual results of my hon. Friend's local authority. I can fully understand that, from time to time, local people will feel that they would have reached a different judgment. Having said that, we should not lose sight of the fact that the overall result of that survey was positive. Indeed, I think that I heard the spokesman for the National Audit Office say this morning that 60 per cent. of all councils were either good or excellent, and those of us who are strongly committed to the health of local government must take some encouragement from such a positive result.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I know that you are a keen reader of the Bible, Mr. Speaker, so I rest assured that, one day, the last will be first—*[Interruption]*—but perhaps I should not bank on it.

In view of the story in *The Times* today about the continuing catalogue of incompetence at the Office for National Statistics, will the Leader of the House pledge to allow a statement on the continuing controversy that surrounds the 2001 census figures, which play a very important part in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable people, particularly in our inner cities, have proper public services?

Mr. Cook: As I recall my Bible, the day on which the last shall be first was judgment day, and I would not suggest that the hon. Gentleman should wish to rush forward to that day.

Of course the census is a valuable tool for public policy, but it should not be the only tool; there are other ways in which we can ensure that we adequately reflect the needs of vulnerable people in our inner cities.

Mr. Foulkes: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to refer to the abuse of business questions. As you know, this is a very important opportunity to cross-question the Leader of the House about the next week's business. The shadow Leader of the House did not even make a pretence of asking anything about next week's business or, indeed, any business of the House. Instead, he used it as a gratuitous opportunity to attack the Prime Minister and his family. That is an abuse of business questions, the like of which I and, I bet, you, Mr. Speaker, have not seen in our 23 years in the House. I seriously hope that you will look into that and insist that questions relate to the business of the House next week.

Mr. Speaker: As always, there is a loophole in the procedures of the House. I think that I heard the shadow Leader of the House ask for a debate. As a debate was requested, the shadow Leader of the House was in order. The right side of the line is all right for me.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

NORTHERN IRELAND

That the draft Company Directors Disqualification (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Northern Ireland

That the draft Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.—*[Mr. Woolas.]*

Question agreed to.

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

[Relevant documents: the Ninth Report of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, Session 2001–02, on The Future of UK Agriculture in a Changing World (House of Commons Paper No. 550I), and the First Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2002–03, on Pesticides: The Voluntary Initiative (HC 100).

Minutes of Evidence taken before the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee: Foot and Mouth Disease 2001: Lessons to be Learned Inquiry, 23 July 2002 (Session 2001–02, HC 1144); The Royal Society Inquiry into Infectious Diseases in Livestock, 16 October 2002 (Session 2001–02, HC 1227); and Government Response to the Foot and Mouth Inquiry Reports and other matters arising, 21 November 2002 (Session 2002–03, HC 111).]

Mr. Speaker: I inform the House that I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

1.13 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I beg to move,

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to sustainable development, balancing environmental, economic and social aims both domestically and globally; commends its drive to promote thriving rural economies and communities, including a vibrant food and farming sector, that protects and ensures the sustainable use of the environment, as well as contributing to productivity; applauds the launch on 12th December of the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy; further welcomes the Government's commitment in its response to the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiry reports to a massive programme of work and reform; recognises the substantial strides the Government is making in tackling climate change, and the leading role it played at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in securing global commitments to tackle poverty through sustainable development, such as halving the number of people without access to adequate sanitation; further welcomes its focus on the sustainable and efficient use of the urban and rural environment and the need to work with business to promote the country's competitive advantage by embracing and leading internationally on green technologies, landscapes and the countryside for all to enjoy and benefit from, its commitment to animal welfare and its focus on evidence-based policy-making and science; and urges the Government to make continuing progress in advancing global environmental priorities, including radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, not least as part of the UK's commitment to reducing poverty and hunger in developing countries, to the World Trade Organisation, and to further cuts in carbon emissions worldwide.

The overriding purpose of my Department is the pursuit of sustainable development—the balancing of economic, social and environmental concerns—but there is supposed to be an old Chinese curse that runs, "May you live in interesting times", and the Department was certainly set up in interesting times, with the worst outbreak of foot and mouth disease that the world has ever seen still not overcome.

For the past 18 months, its officials and Ministers have been striving to create a new Department, with sustainable development at its core, which is outward-looking, open in its dealings, ready to recognise and to change where we get things wrong, and capable of forward thinking, while still dealing effectively with the day-to-day.

The Department already has much of which it can be proud. We head the interdepartmental team that did so much to broker success in the climate change negotiations, particularly those in Bonn and Marrakesh. We maintained and reinforced the Government's reputation as a leading player in sustainable development at the world summit in Johannesburg and began to mainstream it in Government policy here at home—with, for example, the Treasury's agreement to make sustainable development a key component of the Government's approach to the recent spending review and, with the agreement of the Office of Government Commerce, to look at sustainable procurement across the Government.

Just as when pressing for rural-proofing, much of our work as a Department is of necessity bound up with the policy work and, indeed, the budgets of other Departments, so it is essential that we work effectively and co-operatively with them; and we are doing so, as, for instance, the Department of Trade and Industry's recent announcement about rural post offices showed. However, in DEFRA itself, we are working to give effect to the principles of sustainability.

So today we have published the Government's response to the Curry commission, setting out our approach to a sustainable farming and food industry and, of course, drawing to a close the final stages of the response to the disease outbreak, through the three strands of the inquiry process, to each of which the Government have now responded, with the publication of our report today and, of course, setting out some of the forward work before us.

We are the custodians of the rural White Paper, which was first published in November 2000 and set demanding standards for the improvement of services for rural England and for the rural economy. The White Paper contains some 260 commitments to action, half of which have been delivered, with the rest ongoing or on course for delivery in the future. However, I want to ensure that we are doing enough to deliver on the White Paper's main purpose: to try to transform the rural economy and rural services, so we are setting in train measures to deal with our programme of such work.

Since 1998, there has been a formal presumption against the closure of rural schools. On average, five a year are now approved for closure, compared with an average of 30 a year between 1983 and 1997. Some £450 million over three years has been committed to support the rural post office network. Some £239 million has been allocated over the three years to 2004 for rural transport services, including £70 million a year on rural buses, with some 1,800 new or improved bus routes in England. Much more remains to be done, such as providing more affordable homes in rural areas and supplying an enhanced health care service, to name but two.

Although rural communities and the rural economy are not synonymous with the welfare of farming and food, over three quarters of the United Kingdom's landmass today is given over to agricultural use, and there are clear interactions between farming and the rural economy, farming and the landscape, as well as farming and the environment. The wider environment itself encompasses a huge range of domestic and international issues, stretching from water and air

quality in the United Kingdom to desertification and access to clean water across the globe—issues to which I shall return.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I was pleased to have the opportunity to pick up the three documents in response to the Curry commission report from the Vote Office at a quarter past 11, after the press, the National Farmers Union and other bodies had already been able to comment on them. Which of all the detailed responses in those documents would the Secretary of State say would deal with the problem that more farmers have left the industry in past year than in any year since the second world war? The structural problems of farming are resulting in large numbers of farmers leaving the industry.

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman invites me to tell him in one word or a phrase what the entire content of the documents is. May I take this opportunity to say that I am sorry if he did not get the documents until 11.30? I do not know whether he checked the board, but the documents should have been sent to him and the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman earlier this morning.

Andrew George: I did not get them.

Margaret Beckett: I apologise for that. Something must have gone wrong with the delivery, but we endeavoured to ensure, having issued a written statement at 9.30, that certain key players received copies, and I apologise to the hon. Gentleman if the system fell down in some way.

The hon. Gentleman is right to say that, of course, there have been dramatic changes in the past 50 years, but everyone recognises that change in the industry now has to take place. We set out a range of measures in the documents and the back-up analysis to which he refers, and I shall say a little more about that in a moment.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Before the previous intervention, the Secretary of State referred to the Government's overall view of the agricultural landscape of this country, and the role that the agriculture industry plays within it. Having quickly perused the documents to which reference has just been made, I recognise the Government's commitment in terms of a viable agricultural industry. Does she envisage—this does not seem to appear in the document—a reduction in the amount of the land area of this country used for farming? Does she envisage land coming out of agriculture and being used for other purposes to any significant extent?

Margaret Beckett: I am tempted to say that it depends. I emphasise that I do not have any kind of master plan, blueprint or theoretical view of the number or size of farms that should exist. I know that that was not what the hon. Gentleman was implying, but it is important to put that on the record. As we develop the countryside stewardship scheme, and as we pilot the new agri-environment scheme—the broad and shallow scheme to which the Curry commission referred—it is entirely possible that marginal land in particular, which is now used, for example, for growing crops, might be used for flood plain alleviation, wetland creation or a range of other things. The answer to him, therefore, is that such a change is possible, but that does not mean that it will not contribute to the welfare of the individual farm business or the wider rural community.

The latest statistics suggest some improvement in some farm incomes. We fully accept, however, that there are many and continuing problems in farming and food, and that the Government should do what they can, in their own proper sphere, to assist in overcoming those problems. I say that deliberately because, particularly in this place—understandably—there is a tendency for people to talk as if the whole responsibility for the welfare of food and farming rests on the shoulders of the Government. That is not, of course, the case: the future of the industry, like the future of the individual businesses within it, is primarily in its own hands, but there is a role and a place for Government to help and support, and we shall do our best to deliver our side of the bargain.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Just before the right hon. Lady embarked on the question of incomes, she rightly mentioned some of the broad industries and services in the countryside. To that end, we have just seen the terms of reference of Lord Haskins' inquiry, which is virtually an inquiry into the Government's policies towards rural Britain. Will she assure us that Lord Haskins will have access to other Departments in analysing those services? If joined-up government is to mean anything, he should have such access—he is looking at the regional development agencies, and he has been told to look at local authorities, the national parks, the Countryside Agency and English Nature, all of which have implications for other Departments. How wide ranging is his inquiry, and how will she define its limits, its time scale and its resources?

Margaret Beckett: Its limits are likely to be defined by the amount of time that Lord Haskins has—it is not likely to be an unlimited and untimetabled study. In that regard, the phrase used by Lord Haskins was something like "studying policies and delivery". We want him to focus particularly on the delivery of what the Department seeks to do in rural areas. We want him to take a broad look at what we are trying to achieve, to look critically at what the Department is doing, and to judge whether we are pursuing the best way of achieving our goals with the resources available, and whether we are getting the best value for money and the most effective delivery. That will inevitably curtail what he will do. I do envisage that he will talk to the other players with whom we are involved, which will, to some extent, include other Departments. We are anxious that he should give us the benefit of what will no doubt be his robust views on a reasonably good time scale, as we have challenging targets on which we want to deliver.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Before the Secretary of State leaves the issue of farm incomes, does she recall that one of her Conservative predecessors told me that approximately only a third of common agricultural policy funding ends up on the farm? What

[Mr. Paul Tyler]

calculation has she made of what percentage of common agricultural policy funding now ends up directly in farmers' hands?

Margaret Beckett: I do not have the latest calculation, but I shall make inquiries and drop a line to the hon. Gentleman if it appears that that has changed significantly.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Before the right hon. Lady was diverted, she was outlining the different sectors of farming. My constituents are most concerned with dairying, and the principal problem of dairy farmers is simple: the price of milk at the farm gate. Do the Government intend to make their influence felt in that area? As things stand at the moment, we will lose dairy farmers unless we can get the retailers to increase the price that they are prepared to pay for milk.

Margaret Beckett: I do not think that that is an issue in which the Government should seek to intervene directly by trying to set prices. Certainly, however, we are conscious of the difficulties that many dairy farmers are and have been facing. I hope and believe that the range of issues that cause difficulties for dairy farmers will be among those addressed through the work of the food chain centre and, to some extent, through English Partnerships.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I am sure that my right hon. Friend is right to say that farming itself must bring something to the task of restructuring the industry. Is not the problem, however, the imbalance between production and demand? Many small producers produce goods that are purchased by a few large and powerful purchasers—the supermarkets. How can she help to rebalance the industry so that the producers have more of a sway in that calculation?

Margaret Beckett: I am coming to that point, in a sense, a little later. It can be addressed in two areas. First, it can be addressed through work in the supply chain. Clearly, the experience of the imbalance of power between the producer and the purchaser is not unique to farming and food, and, in other industries, supply chain work has consistently been found to be useful in addressing those issues. Secondly, the whole issue of collaboration has been found to help with implementation in relation to supply chain difficulties, once they are identified.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): Will the Secretary of State give way?

Margaret Beckett: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I shall make a little more progress first.

We fully accept the recommendations of the policy commission chaired by Sir Don Curry that the food and farming industries need to be responsive to changing consumer demands for higher-quality, safer, more traceable and yet competitively priced food, produced to higher environmental and animal welfare standards. In our strategy for sustainable farming and food launched today, the Government set out some of the steps that we can take to assist and support the industries, particularly in promoting the spread of best practice. We are making available some £500 million to support the strategy, which will be used to examine ways to encourage, for example, a more effective food chain and whole-farm audits, as well as to develop measures such as the livestock database and work on contingency planning.

The strategy builds on the steps that we took immediately after the launch of the policy commission report, such as setting up the food chain centre. We want to see increased co-operation within the food chain and improved performance across the board. We want to help farmers get the right training and advice to develop their businesses, and see them rewarded for providing sustained benefits to the environment. We want to help them move on from production subsidies that distort market signals and distance them from their customers. As ever, investment and reform are key. To try to ensure that we secure those improvements, and get value for the money that we are prepared to invest, we have asked Sir Don Curry to chair an implementation group to focus on and help keep us up to the mark in our delivery strategy.

Most of that work is done in the context of international agreement and international policy making. The House will be well aware that, in relation to both the common fisheries policy and the common agricultural policy, there is strong debate about the need for change and the nature of the change that will be required. The Fisheries Commissioner has made his proposals—they include a proposal for a complete moratorium on cod fishing—but he is exploring with us and other member states whether a less draconian mix of measures can be taken as a way of substantially reducing fishing activity so as to try to ensure that stocks can recover. We recognise that even this would be painful, but we must act sensibly if we are to have fish stocks to argue about in the future.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): I am glad that the Secretary of State has introduced the subject of fisheries to the debate. Yesterday, in a debate on European matters, Foreign Office Ministers said that they would speak to the Prime Minister about the prospect of raising this subject at the Copenhagen summit. Will she update us and tell us whether the Prime Minister will raise the matter at Copenhagen at the weekend?

Margaret Beckett: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is very apprised of the need to address this issue. I have little doubt that he will take the opportunity on this occasion, as he has done so often in the past, to make strongly the case in Britain's interests.

The common agricultural policy review represents a significant opportunity for reform. With the Doha agreement, it adds impetus to the case that we, along with other Governments, have been making for radical reform of the CAP. We look forward to important negotiations in both these policy areas during the next few weeks and in the course of next year. However, that is, of course, only a small part of the international agenda and the negotiations in which my Department is engaged.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's environmental performance review of the UK, which was published a few days ago, shows evidence of progress in the effects of our domestic policy, in particular decoupling economic growth from at least some aspects of environmental degradation. We are also able to show progress in air quality, water quality, greenhouse gas emissions and levels of recycling.

Although it is right and good that we are achieving these improvements in the UK, the world summit on sustainable development in Johannesburg in September brought into stark focus the position elsewhere in the world. One in six of the world's population lack access to safe drinking water and more than one in three lack adequate sanitation. More than 11,000 species are threatened and as much as two thirds of the world population could soon live in countries suffering from moderate or severe water stress. The problem of water access and the availability of clean water are very much related to climate change, but all these issues relate very directly to the sustainable development that is at the heart of my Department's purpose.

At the world summit, we got international agreement to tough new targets to halve the proportion of people without access to adequate sanitation by 2015. We also, for example, got agreement to work on chemicals and on the marine environment, which had long been considered important by campaigners and by the Government. Of course, with others, we were engaged in launching 200 specific and concrete partnerships to pursue sustainable development initiatives right across the globe.

We said before the Johannesburg summit, we said at Johannesburg and we continue to say now that that meeting was only the beginning of a process and not the end. Internationally—whether through the United Nations or within the EU—we must work to make sure that sustainable development is at the core and in the mainstream of policy making and that we pursue the action plans and ideas set out in Johannesburg. We shall continue to press that case. However, while we continue to pursue sustainable development internationally, we also have to continue to implement our own policies, augmented by the Johannesburg agreements, here at home.

I have already referred to the improvements in air and water quality. We have also implemented a whole package of measures, including the climate change levy and the climate change agreements with energy-intensive sectors of industry, to try to deal with the overall impact of climate change. The creation of the Carbon Trust and the promotion of good-quality combined heat and power, as well as of renewables and energy efficiency, are all key to the Government's domestic agenda.

In April we introduced the world's first economy-wide greenhouse gas emissions trading scheme and, on Tuesday in Brussels, we and our Environment Council colleagues reached agreement on the shape of an EU emissions trading scheme that is to begin in 2005. The twin objectives of our scheme and of the slightly different EU-wide scheme, which has now been agreed, are not only to make emission reductions, but to give the business community a head start on the potentially billion-dollar carbon market. In the UK, there has already been an encouraging amount of trading in what is, at present, a fledgling market.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Although I am prepared to accept that the Secretary of State's Department takes these matters seriously, is it not true that her writ does not run to other Departments? There have been massive increases in carbon dioxide emissions from the transport sector and this week's statement from the Secretary of State for Transport does nothing to help. There is a huge subsidy for nuclear power and nothing for renewables. Does not the problem arise from the fact that the right hon. Lady cannot deliver across other Departments? *[Interruption.]*

Margaret Beckett: I am afraid that I missed the hon. Gentleman's second point, although I caught the one about transport. As ever, it is not easy to deliver on these commitments, but we all recognise the concerns that he has identified. We have seen a substantial improvement in public transport, but no one from the Government doubts that there is a great need to do more. The fact that not everything can be done at once does not mean that we are not putting on the right kind of pressure and getting the right kind of response from our colleagues.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): Has not my right hon. Friend's Department made preparations to examine Government as a whole in terms of a grid so that every Department can be considered from the point of view of sustainability and so that the Johannesburg commitments can be carried through?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right. We are undertaking such work. We are now considering what is the most effective action to take and are examining what our European colleagues are doing. We will share good practice so as to give effect to the commitments that we all signed up to in Johannesburg. Globe UK, with which my hon. Friend is associated, made a substantial contribution to illuminating some of the issues. We were grateful to it for that.

We now have the benefit of an updated scientific study on the risks and impact of global climate change associated with greenhouse gases. The whole House will be aware that our royal commission on environmental pollution recently suggested that, to stabilise emissions at a level that does not run the risk of massively increasing environmental damage, we should be aiming for reductions of 60 per cent. or more in emissions by the year 2050. To meet such a challenge, technical innovation is certainly needed.

Mr. Curry: In the light of the report from the royal commission on environmental pollution, has the Secretary of State had discussions with the Department of Transport on airports policy?

Margaret Beckett: Yes.

Technical innovation is particularly needed when it comes to the issue of the emissions coming from developing countries. Their legitimate aspirations for economic development and for growth will inevitably include greater use of energy sources. Therefore, it is all the more important to try to ensure that—whatever the

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sources or resources used—they are used to the maximum possible efficiency. We must also look to find renewable and carbon-friendly low-carbon technologies that developing countries can exploit.

This is not the only issue where the Department has to consider and deal with important and controversial technological innovation. Genetic modification is, in itself, a technical tool that allows people to do what the human race has been doing since time began—and this is the entire basis of agriculture. It seeks to find ways of improving breeding stock. Although the technique offers greater speed and precision than age-old breeding techniques, it is not of itself different in kind. However, there is no doubt that it raises a great many genuine questions and real concerns. That is why the Government are now sponsoring a public dialogue to explore the questions and concerns that people have. In this and other areas, we want to be guided by evidence and sound science.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Does not one of the concerns about GM technology result from the fact that it is fundamentally different from all evolutionary processes? It allows science to cross all the frontiers that nature has previously set. Among the risk considerations that the Government and society have to address are the implications for the ability of infections and illnesses to cross the vectors and frontiers that science is also crossing.

Margaret Beckett: I have mixed feelings about my hon. Friend's observation. In one sense, he is, of course, right. We need to take those issues seriously, and they need careful thought and discussion. However, crossing the frontiers set by nature is what agriculture is and what human beings have been doing since the race first started to try to feed itself more successfully. If we were not doing that, we would not be able to sustain a population on this planet on anything like the scale that we do. He is right to express those anxieties and it is right that they are taken seriously, but it is also right to consider the issues in a proper and sensible context, which is what I hope the dialogue will foster, so that we can decide how to deal with that potent technical tool.

Mr. Weir: Following on from that point, does the right hon. Lady know that in evidence to the Scottish Parliament's Health and Community Care Committee, the British Medical Association called for a moratorium on GM trials until there is more evidence of its long-term effects? She talks about discussing GM further. Does she agree that a moratorium would be sensible until that discussion is concluded?

Margaret Beckett: I am aware of the comments by the Scottish BMA, but I do not wholly share its view. To be fair, I have only seen reports of those comments and I may not have the full picture of the concerns expressed. What seems to have been overlooked, however, is that safety trials have been carried out. I was talking about the wider issue of genetic modification. The hon. Gentleman is talking specifically about the crop trials that are under way. Extensive safety trials were carried out before we got to the stage of growing trial crops on the present scale. The Government would not have allowed the trials to continue without that safety evaluation. The trials have a specific and restricted remit, which is to look more closely at the environmental effects on a farm-scale basis.

I was slightly surprised to learn that the Scottish BMA made that observation. Science is about trying things out. If we do not, how will we ever carry out the assessments? We need to make those comparisons and to have a mature judgment of the issues while retaining proper respect for people's genuine concerns.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): Does the right hon. Lady agree that the issues relating to GM food must be put in the context of the fact that there is less land for growing food, as the deserts expand and urban growth takes place, and that the world's population is expected to increase from 6 billion to 10 billion over the next 50 years?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman is right. I am concerned that the general dialogue in the news media in recent months and years has almost omitted to mention the impact that the technology could have on the developing world. That has not been a major factor in the public dialogue hitherto, although I am not, of course, talking about the process that we have just begun. In areas with desertification and salination, there is great potential for the use of that tool, and I know that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development shares that view.

There is yet another area where technological innovation is much needed. There is widespread recognition of the need to tackle the growing waste mountain that we produce. We need to put downward pressure on the levels of waste that we produce and to stimulate investment in new technology that can help us to tackle the problems in the future, whether they be waste minimisation or waste handling.

In the Chancellor of the Exchequer's pre-Budget statement, he reflected a cross-Government commitment to sustainability, including the sustainable handling of waste. He signalled, in particular, proposals in the longer term to increase landfill tax from its present rate of £13 a tonne to £35 a tonne. He also signalled the first steps on that road. He committed himself to reform the landfill tax credit scheme, to reduce the duty on bioethanol and to pursue a series of initiatives to promote more environmentally friendly transport, as well as looking further at fixed incentives to promote household energy efficiency.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Will the Secretary of State take up some of the issues on the landfill tax credit scheme that were put to her right hon. Friend at a recent House of Commons meeting? It was apparent that the restructuring of the credit scheme will reduce the amount of money available to fund further sustainable waste schemes and other work on the environment because the money that went to the private sector is to become public money, so reducing funding substantially.

Margaret Beckett: All those issues will have to be examined and taken into account as we consider the

reform of the landfill tax credit scheme. Although we recognise that some good things have been done through the scheme, the right hon. Gentleman will know that there has also been a great deal of criticism about some of the work and much concern about whether the money was being used most effectively. It is right for the Government to consider reform in those circumstances. I know that the Select Committee will take a keen interest in those matters and my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment is mindful of the benefits received from the existing scheme. We will want to do everything we can to preserve the benefits and to do better with other resources.

Sue Doughty (Guildford): We welcome increases in landfill tax, although the tax may not be increasing rapidly enough to make a real environmental difference and to get us closer to sustainable waste. Had a tax on waste going to incineration been announced at the same time, we would be able take the maximum opportunity to invest in recycling rather than in landfill or incineration.

Margaret Beckett: I understand the validity of the hon. Lady's point, but we are trying to ensure that we give the right signals to stimulate the changes in behaviour that we all want to see. We also hope to encourage further investment in, for example, innovative waste treatment. However, we must give people proper time to consider the issues and to make the investment and preparation necessary. We are not in the business of punishing people for doing something; we are trying to encourage them to find ways to change their behaviour.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the right hon. Lady agree that with respect to at least one element of the waste mountain—disposable nappies—there is a perfectly good old technology for dealing with the problem? It is simply a question of educating the public about that.

Margaret Beckett: Not only do I accept that, but I have some rather revolting experience of it, although I am happy to say that it was many years ago. We need to do a range of things to stimulate behavioural change. One of them is to minimise waste production as well as its handling.

In general, an enormous amount has been achieved over the 18 months of the Department's life.

Matthew Green (Ludlow) *rose—*

Margaret Beckett: With respect, I think that I should finish.

Internally, substantial work is continuing to reform the way in which the Department works and to deliver the policies and proposals to which we are committed. I said at the outset that sustainable development is the Department's core purpose, and it is the principles of sustainable development that we seek to apply throughout our policy areas and portfolios, and to see applied across the Government as a whole and internationally.

Since the foundation of the Department, the times have, indeed, been interesting. They have been challenging, but also enormously fulfilling. Much has already been achieved, but it is a giant task that our Department has been set. I am fortunate in tackling that task, both in my officials and in the strength of my ministerial team. We will continue to strive, first, to identify the policies this country needs to pursue, and then to deliver those policies as effectively as we can. We know how much more we need to do. I hope that we will have the support of the House in that endeavour.

1.49 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to move, To leave out from "House" to the end of the Question, and to add instead thereof:

"notes with concern the continuing recession in British agriculture; believes that a profitable farming and growing industry should be at the heart of a thriving rural economy; deplores the Government's mishandling of the foot and mouth epidemic and its failure to take effective action against illegal meat imports; calls upon the Government to reduce rather than increase the costs imposed on farmers and growers by unnecessary regulations; regrets the Government's failure to deliver on its promises to rural-proof its policies and to place sustainable development at the heart of policymaking and its failure to deliver on its own targets for recycling and carbon emissions; notes the repeated and trenchant criticisms made of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs by the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Environmental Audit Committees and believes that the time is now long overdue for the Government to turn fine words into effective action."

Many of the Government's policy objectives described by the Secretary of State are indeed admirable and, I am sure, command the support of hon. Members on both sides of the House. However, I found the self-congratulatory tone of the Government motion shocking. The sunny picture that it and the Secretary of State paint of the Government's achievements is utterly at odds with the experience of people in our rural communities and the conclusions of successive Select Committee reports. Even when the Government get their policies right, the Department over which the right hon. Lady presides is often incapable of delivering the outcome that Ministers want to achieve.

I shall start with what the Secretary of State described as her Department's overriding purpose—sustainable development. The Department's public service agreement defines DEFRA's overarching aim as promoting sustainable development. It is at the top of the Department's published lists of objectives and performance targets, and the Department's duty is

"to promote sustainable development across government and the country as a whole".

Last month, however, the report by the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs concluded:

"We are pessimistic about DEFRA's ability to ensure that Government Departments will do more than pay lip service to the objectives of sustainable development."

I am sure that the right hon. Lady does not need to be reminded that the Select Committee has a Labour majority and that 11 Government Members serve on it. It reached that conclusion after listening carefully to the

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evidence of key non-governmental organisations that do not have a partisan axe to grind but deal daily with the Department. The Wildlife Trust commented that

"there is evidence of a lack of integration with other Departments on related issues (such as transport and planning)".

The Council for the Protection of Rural England detected a

"growing sense of frustration and perhaps the inability of the Department to make an impact where it matters on the centre of Government".

The National Trust said:

"DEFRA has been barely visible in key policy debates, including, for example, on the internal working groups which developed the Planning Green Paper without any DEFRA input".

That failure to deliver in Whitehall means that DEFRA is failing to deliver its wider environmental objectives, admirable as they are.

I shall illustrate that with the example of timber—in many ways, a symbolic issue in the environmental debate. On 28 July 2000, the Minister for the Environment—I openly acknowledge his personal commitment to good environmental policies—announced at column 947W that the previous voluntary guidance would become binding on all Government Departments and their agencies, and they should

"actively seek to buy timber . . . from sustainable and legal sources".—[*Official Report*, 28 July 2000; Vol. 354, c. 947W.]

This year, however, the Environmental Audit Committee, on which nine Labour Members serve and which has a Labour majority, reported:

"While Government rhetoric has been laudable, we see no systematic or even anecdotal evidence of any significant change in the pattern of timber procurement since July 2000".

The latest evidence appears on the Department's website. Paragraph 4.6.10 of the report "Sustainable Development in Government", published just a few days ago, records a big increase in the last financial year in the Government's timber procurement, but a reduction of 16 per cent. in the proportion of timber bought from certified sustainable sources. Individual Departments are failing to comply with DEFRA's policy—the Department for Work and Pensions said that it cannot provide any information at all about its procurement, and the Ministry of Defence told DEFRA that it cannot provide figures until 2004.

It is hardly surprising that the Select Committee concluded:

"That DEFRA lacks the capacity to deliver in any policy areas other than the most immediately essential areas must have undermined its ability to commit fully to providing the required leadership and guidance on timber procurement, just as much as its lack of authority has prevented it enforcing the policy across Government."

The Government trumpeted rural-proofing as a key aspect of their policy, but their own quango, the Countryside Agency, concluded that

"most Departments have done the minimum necessary to introduce rural proofing".

The rural advocate, Mr. Cameron, said:

"I am not convinced that policy makers generally are giving sufficient thought to the impact on the countryside and people who live there when they develop policies".

He continued:

"I have seen little sign of a fundamental shift in Departmental policies".

Worse still, the Select Committee said that the record of DEFRA—the key Department—on proofing its own policies "is not impressive".

I am afraid that we must conclude that the Secretary of State presides over a dysfunctional Department. There is evidence of discontent in No. 10's decision to bring in the strategy unit to rescue a failing waste policy and, more recently, in the decision to appoint Lord Haskins as a temporary tsar over the Government's rural policy. Members of Parliament and, more importantly, our constituents see daily evidence of DEFRA's failure to deliver the services for which it is responsible. Every Member representing a significant agricultural constituency will have received representations from farmers and others concerned with the chaos and sheer incompetence of the Rural Payments Agency.

Matthew Green: Is not the problem with the Rural Payments Agency that it is acting as judge, jury and executioner and behaves as if farmers are guilty until proved innocent? By contrast, the Inland Revenue would assume that someone was innocent until it found evidence of wrongdoing—*[Interruption.]* Well, perhaps I am being too kind to the Revenue.

Mr. Lidington: It is part of the problem, but in the Department there is a wider failure to develop information technology systems to make online communication between the Department, its agencies and individual farmers practicable.

Recently, the Government almost unbelievably admitted that DEFRA forgot to apply on time for a share of the European Union's 2003 fund for expenditure on efforts to control animal diseases, notably scrapie and BSE. As a result, the United Kingdom ended up as the only member state to get nothing from the fund, and the right hon. Lady has been reduced to pleading with the Commission to accept a late bid. Above all, British agriculture feels betrayed by the gap between Government promise and Government delivery. In that context, I want to comment on the new strategic plan. Having had a couple of hours to look at the three documents published by the Government today, Conservative Members can give a cautious welcome to many of the proposals. We shall clearly want to study them carefully, and I want to come on to one or two aspects of the plan later.

However, the test of today's announcement will be not the presentation of a document or even the admirable list of policy initiatives, but whether today's statement can be turned into effective action to assist British agriculture, which is in the grip of the deepest and longest-lasting recession to affect that industry in living memory. If there is scepticism in our countryside, it is partly because we have had so many strategy documents before—in December 1999, "A New Direction for Agriculture"; in March 2000, an "Action Plan for Farming"; and in 2001, reports from a hills taskforce and an inputs taskforce, to which the Government have even now failed to respond. In the eyes of many farmers and growers in this country, the Government seem at best indifferent and at worst hostile to their industry, at a time when their businesses are fighting for their very survival.

That does not always mean that the Government need wait for European and international agreement, important though those aspects of the debate are. Let us consider animal disease. It is shameful that we had to wait for the European Parliament in order to get an independent and public inquiry into that devastating epidemic. The European Parliament's inquiry confirmed many of the messages that came through in the report of Dr. Anderson and others. Paragraph 20 stated:

"The British Government's contingency plan was inadequate both before and during the crisis."

In paragraph 21, the Parliament commented that the

"provision of information from state sources to local bodies and the farmers affected was poor and advice from the various government departments was repeatedly altered, inconsistent or even contradictory."

It is not enough for the Government to argue that that was all in the past and that things have now moved on.

Let us examine today's strategy document and the reference that is tucked away there to disease insurance. There is a clear signal that the Government intend to impose on farmers at least a large part, if not all, of the financial responsibility for ensuring against the risks of future epidemics. The first thing a livestock farmer is likely to say is that not only is he struggling to make a living, but the level of any premium that an insurance company requires of him will be determined in large measure by the assessment that that insurance company makes of the effectiveness of the Government's policies for stopping disease entering this country again in the first place.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Does my hon. Friend feel as unhappy as I do about the Government's efforts to prevent disease from coming into the country? We still do not have the bins necessary for people to throw away their sandwiches at the airport, and the landing cards have still not been amended so that people can read that they should not be bringing illegal meat into the country.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend is right. It was March when the Government published their action plan. As my hon. Friend says, there are no amnesty bins and there has been no change to landing cards. We had an announcement that Customs and Excise would take over responsibility for enforcing import controls on meat and plant products, but no details of the priority that Customs is to give to that task, nor any details of the budget, resources or manpower that will be available to Customs and Excise to do that important job. The situation was pretty well summed up by the chairman of the Royal Society inquiry, Sir Brian Follett, who when asked by the Select Committee what was missing from the Government's action plan replied with the single word "Action."

The experience of foot and mouth disease and the Government's failure even now to deal with the consequences of that and to take effective precautionary measures for the future could be applied also to the situation as regards bovine tuberculosis. The most recent figures show a further rise in the number of herds infected. We have an epidemic that is spreading way beyond its original hotspots, and there appears on the Government's part to be no strategy beyond waiting for the Krebs trials to conclude over a period of many years. We were promised many months ago the introduction of the gamma interferon test. Yet again, action has lagged greatly behind the promises made by the Government.

Let us take another issue on which national action would be possible: food labelling. In its report on the foot and mouth epidemic, the European Parliament called explicitly for country of origin labelling to be introduced on all food and food products to ensure proper transparency and traceability. Even the European Commission seems ready to review the position on that subject. In their document today, the Government make a few lukewarm noises about looking again at food labelling.

We know that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) is to introduce a food labelling Bill later this Session, and that will give Ministers the opportunity to demonstrate whether they are serious about the matter, and whether they are prepared to help British agriculture and consumer choice by introducing a statutory labelling system that will make sure that shoppers are able to tell whether the food that they buy was reared or grown in the United Kingdom.

We heard lukewarm words from the Government about competition policy. The Government speak, rightly, about the importance of farmers developing collaborative ventures in order to strengthen their clout in the food chain, but today's strategy document seems a little too satisfied with the current state of UK competition regulations. I am troubled when I see a New Zealand milk co-operative with more than 90 per cent. market share, and similar co-operatives on the continent of Europe with market shares in those countries of well over 70 per cent., and our dairy sector reduced by our competition policy to no more than 40 per cent., if that, of the market.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): I have been in the House for quite a long time. Will the hon. Gentleman explain why his Government destroyed the milk marketing board?

Mr. Lidington: I have two things to say to the hon. Gentleman. First, unlike his Government, I am prepared to learn from experience; I do not feel wedded to decisions taken by previous Governments, I am prepared to look at policy on its merits. Secondly, we are discussing farmers' co-operatives, not state agencies. When we are asking our dairy farmers in particular to go out and compete in a European and, increasingly, in a global market, we must review our competition policy to make sure that it takes account of the realities of global competition that our producers are encountering.

Mr. Curry: As the Minister who took the legislation on the milk marketing board through the House, may I tell my hon. Friend that I have no regrets whatever about that legislation, because the milk marketing board had become an east European-type, top-heavy monopoly based on selling a raw commodity, and was not innovating sufficiently. We needed to bring more market forces into play, and that is now beginning to happen, very sensibly.

Mr. Lidington: We need to find a way to marry the innovation that my right hon. Friend was seeking to

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achieve—it is clear that dairy producers will gain by getting into value-added milk products—with a capacity that enables dairy farmers to market their product collectively, so that they have sufficient influence in the marketplace when they are faced with very large retail buyers.

When one goes round and speaks to farmers and growers, one finds that the single greatest complaint about Government concerns the burden of regulation. At various times in the recent past, the House has debated a number of such measures in some detail. The 20-day rule is putting at risk the survival of livestock markets throughout the country, as well as that of many individual farmers. We know that fallen stock rules will be introduced next April, but we have not yet seen any details about the proposed new collection service. The Environment Agency is saying that new environmental laws due to be introduced in the next few years could cost farms between £25 million and £40 million and involve up to 200,000 separate agency inspections.

I believe that regulation needs to be more selective and risk based, and that we need to involve the industry at a much earlier stage in discussion about regulations, before the final details are set in stone, whether in Brussels or Whitehall. We need to find ways of reducing the duplication of paperwork and the multiplicity of inspections of our farm businesses. As I am sure the Secretary of State knows, the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Union recently published a report on environmental regulation and agriculture that made a number of important suggestions in that regard. I hope that the Government will take forward a significant number of those proposals.

Mr. Paice: Should not another factor be taken into account in dealing with regulations: the question of how the principles that they involve, many of which stem from European decisions, are being applied by other European Union member states? There is ample evidence to suggest that many regulations that are, to use the jargon, gold-plated in this country are given cursory attention in other European countries. Should we not ensure in future that, before implementing a measure in this country, we see exactly what is happening in the countries with which we must compete?

Mr. Lidington: As my hon. Friend says, we certainly need to keep a sharp eye on what is going on in the rest of Europe, where other countries' producers are competing with our own. I also hear from the agricultural sector of this country, however, that even when regulations are applied equally throughout the EU, there is often a difference of culture in their application. On the continent, the inspector will ask the farmer, "How can we work with you to ensure that you can comply with the new law and operate a successful and profitable business?" In Britain, however, the attitude tends to be one of us and them, and the farmer perceives that the regulations dumped on his desk in a massive folder or as part of a lengthy e-mail contain the implicit threat that if he steps the slightest bit out of line, the authorities will be down on him like a ton of bricks. The House of Lords European Union Committee suggested ways in which we could try to move on from such a culture, which is currently getting in the way of the profitable operation of businesses.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman, but I should like to move on.

On the environment, as with agriculture, there is a massive gap between the rhetoric of Ministers and the Government's record in practice. Ministers have set ambitious targets for the United Kingdom on carbon emissions, yet emissions have increased in each of the past two years. On recycling, we have seen not only the setting of fine targets, but enthusiasm in the Government to sign up to strict new European legislation. We now find, however, that a quarter of local authorities say that they will not be able to meet their recycling targets for 2005. There is no Government plan to deal with the imminent reduction in the number of sites for hazardous waste disposal, and the disastrous mishandling of the new rules on fridges and freezers has placed enormous financial burdens on local authorities.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): On refrigerators, does my hon. Friend recall the Minister for the Environment saying that, because of the cost to local authorities of recycling responsibilities, the Government would pay compensation in relation to such new regulations? Is he aware that in the county of Devon, however, we have just heard that there will be a shortfall next year of more than £600,000? That will be the cost to the taxpayer of picking up the tab for Government underfunding on refrigerators alone.

Mr. Lidington: I am afraid that council tax payers in my hon. Friend's constituency are going to be landed with the bill for the Government's inability to understand what the new European legislation they have supported means in practice. I hope that her constituents will know exactly where to place the blame for that increase in their council tax bills.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman has already had one go.

We have had our fill of ministerial visions, strategy papers and targets.

Margaret Beckett: I have been listening to the hon. Gentleman with great interest. He has made many comments about regulation and so on, and I share his view that it is right that we should become involved in discussions at an early stage. He has been talking a lot about the impact of regulation and how badly it has been handled, but it is my understanding that the regulations that are causing farmers greatest distress and concern are those on nitrate-vulnerable zones, which were introduced in 1991 by the then Conservative Government and have created problems in agriculture that far outstrip—

Mrs. Browning: My hon. Friend was talking about fridges.

Margaret Beckett: Yes, I know. There is no comparison between the impact on the community of

the fridges regulations and that of the nitrate-vulnerable zones regulations. The fridges regulations pale into insignificance in that regard, so a little more recognition from the hon. Gentleman of that widespread problem would be welcome.

Mr. Lidington: I am astonished that the right hon. Lady chooses to mount a defence of the Government's record on the basis of their approach to nitrate-vulnerable zones. The reason why we have to contend with such an oppressive regime on NVZs is that her Government failed even to enter a defence at the European Court of Justice. The judgment was made against them because they simply failed to argue a case.

Mr. Paice: Has my hon. Friend had a chance to see one of the documents published this morning, in which the Government's own figures show that nitrate concentrations in our rivers have fallen over the past seven years? Therefore, the justification for a countrywide NVZ simply does not exist. Most regions have seen a reduction of nitrates in their rivers. We should concentrate on the areas where the problem has not been resolved.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes his point well.

The credibility of the Government with farmers and environmentalists alike is in shreds, because they have repeatedly failed to make good the promises that they were so free in making. That is why the House should reject their complacent motion.

2.17 pm

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) began his speech by commenting on the motion. I think that he called it self-congratulatory, but I disagree with that view and with a number of the points that he made. I would describe the motion in different terms, as I believe that it is ambitious in substance, scope and scale, and deals with national and international issues that are highly complex and very difficult. In that context, I shall confine my remarks to a narrower picture, as I want to deal with British agriculture and rural communities, and the British countryside. That is enough for one afternoon, as there are plenty of problems for us to solve.

The countryside is not static. One of the issues that is currently around in the countryside is the cry "Listen to us", which often means "Listen to us: we don't want to change." That is based on a false perception. The countryside has always changed and it will always have to change to survive. If we want a living and working countryside, we must have a farming industry and a countryside that have the ability to take the challenge and make the change. It is how we manage that change that is so important.

There is no doubt in my mind that the farming sector is in crisis. After a long period, farming incomes are beginning to rise.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that with 15,000 fewer farmers left in the industry in recent times, there will be fewer people to face the challenge and make the change?

Paddy Tipping: There are fewer farmers to face the challenge and to make the change. The prospects are still difficult. I believe that more people will leave the industry before the change occurs. Farming is in crisis. There has been a period of prolonged difficulty that has been driven by low commodity prices and by a strong pound. The difficulty has been compounded by BSE and the foot and mouth outbreak. These things brought a crisis in public confidence about the food that is available to us.

Mr. Curry: Given the economic and statistical analysis that has been produced today, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the trend that he has identified in British farming is the trend Europe wide? The decline in farmers and in farm holdings is happening throughout the European Union, very much for the same reasons. I am sure that our debate could be reproduced in any national parliament in the EU on very much same terms.

Paddy Tipping: I agree entirely with that. International pressures, the way the world has changed and the issues that the Secretary of State has talked about in the international setting will drive the trend even further. However, more locally at a national level, the tragedy of foot and mouth disease has been a trigger or catalyst for change. I think that following the outbreak there has been a recognition throughout the farming sector that things cannot stay as they are and that we must change. The Curry report on the future of food and farming, which was published almost a year ago, has received some criticism. However, by and large there is a consensus that it is the way forward. It is important to praise Sir Don and to acknowledge that many of the points made in this morning's statement on the strategy for sustainable food and farming come straight from his report.

I broadly support that way forward. However, my major and real concern is the passage of time. It is more than 18 months since we were faced with foot and mouth disease. Although there has been consensus for change, I have a feeling that people are slipping back into the bad old ways. Many people decided to come out of livestock farming after foot and mouth, but farmers have begun to restock and to turn to the old family traditions. The strategy that has been announced this morning is, I hope, an agenda for action.

I agree with the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) that it is important quickly to make more progress. Much can be praised in the statement, but we need to consider things that were left out. I think that there is a strong feeling throughout the House that we should consider non-food crops, especially biofuels and biomass. I am disappointed that we do not have more concrete proposals in that area in the strategy that has been set out. I know that that is not entirely within the gift of my right hon. Friend. Treasury incentives will drive things forward. I am mindful of the fact that excise duty on biodiesel has fallen, as it has on bioethanol. However, it has not yet reached the level that will take the industry forward and provide a valuable and secure crop for farmers.

Mr. Weir: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that to get bioethanol off the ground, as it were, there will need to be substantial investment? Farmers, after experience with some other crops, will not go into growing non-

[Mr. Weir]

food crops in a large way until processing plant is available. Investment must be made in the plant in the first place.

Paddy Tipping: I agree entirely with that. That is why, fairly recently, I took British Sugar and Cargill to meet Treasury Ministers. I will not divulge detail, but both British Sugar and Cargill put concrete proposals on the table at the Treasury to show how the necessary investment and infrastructure could be built. In a sense, the ball is now in the Treasury's court. If it wants us to achieve our targets for renewables and if it wants to see investment in manufacturing, it must examine closely the proposals that have been put forward. In fairness to the Treasury, we have seen some movement, but it has been piecemeal, rather than the step change that we need to take the industry forward.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): The hon. Gentleman has made a compelling case for biocrops. I know that he has a long history of doing so. He says that the problem is a piecemeal approach and a lack of interdepartmental work. In a sense, does that not lie at the nub of the problem in terms of this morning's announcement? Some of it is interesting and parts of it are welcome, but it is not really a strategy in the sense that he identifies.

Paddy Tipping: The Treasury's strategy is straightforward. It would like to see biofuels take off, but it would like that to happen for nothing. What is new? We are talking about the Treasury. We are climbing the steps of the mountain and eventually we shall get the Treasury to the peak, when the vision will become clear to it. However, those of us who have worked on these issues for many years know that these things take time. I merely say that we are getting there.

My right. Hon Friend the Minister for the Environment, who was in his place on the Government Front Bench for the early part of the debate, has been a leading advocate to take us forward. I think that we shall achieve that.

In relative terms, the strategy set out this morning is weak when it comes to pollution issues. There is no doubt in my mind—I know that there is denial in the industry—that farming is a big polluter. The strategy sets out little about that. I am disappointed that more is not said about how we can use the land for flood prevention. That is the soft flood-plain approach or the water meadow approach. These are things that we can make progress towards and build upon.

In a real way, there are two themes in this morning's announcement that spring from the Curry report. First, we must link farming and food much more closely. I am amazed when I talk to farming friends to find that few of them have a business plan. I am amazed also when I find how few of them are aware of their marketing strategy. Similarly, I am amazed at how far many of the producers are from the marketplace, from the consumers. It seems that more and more people buy ready-made goods, convenience goods from the supermarket. We must connect the chain. One of the strengths of this morning's report is a recognition that investment is needed to enable these things to be done.

Andrew George: If the hon. Gentleman believes that the most important thing is to connect food production with sale, does he agree that having a rural recovery co-ordinator who comes from the processing sector preaching at farmers will not necessarily be the best approach?

Paddy Tipping: I sometimes think that prophets are not recognised in this context. If we are talking about a farmer in his own right, he will have a robust view of life. I agree that if we are to compete—allegedly we have the most efficient farmers in Europe—we shall have to see further efficiency gains. To take up the point made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Currie), we see larger and larger holdings. I am concerned about traditional family farmers and tenant farmers. The scenario looks bleak for them unless they can find niche markets or specialist markets, and they do not exist for everybody. Only a small sector of farming can turn to them.

I therefore commend the second part of the strategy on the importance of the environment. That springs from the Curry report, and was well documented in this morning's strategy statement. The message that I took from the foot and mouth outbreak was the importance to the rural economy of people visiting the countryside. Of course farmers suffered, but when the rights of way network shut, the countryside was closed to people. Bed-and-breakfasts and tourist attractions, and thus the rural economy, genuinely suffered.

People want to visit the countryside because of the landscape and the environment. There is nothing wrong with asking whether that is the sort of countryside that we want and for which we are prepared to pay. Should we pay farmers to provide such a countryside? Those matters are well documented in the Curry report.

An entry scheme and the review of agri-environment schemes constitute an important way forward. I counsel my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that it is not an easy road. Different members of the public define public good differently. What is good for a member of the RSPB may not be good for a member of the Ramblers Association. There is potential for conflict, and we must therefore work matters out carefully. We must also be careful that the entry scheme and agri-environment payments are not subsidies by another name. The World Trade Organisation and other bodies will consider that carefully. We need a strategy for answering their questions.

I am also worried about value for money. One of the reviews of the agri-environment scheme examines the fact that some schemes cost more to deliver and administer than to operate. If we are not careful, we could find ourselves trying to micro-manage the environment. The needs in the Yorkshire dales are different from those in the Lincolnshire fens. We need a scheme that is sufficiently flexible but careful enough to achieve our ends. Most important, we need to understand the consequences of the switch from

subsidies on production to payment for public and environmental goods. In so far as I can ascertain, no modelling has been done on that.

Mr. Jack: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that we are clear about the environmental goods that we would like to buy?

Paddy Tipping: There needs to be a vigorous debate about that and the entry scheme that will soon start. I believe that we are moving in the right direction and I am pleased that the schemes will be piloted for two years. However, there is a limited number of pilot schemes, and I have the impression that the piloting will consider the administration and operation of the scheme rather than the output. If so, we should be worried. Ministers have said that they do not want to be too restrictive and prescriptive about the scheme. However, we will pay public money for public goods and we must be able to define the reward clearly and carefully. I am not persuaded that we have such a definition yet.

I am not sure whether the timetable is right. I understand that there is a two-year trial period followed by a national roll-out. Given the pressures on the industry, I do not believe that we are sufficiently clear about the time scale.

Mr. Paice: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on an exceptional speech, which is seriously addressing the subject. On public goods, did he read the article in last week's *Farmers Weekly*, entitled "First Glimpse of Flagship Green Scheme—how the broad and shallow scheme will work"? It went into immense detail about, for example, the number of points that farmers would receive for all sorts of different details. What is his opinion of that? I should also like a Minister to pick up the point and say in the winding-up speech whether the sort of scheme outlined in *Farmers Weekly* will be effected.

Paddy Tipping: I saw the article, which reassured me a little. However, my point is slightly different. I guess that the audience for *Farmers Weekly* is fairly self-selecting. That publication is not a big seller. There should be a wider public debate about the entry scheme and what we want from it. I am not clear that we have reached that point. I am not sure that we have got the administration right. My preference is to move to a whole-farm approach for inspection. There is a strong case for registering the keeping of livestock. I should like to reach a position where one body inspected and advised farmers annually or more regularly. I hope that we can move towards that, and hold discussions with the NFU and others about doing so.

I have already mentioned access. The motion mentions people's desire to visit the countryside. The Secretary of State can be proud of what has been achieved. After 100 years of struggling, we have a right to roam freely in the open countryside: true Labour values delivered by a modern Labour Government. We should not be afraid to tell people about such achievements.

We should also not be afraid to implement measures. Parts of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will not come into force until 2005. I am delighted that the Minister for Rural Affairs, who is enthusiastic—perhaps sometimes over-enthusiastic—has concluded that we can allow access on a regional basis. That is good news for those of us who want to visit the countryside. I am also pleased that the Act provides for rights-of-way improvement plans. Arguments in the Ramblers Association mirror those in the Labour party between traditionalists and modernisers. Some people say that the directions of footpaths can never change because they are our historic legacy; others want a rights-of-way network that fulfils present local needs. Some exciting work can be carried out under the Act.

The Countryside and Rights of Way Act must allow people from the town to visit the countryside. I despair of those throughout the country, but especially in the countryside, who try to drive a wedge between urban and rural dwellers. That is a recipe for disaster. The rural and urban White Papers are two bookends on the same shelf. We need to be clear about the reciprocal relationship between town and country. I shall give two examples.

Earlier, I mentioned the benefits to the countryside of visitors, and the tragedy when they were not able to visit post-foot and mouth. Let us consider farmers' markets—parts of the countryside brought to the town. They are valuable to both communities.

Another, starker example is the need for more housing. We must build sustainable housing. We need small dwellings in town centres and to move away from the trend of building five-bedroomed, executive ranches in the countryside. We need to work for reciprocity in Government policy.

Sue Doughty: The hon. Gentleman has been saying some very interesting and helpful things. Does he agree that one of our problems is that an increasing number of young people are growing up with no real understanding of how farming contributes to the countryside in which we live today? Furthermore, these children are growing up and buying food that may not have been produced on British farms. Might it be helpful to develop a programme for schoolchildren to visit our farms and see the high quality of food that is produced there, to give them a greater understanding of the issues?

Paddy Tipping: I agree with all that. Organisations such as the National Farmers Union, for example, know conceptually that this needs to be done, but have not been particularly smart at delivering the goods. I used to take youngsters out from the middle of St. Anne's in Nottingham—my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) knows the area well. We would go out in the minibus and, as soon as we saw a stream, they would know we were in Derbyshire. I remember having many conversations about where the milk that arrived in St. Anne's actually came from. That is the kind of education that is necessary. That is why I am so concerned about the small group of determined people who, for their own ends, want to try to drive a wedge between the needs of urban dwellers and those of people who live in the countryside. It is in no one's interest to do that.

[Paddy Tipping]

We are not particularly strong on policy relating to the urban fringes. I am pleased with the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, but I visit the countryside regularly—

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. He has talked about not wanting to drive a wedge between the countryside and the urban population. Does he view with concern, as I do, the Government's proposals to reduce the size of the national parks? It is very important that those parks should have a wide variety of members on their boards. Implementation of the review that the Government published in July would lead to substantial reductions in the number of people serving on those boards.

Paddy Tipping: My criticism of national parks is that there are not enough outsiders on their boards. When I talk to people who are on those boards, they say that outsiders can often bring value. I was concerned, when the legislation relating to this issue was passed, at the dominance of the boards by large sections of parish councillors. They contribute something, but they sometimes do so in a negative way. What I want to say to my hon. Friend the Minister is, "Get on and designate some more national parks soon!" That is on the agenda; let us make sure that it happens, particularly before the next general election.

Let me return to the subject of urban fringes. As I said, I do not think that our policies on them are particularly good. Urban fringes are the places where old cars go to die, or to be burned out, and where people go to fly-tip. At the moment, we are just not clever enough at designing policies to help us with the transition from the built-up areas to the countryside.

I want to mention a particular experience that I had last week. I went to see the Hammond family at New Farm, at Redhill. They rent a field from the city council near Bestwood country park. It is a pasture, a piece of grassland. Local youngsters from Bestwood estate use it as a place for Tarzan adventures and bonfires. Dog-walkers also go there. We ought to design our policies and use our resources to provide imaginative opportunities to resolve the problems of the urban fringes.

I am also concerned about the fly-tipping that takes place around the countryside. We need to be clear, in our policies relating to the landfill tax, how we are going to manage and resolve that problem. I am particularly keen on an old colliery site in Nottinghamshire—the Gedling colliery—which is right on the eastern end of the built-up area. It is badly contaminated, but people aspire to turn it into a country park. At the moment, however, there is no real vehicle to make that happen. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is talking about the notion of a land regeneration trust. This site could be a prime candidate to provide a new country park. It would be a piece of alchemy to take the mud heaps of the old traditional mining industry and create part of a new Sherwood forest. We ought to have the ability and the imagination to achieve that.

We need to bring new opportunities into rural areas, and to acknowledge that farming is no longer the backbone of the rural economy. We need policies that will bring new investment into rural areas. I am slightly alarmed, as I see broadband develop across urban areas, at the difficulties that we will have in giving people in rural areas those same opportunities. I am also keen for us to review planning policies. PPG7 relates to diversification. I constantly struggle with local authorities in my area to try to persuade them to be more flexible about business opportunities—to let a wood yard grow a little more; to consider allowing the stables and the forge that provide specialist veterinary help; and to acknowledge that there might be a need for a house on that site. Our planning policies are far too restrictive. I know that they were reviewed 18 months ago, but if we are to develop the kind of enterprise that I want, we need to move further on this. As I have said, the countryside is not set in aspic, and we need to ensure that we have a strategy for change.

We also need to set the strategy in a wider international context. I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) about European legislation and directives. More and more of our work on waste legislation and environmental legislation will come from Europe. I was at the Commission recently, with some of my hon. Friends and other hon. Members, and it was interesting to note how enthusiastic members of the Commission were about British Ministers and British civil servants. Our problem is that we do not engage early enough in the emerging debate. We do not shape the debate or the future of the legislation at an early enough stage. The refrigerator issue and the nitrate directive particularly illustrate that point. We do not work through, at the conceptual stage, what finally the practicalities on the ground are going to be.

All this is achievable, but it is not going to be easy. The mid-term review is not going to be easy, and I think that the CAP reform is going to be almost impossible. We have the chance, however, to make the kinds of change that I am advocating. We can modulate farm policies in our own sector far more than we are doing at the moment. That is the message that I want the Minister to take away with him. We have made a good start through the English rural development programme, but there is much more to be done. We must move away from the notion that farmers can somehow rely on the state, and towards the notion that they can provide something more for the environment. We must also move towards the notion that we need more rural business. That is why the countryside has to change, and why change is inevitable. I say to my hon. Friend the Minister that we have an agenda for action, and it is action that we want. It is time to put the theory into practice.

2.48 pm

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the opportunity for a debate on the new Department, although I am sorry that the Secretary of State is no longer with us. The debate takes place against the background of the Select Committee report, to which other hon. Members have referred, and the publication today of the strategy for sustainable farming and food, to which I will return in a moment.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) called the Government motion "self-congratulatory". The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), some

30 minutes ago, called it "ambitious"—a very creative term in the circumstances, if I may say so. The picture painted in the motion is perhaps not quite so blissfully wonderful as he might think. If I may be slightly rude to the Minister, the word that springs to my mind is "smug". *[Interruption.]* The Minister should wait, as I may say something nice in a moment. Liberal Democrats want his Department to succeed. It may be flawed, but it is the only Department that creatively and actively promotes proper sustainability in government. It is the only Department that takes environmental issues seriously and champions the needs of rural areas. All those issues are terribly important, so it is vital that DEFRA succeed.

The Prime Minister was right to change the arrangements and mechanisms of government to abolish the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, because it had run out of road. It was known in some circles as the Ministry for Agro-chemicals, Fishy Excuses and Food Poisoning. No Department with such a reputation should be allowed to continue. The creation of a rural affairs Department was right, and the Government should get credit for that.

However, DEFRA has had a difficult birth, and its first few months have not been without difficulties, whether it has been on the environment, the foot and mouth epidemic or other farming-related problems. I shall deal with the Department's internal record, and then briefly with its external record and how effective it is in persuading other Departments to adopt its sustainable approach. That approach is terribly important. The Secretary of State said that sustainability was her Department's overriding purpose. If she is rightly to put such weight on sustainable development, it is important that we consider how well it has done.

I shall refer briefly to today's Government reponse on sustainable farming and food. I hope that my hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) will catch your eye during the debate, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I know that he wishes to address that issue. Like all hon. Members, I have only been able to have a brief reading of the report. It is fair to say that, as with many Government documents, it is good on rhetoric but less good on action. It tends to push all the difficult issues over the horizon.

Sometimes that is not the Government's fault. All parties in the House are signed up to CAP reform, but the Government cannot deliver that themselves. If they could reform the CAP by themselves, they would have done so, but they must secure European Union agreement. The CAP is a drain on the EU budget, it is an unsustainable way of farming, it gives 80 per cent. of direct subsidy to 20 per cent. of holdings, and it is not something that any of us could sensibly defend, yet the Government's response is weak. It says that they will continue to press for change. We have been told that for some time. The Minister may say, "What else can we do?" but I think that the Government should press harder and more firmly. He should speak to the Foreign Secretary and consider the impact of enlargement. In my view, it is important to get some CAP reform before enlargement if possible, because it will be much more difficult to achieve that when euros are raining down on the new members in eastern Europe, who will have reason to keep the present system going.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Like the Liberal Democrats, I would like to see substantial reform of the common agricultural policy. Liberal democrat parties are in power in six EU member states: Italy, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Luxembourg and Belgium. Has the Liberal Democrat party in this country made representations to its opposite numbers in those countries to press them to agree to some of the proposals that our Government have made?

Norman Baker: I am happy to confirm that we have made representations to our sister parties in those countries. We have also done that through the European Parliament, where our MEPs have been active on this issue. The countries to which the hon. Gentleman refers are not those most resistant to change. I am thinking of France and other countries where resistance is greater. He is right that we need to work with our European sister parties, as the Labour party does, to try to bring about change.

Besides the CAP problem, there is still the difficulty of the strength of the pound. Without wishing to be unhelpful to the Conservatives, I must put on record my view that, had we entered the euro earlier, the position of farmers in this country would be rather less dire than it is at present. The strength of the pound is a significant factor. According to the National Farmers Union, average income per farmer is just £10,700 per annum, and 67,000 jobs have been lost in the past six years.

Today's Government response says the right things, but does not take much further forward the issue of food miles and the power of the supermarkets. Recommendation 84 says:

> "The food industry should re-examine supply routes to reduce journeys wherever sensible."

With due respect to the Government, that will not get us very far, because the industry will carry on with existing practices, which suit them well. We should put real pressure on supermarkets to ensure that they start to source locally, which they do not want to do. Farmers' markets are great, and we all support them—it is good that they are increasing in number—but until we deal with the supermarkets, these problems will not go away.

Mr. Weir: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about supermarkets, but can he suggest practical ways in which that pressure can be applied when dealing with large companies with huge economic power that are beholden to shareholders rather than to the general community?

Norman Baker: We certainly need something stronger than a code of practice. We should deal with the power of the supermarkets. The Competition Commission should be more involved in dealing with the power of the supermarkets, which seem to have disproportionate control over the retail chain.

Animal transport is a further issue. I would like to have seen more from the Government on minimising the movement of animals for slaughter. There has been a contraction in the number of abattoirs in the past 20 or

[Norman Baker]

30 years, which has gone way beyond what was required. There are no abattoirs in my constituency, where once there were three. Animals are taken long distances for slaughter, which is bad for the animals, bad for the farmer who has to pay for that, and bad for the environment. The Government should concentrate on getting more abattoirs and filling the gaps that have opened up, but I see no evidence that that is occurring.

The Government have taken welcome steps on illegal meat imports by concentrating resources on Her Majesty's Customs and Excise. However, concentrating on Customs will not achieve much unless there are sufficient Customs officers. At Newhaven in my constituency, 14 officers have to cover a huge stretch of coast on a 24-hour shift. The idea that they can do much to stop illegal meat imports or anything else is fanciful. They will not be able to do that. We must get more Customs officers in our ports.

As for serious animal diseases, especially the foot and mouth outbreak in the previous 12 months, I do not want to rake over old ground, but as a consequence of that episode, the Treasury has decided to punish DEFRA by cutting its budget, so there is less money for the environment and for those issues that the Minister and his colleagues say they want to pursue.

In his speech, the hon. Member for Aylesbury quoted the Select Committee when he referred to sustainable development. It is important to understand that the general view outside Government, which is shared by Liberal Democrat Members, is that DEFRA is not able to deliver beyond its own boundaries. That is an important point for the Minister to pick up, because no matter how well intentioned he and his colleagues are, if they cannot deliver across those boundaries, their effect will be limited. Friends of the Earth said:

"Environment officials and Ministers have been marginalised, and distanced from the big decisions."

The Council for the Protection of Rural England said:

"The environment overall is becoming divorced from other Government policy decisions. A key concern is the relationship between Defra and other government departments. The Greening Government initiative no longer benefits from a senior member of the government"—

the Deputy Prime Minister—

"championing it, and the use of environmental appraisal elsewhere in government is distinctly patchy."

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has talked about DEFRA becoming

"a policy ghetto for green issues."

There is a perception that DEFRA is not able to deliver across government, which is what sustainable development requires if the Government are to deliver their agenda. They must face up to that problem, and deal with it head on, but the Secretary of State did not do that in her introduction to the debate.

I pay tribute to the Department when it has got it right. It has made good progress on dealing with sewage discharges and ensuring that secondary treatment is available for all towns with a population of 15,000 or above. It has made good progress in a number of areas. It is only fair to say that—but it is equally fair to say that the Department has not made progress in other respects. For instance, it was set a target on wildlife: to bring into favourable condition by 2010 95 per cent. of all nationally important wildlife sites, the current percentage being 60. The year 2010 is some way away and the Government may say "We will get there", but the fact remains that fewer sites are now in "favourable condition" than was the case two years ago, according to the sixth Committee report.

Both my hon. Friend the Member for Guildford (Sue Doughty) and I are worried about waste management. The target requires 17 per cent. of household waste to be recycled by 2004. At the end of 2001 the recycling rate was 11.2 per cent., up from 10.5 per cent. the year before. I do not think that there is a chance of it getting anywhere near 17 per cent., because there are not sufficient financial incentives for councils, private businesses or anyone else to achieve that target.

I recently visited the constituency of the Minister for the Environment, who, unfortunately, is not present at the moment. Oldham's Liberal Democrat council told me that it had wanted to replace PVC windows in a tower block, but that it would have cost £9 to recycle each window, against £5 in landfill costs. The council got round that by making a deal with Remploy, but all the economic signals are pointing in the wrong direction. The Government are right to introduce higher landfill taxes, but I question whether they are moving fast enough to meet their recycling targets.

The Government do not want to talk about incineration. A failure to promote recycling properly, however, along with a rise in landfill tax, will drive local authorities in particular into the arms of incineration. I can tell the Minister that people up and down the country do not want incineration. They do not consider it safe, and they rightly think that it undermines recycling because the waste stream is diverted. Moreover, it requires the concentration of resources in one place and many transport movements. Nevertheless, it may well be introduced through the back door because of the lack of incentives for recycling and reusing, let alone the minimising of waste generation in the first place. I am sorry to say that the Department has not dealt with that. Incidentally, the amount of glass being recycled fell from 27 per cent. to 26 per cent. last year. If we cannot even get that right, we are in some difficulty, are we not?

I do not want to be entirely negative about what the Department has done internally. It has done many good things, and its intentions are entirely right. I genuinely believe that it has a good ministerial team: Ministers are committed to their task and do their best. Nevertheless, there are clearly teething problems. There is a mismatch between the part that came from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the part that came from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. There are also problems with staff morale, which were picked up by the Committee. They are due partly to the variation in salaries—an inherited problem—but the current 20 per cent. turnover rate in junior-grade staff would be high in any Department. Furthermore, my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) said in the House on another occasion that 83 per cent. of targets had been missed. It is not exactly a success story so far.

We want DEFRA to work and if we can help it to work, we will. However, some reassessment is needed of how it is working internally and, more importantly, of its clout across Government.

I fear that the Government—deliberately or unintentionally—have downgraded the environment. I am not saying that the DETR was perfect—it certainly was not—but in that big Department the environment and transport were linked because transport has such an impact on the environment. There was a 10-year transport plan, which many people think was quite beneficial environmentally. Moreover, the relevant Minister was the Deputy Prime Minister, who had some clout. Let me say, with due respect to the Secretary of State and to DEFRA generally, that the new Department does not possess the same clout. It is, for instance, difficult for DEFRA to lead on climate change without being able to pull the necessary levers.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): The hon. Gentleman spoke of the impact of the new Department across Government. Does he accept, having paid tribute to the commitment and ability of the ministerial team, that what ultimately matters more than the work of the Department is the work and commitment of the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry? Does he accept that many of the Department's intentions can be implemented only if we manage to change the culture in the Treasury?

Norman Baker: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman has a proud record on the environment, and knows what he is talking about. My point was that when the Deputy Prime Minister was in charge of the DETR, there was a chance that he might be able to speak to the Chancellor and get some of his own way. The evidence so far does not convince me that that applies now. I say that with due respect to the Secretary of State and her colleagues.

The Secretary of State talks of a 60 per cent. cut in carbon dioxide emissions, which is indeed desirable, but what is happening? Perhaps emissions are being reduced in Nobel House—I do not know what the Department is doing internally—but they are not being reduced where it matters, which is in the Department of Transport and the DTI. Aircraft emissions, for instance, are expected to double from about 20,000 tonnes in 1990 to 40,000 tonnes in 2010, and, according to a parliamentary answer given last week, a further increase is anticipated.

A Conservative Member mentioned earlier that ours is effectively a "predict and provide" policy on airports and air travel. It seems that any demand for air travel must be met. That policy is not environmentally sustainable, but it is the policy that we have, and it is making it far more difficult for DEFRA to curb carbon dioxide emissions. Indeed, the Department is not tackling that task. The Secretary of State said earlier that she had spoken to the Secretary of State for Transport about aircraft emissions, but, if we assume that she conveyed the right message, it seems that she lost. She must have been overruled, because her colleague went ahead anyway.

We have seen a transport statement this week that goes back to the days of road building, saying that the car is king again and minimising the role of public transport. There is no getting away from this. We have a mad situation in which the Government are able to finance road schemes directly, but to say, "If you want a rail scheme, go and talk to the Strategic Rail Authority". What does the SRA say? It says, "The money has all been spent. Another £58 million was spent on Connex this morning"—or whatever company it happens to be—"and we have no money left because it has all gone to train operating companies."

According to multi-modal studies throughout the country, roads are going ahead and public transport is not. We must grapple with that problem, or we will see an increase in carbon dioxide emissions—as, indeed, we already are. This is one reason why they have increased in the past two years. What is the Government's strategy for reducing them? We have had nothing today from the Minister or any other Labour Member.

Mr. Chaytor: Has the hon. Gentleman seen the recent report of the royal commission on environmental pollution, which deals with air transport? Will he commit himself to supporting its call for a duty on aviation fuel?

Norman Baker: I am happy to say that I will. The Liberal Democrats have long believed that aviation fuel should be taxed. Fuel for motor vehicles is taxed; why should aircraft be excepted? In the current artificial situation, air travel is effectively subsidised in a way that is unsustainable, because it does immense environmental damage, especially on short-haul journeys. Why are aeroplanes flying from London to Manchester when there is what ought to be a perfectly adequate rail system? I can give one reason for that, as I went to Manchester the other day: the last train from Manchester leaves at about 8.10 pm. Until our rail systems work, such problems will continue.

DEFRA should be dealing with transport by lobbying very hard and achieving environmental aims, but it is not doing so. According to a parliamentary answer of 20 November, the cost of motoring went from a base of 100 in 1974 to 98.7 in 2001. In other words, motoring became cheaper over those 27 years, never mind the fuel protests. Over the same period, the cost of traffic by rail went from a base of 100 to 185.3. That is an 85 per cent. increase in the cost of rail travel. The bus figure went up from 100 to 166—a 66 per cent. increase in the cost of bus travel. Since the Government came to power, the cost of motoring has gone down again and the cost of bus and train travel has gone up. How does that help deal with carbon dioxide emissions or with the Minister's strategy for tackling climate change? It does not help at all—DEFRA must get a grip on the Department of Transport but it fails to do so.

The Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for energy, and DEFRA is left with bits and pieces such as home energy efficiency. The DTI produces the nuclear waste and DEFRA is left to clear it up. The polluter does not pay in Government; the DTI and the Department of Transport—the polluters—do not pay. DEFRA has to pick up the waste stream, which is wrong. The DTI and the Department of Transport should be greened, and if they are not going to be greened by the Prime Minister, there should be a mechanism in place by which DEFRA can do it.

The situation with regard to energy is almost unbelievable. According to a parliamentary answer that I received recently, the amount spent on the nuclear industry in 1997–98 was £94.3 million, and by 2000–01 it had reached £223.4 million. That is a massive increase

[Norman Baker]

and does not even include the £650 million for British Energy. It is hard to imagine any other industry saying that it has got into difficulties and needs a blank cheque. That figure would pay for doorstep recycling up and down the country for every house twice over, yet we are handing it over to the nuclear industry because it has failed. Why are we so obsessed with the nuclear power argument? We have a failed industry, both generators are bankrupt, yet the Government give them more money time after time.

What are the Government doing to help renewable energy? According to another parliamentary answer, the renewable energy support in 2000–01 was £13.6 million. So the nuclear industry was given a wad of money, but only a few coins were thrown to renewable energy.

Mr. Jack: Is the hon. Gentleman yet able to reply to the long list given by the Minister for Energy and Construction of wind power projects for renewable energy, to which Liberal Democrat Members, from the north of Scotland to the south of England, appeared to object?

Norman Baker: The Minister for Energy and Construction used that particular debate as an opportunity to avoid the issue of nuclear energy. Instead, he indulged in a load of rhetoric. The examples that he gave were out of context and misleading. My party leader is firmly supportive of the wind energy project in his constituency and my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) fully supports the wind power project in his. The picture painted by the Minister is untrue and misrepresents my party.

Mr. Hayes: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman has allowed me to intervene. I want to be absolutely clear about this. The hon. Gentleman is saying quite unequivocally that his party is committed to wind power, even where that means erecting large numbers of wind turbines in fenland landscapes, for example, that might spread across other unspoilt landscapes. Is that the ground on which the hon. Gentleman is proud and pleased to stand? We want to know so that we can let constituents across the country know it too.

Norman Baker: That comes from a member of the party that gave us nuclear power stations, with tens of thousands of tonnes of nuclear waste left for hundreds of years. Let us have no lectures about the environment from the Conservatives. We have a presumption in favour of wind power and our councils and Members of Parliament up and down the country support it. The hon. Gentleman gives an extraordinary description of wind farms filling every nook and cranny of the countryside, but they are subject to the planning process just like anything else, and local factors will be taken into account. That is what the planning process is for. However, there must be a presumption in favour of wind power. In addition, a significant amount of the money presently in nuclear power should be transferred to renewables and energy efficiency.

Until we have such policies, all the good words and rhetoric from DEFRA will not do much. It is not because DEFRA is deliberately misleading us—I think that it believes what it says, but it cannot deliver. What will DEFRA do to knock heads together in other Departments and ensure that they deliver on the policies that the Minister and his Department set out?

3.16 pm

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I congratulate the Government on holding this debate in Government time and on couching the motion in such wide terms, allowing us to attempt to connect the local to the global. That is the major challenge that we face, not only as a Parliament but as a society.

There is much that the Government can feel proud of and excited about in relation to a number of the programmes that have been put forward. The strategy document on sustainable farming and food has to be right to set new and higher standards for food safety. It must be right that we set and meet higher standards for animal welfare. Those are matters on which the House should unite. So, too, should be the commitment to look for sustainable procurement policies. The question is: how do we get there?

Just over a year ago a document produced by a group called Sustain analysed food consumption and trade in the United Kingdom. The document was called "Eating Oil" and was a sad but salutary reminder of exactly what is happening in United Kingdom and European Union food trade. Product by product, we appear to export the same quantities as we import. In terms of EU food trade, we are generating a huge amount of food miles for no particular food gain in the nutritional intake of any part of our constituencies or country. What sort of market rules generate markets in food that are grossly polluting?

I was amused and slightly embarrassed at the reference of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) to the time when he and I were involved in setting up an urban farm in the centre of Nottingham—embarrassed because it was a reference to something that happened a quarter of a century ago. It reminded me that 30 years ago I was involved with other people in setting up a food co-operative in the centre of Nottingham that operated from my garage.

It was a very interesting and exciting time, connecting the interests of the urban poor to those of rural food producers. However, we cannot turn the clock back to provide a template for where we are or where we ought to go. It was for that reason that over the summer I spent part of my time making contact with some of those who are involved in the processes of claiming a place for local food cultures. I made contact with some of those who have been involved in the slow towns and slow cities movement in Italy. I had a fascinating time with the mayor of Greve, which was one of the pioneer authorities, and looked at the nature of the slow cities movement. It was not necessarily about transport movement but about the connection between food consumers and food producers. We talked to fresh food retailers and people who prepared food. People in restaurants told us about the wide choice of wines, and the vineyards that they came from. They told us about the farms and the nature of the produce. They talked

about their local cheeses and how they were made, and even offered to tell us the names of the farmers or take us to visit them. There was intense pride in the localisation of a system of food production and consumption that was not an anachronism in today's world of huge global connections.

People saw that system as an essential underpinning of a sensible and sustainable way of life. Food accountability was central to their food agenda. I realised that we have had a distorted food agenda—distorted largely by the history of MAFF, which has told me on occasions that we do not have a local food culture, because we need to go for trade liberalisation and abandon the idea of clear labelling. In the global food trading system, we have undermined the integrity of local food systems.

I ask the House to align itself with the food revolutionaries, the veritable Khmer Rouge of the food industry: the Women's Institute. The institute runs regular markets where people will be able to say where the food comes from and what has gone into it, be it marmalade or pies—perhaps giving the name of the farmer as well—and will probably be able to provide a phone number that people can ring to ask about the nature of the livestock-rearing or fruit or vegetable-growing processes. The WI understands the importance of food accountability, and the House would do well to follow its example.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): I am sure that my hon. Friend would be delighted to come to the Abergavenny food festival, where he would see that philosophy put into practice with great success.

Alan Simpson: I am sure I would be delighted, and I am open to such offers, but I want to move the argument on from the local and personal to the structural.

We want that philosophy to become the norm, and that requires us to change the rules base for the markets as they currently operate. It is monumentally absurd that supermarkets should pay no business rates on their car parks. It would require only a small change in the regulations to allow local authorities to offer a different incentive and say to local food retailers that they can have a 70 per cent. discount on business rates for food reared and grown within 70 miles of their urban outlets. That would incentivise the strengthening and renewal of local food links.

The rest of Europe has a much greater diversity of local beers, because of a tax system that has always favoured the small and the local. The Chancellor has begun to go down that path with incentives to micro-brewers. In bars in France, all the pression beers come from regional specialists, supported by a tax and duty system that specifically favours the small, sustainable and local over the large, powerful and global. We, on the other hand, have market preferences that favour the rich and the powerful.

Mr. Weir: The hon. Gentleman is right to a certain extent, but how are we to force supermarkets, with their huge economic power, to give producers a fair deal? To be fair, some supermarkets, at least in Scotland, try to sell local produce, but it is still on the basis that they dictate the terms to the producer and push down the prices.

Alan Simpson: That is a real challenge, to which there are several elements. One is to change the tax and subsidy system, removing the concessions to supermarkets that do not apply to local retailers. We should also think about changing the balance of power in the relationship between food producers and retailers. In France, farmers have a legal duty to act through co-operatives, and in Italy they are given tax incentives to do so. Governments can influence the rules base of the market. My point is that current presumptions are in favour of a rules base that gives greater freedoms to the rich and powerful who can determine today's terms of production, purchasing and distribution. None of that is based on principles of sustainability. That is where I would invite the Government to take some of our best initiatives and move them into a more coherent and sustainable strategy.

Now that we have set up the Food Standards Agency nationally, why do we not give similar powers to local authorities to set up local food commissions? In Italy, such bodies can get involved in the brokering of food contracts between urban consumers and the rural communities that produce the food. In the context of such arrangements, which other parts of Europe have as of right, we must consider the twin issues of labelling and liability.

Mr. Roger Williams: Some local authorities would like to use local food and products in their schools, but feel constricted by European regulations that insist on their putting the contracts out to open tender, without being able to specify where the food comes from.

Alan Simpson: Yes, that is part of the current rules base, and I think it is barking mad. We should challenge that, and invite our European counterparts to subscribe to a different common agenda on sustainability.

If consumers are to have choice, it must be informed choice. The current European proposals on clear labelling are enormously important in the context of genetically modified products or ingredients. The Government have got it completely wrong in presuming that only those who seek to produce GM-free food should be required to label. If someone else contaminated food that one attempted to produce in a GM-free way, whom could the consumer sue? It could only be the person who made a claim that the food was GM free. The European proposals say that anyone who knows that a GM ingredient is to be used at any stage of the production process has a duty to indicate it clearly and label accordingly. It follows that, if we are to have labelling, it must be connected to the notion of liability. We have said on many occasions that we are committed to the principle that the polluter pays. That principle is right, but in respect of GM foods we must find some way of establishing—it need not take the form of the Genetically Modified Food and Producer Liability (No. 2) Bill, which I introduced last year—that a rules-based system in which the genetic polluter forces the organic farmer out of business is unacceptable. Such a system would be absurd.

[Alan Simpson]

The Secretary of State has referred to genetic modification as being an automatic part of evolution, but that is fundamentally wrong. To put it in non-scientific terms, the reason why, throughout history, the soya bean has never mated with the fish has nothing to do with the fact that they do not fancy each other, or that they have different tastes in music, or that they prefer to read different Sunday papers.

Andrew George: They might want to.

Alan Simpson: Indeed, but the difficulty is that nature has provided species barriers that do not allow the sharing of those interests. They might share a place on someone's plate, but they are not likely to share a part in the process of reproduction and evolution. We must assess enormously seriously the consequences of a science that breaks down such barriers. We would never allow a new drug to be tested on members of the public outside strict laboratory conditions, in the way that we are currently trialling GM crops in open environments. That is the critical issue at stake.

On energy and technologies, there is much for the Government to feel proud of. I urge Members to read the document that was published last year, entitled "Powering Future Vehicles", which deals with a strategy that is remarkably ambitious. This Government are the first internationally to set targets for new vehicles. One such is that, within 10 years, one in 10 of all new vehicles should have fuel emissions of less than 100 g of carbon dioxide per kilometre. Ours is also the first Government to set really tough emission standards for low carbon buses. Again, that is an extremely desirable process for us to embark on and invite the House to support. However, there is no point in doing that if what underpins the centralities of our transport system is huge investment in motorways and disinvestment in railways, and huge investment in private transport and huge under-investment in public transport. That should be the locus of the refocusing of our attention.

In getting there, it will not be enough for us to talk about other fuel sources. Several Members have been involved in trialling differently fuel-sourced vehicles around the country. Some 10 years ago, I talked to scientists who were involved in running a fleet of cars around Germany using hydrogen fuel cells. The obstacle to change is not the technology, but the question of where to fill up. We must intervene in the markets for fuel in much the same way as is happening in France. In France, there is an obligation on service stations to provide access to alternative fuels.

The Government are right to point out that there is a debate about which will be the predominant non-polluting fuels that we look to in 10 or 15 years' time. However, at this stage the question for the motorist who wishes to fill up more ethically is where to find the fuel choices. If we want people to try to occupy those ethical platforms, we have to make such choices available to them. It is not enough to exhort; we have to build that in as a condition of the franchises for service stations. Only then will people be able to exercise the sort of choices that the Government would like them to exercise.

Sooner rather than later, we will have to address the absurdity of the absence of an aviation fuel duty. Aviation fuel is arguably the most polluting form of fuel, if only because of where the emissions are discharged, and the absence of such a duty also distorts other markets. I therefore urge the Government to take heed of the warnings and exhortations of Members, and to look at an early introduction of an aviation fuel duty.

Norman Baker: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the American Government are wholly opposed to such a tax. Does he therefore agree that the Government should take steps to persuade our European Union partners to introduce one at EU level, at least as an initial step?

Alan Simpson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I would urge the UK Government and our European partners to presume to levy such a tax on all American planes landing anywhere in Europe. The Americans cannot exempt themselves from the damaging consequence in terms of climate change that their assumptions about tax-free aviation fuel impose on the rest of the planet. I should welcome a tax.

I am very conscious that DEFRA has led the commitment to the eradication of fuel poverty in Britain. We could easily forget that that was an important milestone. Never has there been such a clear commitment by a Government in this country—a Labour Government—to the eradication of fuel poverty. DEFRA's current difficulty, however, is that the budget that it was allocated to address that problem is not sufficient to meet the targets and the needs. As a Parliament and as a Government, we must try to strengthen DEFRA's hand in obtaining a more sensible and adequate budget to meet our fuel poverty targets.

Last year, the Home Energy Conservation Bill, promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), was talked out because it was argued that DEFRA could not afford £100 million a year to meet its costs. However, we have to put that in the context of the global figure to which we have just signed up in order to bail out a completely bankrupt nuclear industry. I understand that the total figure will be not the £650 million that was being talked about initially, but £13 billion. The Government propose to underwrite a bankrupt industry with £13 billion of taxpayers' contributions, yet we were told that we could not afford £100 million to pay for the elimination of fuel poverty.

A fraction of the money that will be thrown at the bankrupt nuclear industry could have allowed us to end fuel poverty in Britain, to cut carbon emissions dramatically and to set about a huge transition towards investment in renewables. It would have allowed us to occupy the international moral high ground, as the Government rightly want to do.

On my next point, I am in disagreement not only with the Government but with the House. On behalf of the unreconstructed, I want to make a plea that we should mount a challenge on something that currently mesmerises the House: the belief that global free trade—trade liberalisation—is a panacea for the world's problems. I think that idea is garbage. This morning, the Chancellor was singing the praises of free trade and telling us that it could eradicate global poverty. There is no analysis to support those claims for our planet.

Let us consider what has happened during the past 50 years. For the first 25 of those years, the developing world was allowed to make progress through aid

programmes and international support based on import substitution policies, so that they could meet their own needs before they met those of the west. The gap between the richest and the poorest narrowed. During those 25 years, per capita incomes in Latin America grew by 73 per cent. In Africa, they grew by 24 per cent. Then, post-1980—and who came to power in the UK and the US in 1980?—there was a cowboy era of free trade and trade liberalisation.

The figures for the second 25 years are grotesque. In Latin and South America, real-terms per capita incomes have grown by only 6 per cent. and in Africa they have fallen by 23 per cent. As was pointed out earlier, countries that are primary producers of goods such as coffee and tea face collapsing world prices for those commodities, and when the World Bank steps in with further trade liberalisation programmes it is on condition that those countries hand over ownership of all their primary resources in a fire sale. Those primary resources even include their own water. There is no point in our talking about sustainable access to decent water supplies, food or production processes when the rules of the game asset-strip the poor in the south in a way that we have never seen before. We shall not recover from that in terms of either climate change or global poverty.

In the representations that our Government make to those global summit meetings, we have to occupy a platform on which we assert the right of the poor to be judged not on the basis of how they feed the rich, but on whether they can feed themselves. Sustainability must begin with recognition of the capacity that exists in those continents and the subcontinent.

Just last week, environmental experts from Ethiopia and India spoke to us. Although there is a tragic famine in Ethiopia, they told us that they do not have a food crisis, in the sense that there is a huge surplus of cassava in the north and a famine in the south. They have no shortage of cash crops; they just have a shortage of cash. The international community will not allow their Government to step in to buy the cassava surpluses in the north to give to the farmers in the south without destroying the country's agricultural base.

India has stepped in to try to answer Zambia's plea to receive non-genetically modified grain as part of the famine relief programme. The World Food Programme says, "No, it is an unreasonable request." Why? Because the WFP primarily has huge surpluses of GM grain from the United States. India has been saying, "Look. We have had our largest ever grain surplus—55 million tonnes—take it from us. It is GM free." The WFP has stepped in under the auspices of the US and said that is an unreasonable request from those in one of the poorest countries on the planet.

India has record grain surpluses and its Government are telling farmers to produce less, more sustainably. Even India is asking, "Why on earth are you forcing us to open our grain markets so that America can offload its grain surpluses and destroy our domestic capacity for farmers to produce grain at a price on which they can survive?"

Let me put a challenge to the Government: we have ambitious targets and we have much that we can feel proud of in setting out our stall and in our current direction, but we now have to pull the best elements of our policies together into a coherent programme that offers an alternative model of sustainable development not only for our own communities but for the global community as well.

That model of sustainable development cannot be realised unless we are prepared to challenge today's market rules, which favour the large and powerful over the small and local, and those who exploit and pollute rather than those who sustain and renew. If we can find the courage to meet that challenge, we will be thanked not only by generations of our own electors, but by communities across the planet.

3.43 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Before I make my remarks, may I draw hon. Members' attention to the declaration of my interests in the food and agriculture sector in the Register of Members' Interests?

On Monday 23 December, I invite all colleagues who happen to be in the St. Anne's area of my constituency to join me at the pre-Christmas farmers' market, where they will see Fylde farmers trying to keep farming and to do their bit by marketing directly and thus to respond to the public's growing interest in where their food comes from and to answer some of the questions about traceability. Two weeks before that, the farmers' market in the village of Great Ecclestone in the north-west of my constituency will have effectively done the same thing.

The enthusiasm shown in those markets is electric and exciting. They put some of the passion and interest back into countryside matters, but the sad feature of today's modern, large-scale agriculture business, the marketplace for which is dominated by supermarkets and where 40 per cent. of the country's food spend is made outside the home, is that farmers' markets alone are not enough to help to rebuild and sustain our farming industry.

I was surprised that the Secretary of State made no mention of the fact that farmers' incomes—£1.5 billion in 2000—are at their lowest level in real terms since the 1930s. In the last six years, 67,000 people have left farming in the United Kingdom. Much as I admire the commitment of the Under-Secretary to countryside matters and to matters such as flooding, water and fishing, and the passionate involvement of the Minister for the Environment, there was not much passion from the Secretary of State to provide the vital ingredient that the farming industry craves—leadership. Often, farmers look to the centre to say which way they should go. Ultimately, it is their decision—they are business people and must make investments in their farms—but given that, in post-war Britain, politicians have interfered at a national and European level to form much of British agriculture, to set the marketplace and to set the price structure, it is hardly surprising that farmers look to the Government of the day for leadership, guidance and, above all, commitment to their industry. What we heard from the Secretary of State was a tour d'horizon of umpteen things in which her Department was interested and a great deal of management speak, but not much in the way of passion and commitment to farming.

As well as passion, we want a strategy that shows leadership, and I do not see much of that. As I said, we have heard a lot of management speak about roll-outs of

[Mr. Michael Jack]

programmes, investigations and consultations. We have just been through the traumas of the foot and mouth outbreak, but did the Government take the lead in calling a public inquiry? No, they subcontracted their investigations to other people. When it came to sorting out a report on the future of farming, did the Government do anything? No, it was Sir Donald Curry, who was invited to chair a commission. It has done a good job, but the Government could have organised it, instead of which they simply subcontracted it. Now, it is subcontracting the future of farming to Lord Haskins. It would be nice if the Government, instead of publishing endless glossy booklets about the wonderful world of food farming as they see it, would face reality and offer some leadership.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): The Conservatives made a great fuss, along with *Farmers Weekly* and a number of other newspapers, demanding a full public inquiry. Had they got their way, that inquiry would be only about half way through its work. Through the swift action of the Government, however, we have three independent reports of great quality.

Mr. Jack: It is remarkable that on an issue of particular concern to Labour Members, such as Bloody Sunday, the Government were happy to initiate a serious public inquiry. For those in the countryside of the United Kingdom, having the opportunity to speak in public on these matters was their priority. I urge the hon. Gentleman not to be selective. Given that rural communities have been torn to shreds as a result of this devastating outbreak, which was largely down to the failure of the Government to have a proper strategy in place, it would be a good part of the healing process to let them have their say. Looking at the inquiries that have been conducted by local authorities, one can see the benefit of letting the people speak on such an occasion.

The other factor that has affected farming, which has not so far been mentioned in the debate, is the relative strength of sterling against the euro. One cannot ignore that in determining many of the positions that farming and agriculture must now take to deal with the realities of a difficult trading position, which has opened up competition from Europe in a way that has not been seen before. It is not just a question of being better at doing something but of having an automatic price advantage to help. Many of the problems of our industry would disappear if we had parity of currency values.

Andrew George: Today's Government response says that they will consider giving direct support payments in euros to farmers in two years' time. Is it Conservative party policy to support that measure?

Mr. Jack: As a humble Back Bencher, I cannot speak for my colleagues on the Opposition Front Bench, but they may wish to respond to the hon. Gentleman's question. I was surprised, however, that the Government took so long to make payments in euros to UK farmers, because I thought that that had been agreed some years ago.

The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on one of the features of the response to the commission on food and farming. There is an incredible sense of lethargy—a sort of mañana attitude. Things do not happen today; they will happen in a few years' time. For example, the code of supermarket practice is all about reviews. It is not about ensuring that all the supermarkets sign up to it or about ensuring that the code is given some bite. The approach is, "Let's look at it in a few years' time, folks"—if there is anything still left to look at.

Let us consider the motion against the background of the huge decline in income and employment in agriculture. To table a motion of such unbiased self-congratulation that does not accord with anything in the real world is unbelievable. The motion and the Secretary of State's remarks gave no indication of what the Government think are the strengths and weaknesses of agriculture. The motion gives no encouragement to the better parts of the industry and no commentary on the overall strength of the United Kingdom in, for example, the milk and dairy sector in which we have a tremendous advantage over other parts of Europe. It does not talk about how the Government should be in Europe developing a strategy to enable the best bits of UK farming to survive. It did not even say that they want a vibrant farming industry in this country to survive. It is the lack of passion, commitment and analysis that worries me.

The Select Committee has exposed the utter failure of environmental policy to deal with the fridge mountain, the confusion caused over matters connected to the disposal of dangerous goods and the mañana attitude towards public consultation on the ultimate disposal of nuclear waste. However, I find no mention whatever of those issues in the Government motion. I wonder what planet they are living on when it comes to their agricultural and environmental responsibilities. There is no mention—in any seriousness—of genetic modification and what the Government plan to do. I could go on, but the fact that they have tabled such a motion demonstrates their lack of a sense of reality and their discourtesy to the House. Each item in the motion should have merited much longer debate on its own. To try to jam the entire Department's responsibilities in one onomatopoeic—I think that is the correct word—motion goes too far.

I welcomed the commitment in the Secretary of State's remarks to sustainability and the acknowledgement that farming must be profitable. Many of the things that we want for farming depend on its profitability. I mention that point in the context of sustaining our rural economies. Without profitable agriculture, we cannot have many of the rural community facilities that we want.

I remind the House of what the Select Committee's report said about the role of DEFRA. It concluded:

> "Whether it likes it or not DEFRA is more than just an interlocutor for agricultural and a wide range of other, related, industries: it is a funder, regulator, negotiator and mediator. It is important, therefore, that DEFRA makes clear the central role played by agriculture in delivering a host of its objectives, and in particular those relating to rural communities, the countryside and sustainable development".

That puts agriculture right at the heart of the rural economy and no one should ever forget that. Agriculture is not a manufacturing activity; it is about communities. It is about centuries of devotion to the

land in this country. The very fabric that we seek to sustain is the result of centuries of good farming. It is time that the Government acknowledged that.

The Secretary of State's speech referred to the announcement of £500 million to help implement the Curry commission. However, the detail is fascinating. There is £500 million over three years, and most of it has already been announced. It comes to £133 million a year for programmes that are part of the English rural development package. If one looks across the range of the programmes, one realises that there is limited money for many of the things that the Government say they are going to do to sustain the rural economy. It would have been helpful for the Secretary of State to comment on the workings of the English rural development plan.

There was no mention in the Secretary of State's speech about the state of CAP reform. Like the mid-term review, it did not exist. In the foreword to one of the plethora of documents issued today, the Prime Minister says:

"But things are not right. European taxpayers pay around £30 billion a year for the CAP, yet our farm incomes are close to rock bottom."

Schröder and Chirac ensured that he was sidelined on the mid-term review. When Lord Whitty, the Minister from the other place, appeared before the Select Committee two days ago, I quizzed him on what exactly is on the table for the mid-term review. Perhaps the Under-Secretary can confirm what is still alive. Is dynamic modulation on the table? What is going to happen to the other elements of the separation of payments from production? What is the timetable? What has happened to the mid-term review, because if the CAP is to be reformed, that is when it will be decided?

What is interesting is that there is no mention of the non-subsidised sector of agriculture—pigs, poultry and, above all, horticulture. A member of the food and farming commission, Mr. Mark Tinsley, explained that the horticulture industry is responsible for 20 per cent. of agricultural output and 25 per cent. of the food chain, and that it is largely unsubsidised,

"But it is treated from DEFRA down as if it is an irrelevance."

So a large part of the agricultural sector, which accounts for a large part of our output, is seen as irrelevant. Most importantly, it is not subsidised. If there is a vision for the future of farming and the Government's role in it, the horticulture industry is it. Yet a leading player on the commission says that DEFRA thinks that it is irrelevant.

Mr. Hayes: I have met Mr. Tinsley, who is one of my constituents. My right hon. Friend is right about his concerns. He may be interested to know that Mr. Tinsley told me that he particularly regretted the lack of vision for horticulture, the lack of a willingness to invest in its future in terms of research and development, and the lack of Government support, by which he did not mean payments but some sense of direction.

Mr. Jack: I am grateful for that information and will build on my hon. Friend's comments. The Government have not formulated a proper strategy on how they will help the research side of horticulture. Horticulture Research International awaits the Government's response to the quinquennial review. The Select Committee produced two reports highlighting the management and business failings of HRI, but instead of telling us what they were going to do, the Government sat back, twiddled their thumbs and waited for the quinquennial review. We still do not know what will happen to the only place in the United Kingdom where the Government can help the unsubsidised sector of horticulture. It is lamentable and shows a complete abrogation of responsibility. If the Government want successful food and farming in an unsubsidised world, it is vital for them to attend to matters connected with research and development.

Mr. Tinsley is making zero or negative returns on his capital, and people are working harder just to stand still. The directors of his company have even taken a pay cut. Yet the Government have seen fit not to make a clear statement about the research needs of the horticulture industry. That part of the farming sector was one of the first to embrace an assurance scheme and to deal with the costs of that. When one talks to Mr. Tinsley about some of the problems that he faces, it becomes clear that there is still an imbalance in the power between the buyer and the seller, and that goes to the heart of the matter.

In the Government's response to the supermarket code of practice, they made the lukewarm suggestion:

"The Government believes that the code of practice can set a standard for the industry as a whole. We endorse the Commission's call and are actively encouraging retailers".

What are the Government doing about the mismatch between the pious words of supermarket chairmen who tell farming conferences that they are backing the United Kingdom and looking after the farming industry and the actions of their buyers on Wednesdays and Thursdays when prices are agreed? How are they going to make certain that, through their buying policies, supermarkets do more than pay lip service to the needs of British food and farming? There is a great deal that supermarkets can do to help—respecting seasonality, for example. When we have the produce, we should buy from the UK, not simply take advantage of cheap offers from the continent.

To conclude, I shall say a few words about north-west England. The comments of representatives of the National Farmers Union on the state of the milk industry apply to rest of the country as well. There is an acceptance of the need to co-operate and of the need for value added. However, I remind the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), of the need to look again at competition policy and our milk industry. The Government must make certain that they give it every encouragement so that it is strengthened in Europe—we are competing against powerful players with a dominant position in the domestic market. However, the competition is not just European but worldwide, and our dairy sector is currently battling for survival with one arm tied behind its back.

Farmers in the north-west are worried about bovine TB, about which the Minister is deeply knowledgeable—I understand that he recently met Cheshire farmers to discuss it. If it is Cheshire today, it will be Lancashire tomorrow, and there is a real fear that little is happening to check the spread of that

[Mr. Jack]

debilitating disease. We are still awaiting trials but, in farmers' minds, practical action is needed to stem the spread of the disease.

DEFRA is a big Department and, at times, seems to be struggling both to recognise its priorities and to deliver. I urge it to show leadership, passion and commitment to our food and farming industry, and note the points made in our debate.

4.2 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): When I was a novice political candidate for a partly rural division, I thought that it would be useful to gain some knowledge of the common agricultural policy, parts of which are impenetrable, particularly the language. I went to my first farm meeting armed with a passing knowledge, so I thought, of modulation, and I survived. I had no idea of the language that I would have to learn afterwards—we started talking about cross-compliance, various coloured boxes, first and second pillars, coupling, uncoupling and decoupling. It is not surprising that the wider public find it difficult to enter fully into the debate about the CAP and the future of farming.

There is now a tendency to argue that we should not have price support subsidies. There may be a case for that, but it is worth reflecting on how we reached the current position. Members who have met people who farmed in the 1930s will know of the terrible agricultural depression at the time. We are now in a recession, but that long-term depression lasted the best part of two decades. The price of land was so low that in practice it was almost given away in many areas, and was certainly rented at a low price so that it could be kept in cultivation or under stock. Many people from Scotland came to East Anglia and farmed the land because it was available at such a low rate. That was the sort of depression that existed before the war.

With the coming of the war, we realised how crucial our farming industry would be to us because we could not import foodstuffs from the rest of the world, as we had done. Following those two experiences, the Attlee Government after the second world war, under that great Minister of Agriculture, Tom Williams, began to introduce extensive price support and protection for British farming, which was the foundation of British agricultural prosperity until we joined what was then called the Common Market. The national policy of protection and support was taken over by the common agricultural policy.

It is not for me to give a simplified version of history, but it is sometimes worth recalling how we have come to be where we are, and the problems that have occurred since we have had the common agricultural policy, rather than our own policy. The CAP involves the expenditure of 44 billion euros. I am not immediately able to translate that, as the exchange rate changes regularly, but an awful lot of money is being spent on the support of agriculture across Europe, yet there is a feeling among farmers, the public, consumers and environmentalists that, notwithstanding all that money, nobody is getting a very good deal.

British agriculture needs support and protection. It suffers from a number of fundamental disadvantages, not all of which are replicated elsewhere. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) mentioned the strength of the pound. A former Member of the House would have used the vulgar phrase "a double whammy" to describe the double detrimental effect on farming. It reduces the value of a farmer's subsidy, support or payment, and it increases the competitiveness of imports from abroad. The farmer loses in both respects.

The Government may at some stage make a decision about whether we should join the euro, but it is not a matter that can be dealt with in isolation from a range of other matters. It is not an issue peculiar to agriculture. We cannot make a decision to join the euro based solely on agriculture. That decision must be taken in a wider context, but while the euro is so weak and the pound is so strong, British farming will continue to suffer.

Our climate is not the most perfect in the world. Manchester has been mentioned. Manchester may have a perfect climate for some things, but not necessarily for agriculture. There are other countries that will always be able to grow farm produce more easily than we can because of their climate. The other thing that we do not have is land. A cursory look at the map of Europe reveals how much bigger France and Germany are, let alone the Ukraine or parts of eastern Europe. Such countries have land in abundance and the possibility of farming on a scale that is difficult to contemplate even for East Anglia. They therefore have the great advantage of economies of scale. The further east and the further south one looks, the more likely it is that in addition to cheap land, there is cheap labour. That wonderful combination enables such countries to compete on easy terms with the the UK.

Foot and mouth has been discussed, so I shall not deal with that, or with BSE, classical swine fever or the other scourges that have afflicted parts, or in some cases all, of British agriculture over the past few years. All those matters have a damaging effect on our ability to compete in a free market. Beyond that, we insist on extremely high standards of animal welfare, pollution control and environmental protection. I shall not elaborate on the argument about gold-plating—I have never been certain what that meant. However, it costs British producers money if they are obliged—rightly so—to observe higher standards of animal welfare, environmental protection and pollution control. The suspicion is that not all other countries follow the same route. A major turkey farmer in my constituency is Mr. William Grove Smith of Shalford, who produces very fine turkeys. He believes that turkeys are coming here from Italy in particular and being sold for less than the cost price in this country. I do not want even to contemplate the sort of conditions in which turkeys, pigs and other products are being produced in Brazil and brought to this country. What possible check any supermarket could have on the welfare standards or effects of pollution in such countries is beyond any reasonable calculation. We are therefore at a great disadvantage.

I come now to a word that I learned a number of years ago—modulation. In essence, in the context of this discussion, that means talking about whether to shift support to environmental and conservation schemes that will benefit the fabric of the countryside and take some money away from the price support system that has appertained hitherto. I do not think that anybody

can object in principle to taking that route. We all want an improved countryside and more vital wildlife, and we are mindful of some of the things that took place in the past, such as the destruction of hedges, filling in of ponds, enlargement of fields and all the other factors that radically changed the appearance of the countryside and did great harm to the preservation of our wildlife in certain parts of the country.

All of us should support moves to ensure that farmers are paid for preserving the countryside, as the exercise is not cost free. If one wants to plant a hedge, coppice a wood or plant trees, one must employ a labourer to do the work. Farming in an environmentally sensitive way clearly requires much more skill in mowing, harvesting and any other activities to ensure that no damage is done to the very environmental treasures that we are seeking to protect. Therefore, any environmental scheme will be much more expensive in practice than farming in the normal way.

I do not want us to move in that direction if the consequence will be yet another cut in farming incomes. If we are serious about doing so—we should think about it long and hard, although I think that we probably should—we must ensure that there are sufficient funds. First, they must pay the farmer for the work that he has to do, bearing in mind that so few people now work on the land. The right hon. Member for Fylde suggested that that was the Government's fault, but the number of people working on the land has declined at a colossal rate since 1945 for a range of reasons outside the present situation. In winter time, workmen on farms would do ditching and all sorts of preservation work on the land, but those people are not employed any more. If we want environmental schemes, we must therefore bear in mind that it will cost us money to ensure that farmers can carry them out, whether profitably or even at a cost.

The money that is provided for an environmental scheme must also go directly to the people who are carrying it out. There is a fear that too much money may be frittered away on the side in paying for the administration of such schemes or projects. We want to see the benefits of the money in our countryside as it is spent. We do not necessarily want to hear that 40, 50 or 60 per cent. of a programme's budget has been spent on its administration.

My penultimate point is that we need to remember that farming will remain the core business on the land. I do not think that anybody is suggesting that we are seeking to end farming and introduce a national parks service. Farming will remain the core of the agricultural business, and we must keep it supported by environmental schemes that are properly paid for and that the farmers can administer. We must always remember that farming, if it is to survive, must be profitable. If necessary, support schemes must be in place to make that possible in the long term.

My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), who is in his place, has talked about the effects of the common agricultural policy, and whether ultimately it is possible, as things stand, for there to be radical and far-reaching reform. There is a case—it is one that the Government should argue—for bringing farming policy back home so that member states of the Union can implement their own policy outside the common agricultural policy. In that way, each member state could react to the changing circumstances of farming and the food situation much more rapidly, and change and adapt as appropriate. In other words, we would return to the schemes that we had but with the environmental overlay that had pride of place in the post-war Labour Government.

4.15 pm

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): There is a part of the Gilbert and Sullivan opera "Iolanthe" that refers to the ability of parliamentarians to move almost anything. There is reference also to a parliamentary pantechnicon. The motion is the closest thing to a parliamentary pantechnicon that I have come across during my time in the House. It literally includes everything—and the kitchen sink. I suggest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that even with your ingenuity you would find it almost impossible to rule anyone out of order if he or she were discussing almost any subject. However, I do not wish to challenge you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, on this matter. In effect, we have before us a motion of confidence in DEFRA. That makes it plain why we will vote against the motion.

We talk about farm incomes, but we never distinguish between various categories of farms. In broad terms, there is a large set of farms that are mainly in the hands of part-time lifestyle farmers. They make only a small contribution to production. These people farm not intending to make a profit, or not minding if they do not make one. That is an increasing tendency. I see no reason why policies should be devised round the economic needs of people in that category.

The second category is that of small full-time farmers who find life difficult. It was interesting this morning when Lord Whitty was challenged by John Humphrys on "Today". He talked about livestock farmers going out of business. At present, arable farmers are going out of business. Livestock farmers who were caught by foot and mouth have, to a significant extent, stuck in there. That is partly because the habit of survival is perhaps the most deeply ingrained.

Thirdly there is the large-scale commercial farm. There are a few such farms that produce overwhelmingly the largest amount of foodstuff. There is a choice to be made when it comes to the sort of farm for which we have policy in mind. It does not get anybody anywhere to talk about farm incomes as a broad average, no matter whether the figures are good or bad. A little more differentiation would help our analysis.

I shall focus on the heart of emerging Government policy. That is the same theme as the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) chose in his introductory remarks. There is the move from production subsidy to subsidy for public goods and the environment. We are talking about two sorts of subsidy. We give the impression that public goods are a good thing, and then we slide across, as it were, and say, for example, "support for", or use a euphemism. We are still, however, talking about subsidy; we are simply redirecting subsidies. To start with, we might just as well get the terminology correct. The mechanism is the modulation which gave the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) so much analytical difficulty in his early days when meeting farmers.

[Mr. David Curry]

Indeed, it means something different from its first manifestation. It originally meant trying to hit large farms in northern European to benefit smaller farms on the continent. "Subsidy" has therefore had a new lease of life. I personally regret that jargon.

We are moving towards entry level schemes. They are intended to be undemanding. The Minister emphasised that they are not high access schemes or difficult to get into. They are the starting point; that is why they are called broad and shallow. They are going to be trialled for two years. All that one discovers in a two-year trial is whether the Government can administer the scheme. We will learn nothing about the environmental benefits of the schemes in two years. We should not fool ourselves. We will find out a little about their acceptability to farmers and the Government's capability of administering them, but they are only for a trial area and we therefore may not learn much.

There is however a legitimate question about the value for money of the broad and shallow entry level scheme. What will it mean to the farmer? Will it make a significant difference to his income? Will it have any incremental benefit to the taxpayer as the consumer of that sort of product? If the access point level is so low, what will we get for our money?

I assume that the purpose is to tee up the farmers for other schemes. I therefore welcome the fact that the Government state for the first time in the document that is released today that the roll-out of the schemes will depend on the trials. On every previous occasion, the Government said that roll-out would follow the trials. However, for the first time, they state that that will happen provided that the trials work. I do not know whether that signals a genuine change or whether language has simply slid from one expression to another. However, I welcome it as an improvement.

If we follow this path, we must find a method of getting value for money. We do that by creating a market in environmental goods. I want the scheme to be run as a marketplace. I do not want it to be based on income forgone. There are insufficient incentives for farmers in that. If the schemes are to be sensitive to local and regional needs, the only way to proceed is not through a great national agenda, but through farmers making a contract with the Government to buy into specific programmes, for which they perhaps volunteer. The Dutch can manage that and it should not be beyond English wit to do the same.

We should use the accompanying enhanced schemes, such as stewardship, which is currently under review, to support the main policy developments. The Government speak a great deal about joined-up policies. We have a chance to try to use the initiatives as an element to join up the programmes. I have two specific points in mind.

First, let us consider the requirements of the water framework directive, which the Select Committee is currently considering. It has enormous implications for farmers in the control of diffuse pollution—that is, run-offs from agricultural land. Few farmers have the remotest idea of the sort of requirements that may be placed on them. The Select Committee got the impression that people who live in urban areas have even less idea about it. It makes more sense in getting value for money and minimising the ultimate costs to prevent the incidence of on-farm pollution than to clean it up at the point of discharge. That means that £10 spent upstream may save several thousand pounds downstream. That money ends up as a charge on the water user. Therefore the public who put in an investment of £10 upstream may well save several thousand pounds in tax or water bills downstream.

Secondly, I should like the money to be used to promote integrated crop management. That is a conservation grade of agriculture, not an organic production or even an alternative, but a method of trying to minimise the use of pesticides and fertilisers. It is a form of farming that tries to maximise the benefit to the environment and, for example, to bird species. The evidence appears to be that it enables natural habitat to be re-established much more quickly than people imagine. This is a whole-farm concept, and it would be a useful way of trying to bend a particular programme towards a broader objective, thus obtaining a multiplier effect in terms of value for money.

We must also ensure that the schemes do not proliferate. There is always a tendency for this to happen, because people say, "Hang on, we must make this one sensitive to particular circumstances"—which I endorse—but then the schemes tend to multiply and confusion arises in the minds of the farmers or other takers of the schemes as to which one they should choose and whether it is going to be bureaucratically complex. The administrative costs then mount up in the Department. I know from my own experience—and I do not imagine that things have changed much over the years—that the sheer administrative cost of running some of these schemes bulks very large indeed in the Department's budget. I also know that the Department is going through a fairly agonising process of trying to match its resources to its public service agreement targets at the moment—a fact to which I am sure the Minister is very much alive. There is some scope for rationalisation of the schemes. We have talked about whether the organic scheme might be brought within the framework of stewardship, and I still think that there is something to be said for doing that.

A final factor in the question of joined-up government is whether the schemes will qualify for the green box in the ultimate negotiations in the World Trade Organisation. After all, if we are shifting subsidy from production-related to non-production-related—the strict economist would say that there is no such thing as a non-production-related subsidy, but, for the sake of the negotiations, one can make a distinction—it is important that the present schemes that are in the so-called blue box, which is production-related, should be replaced by schemes capable of conforming with the rules of the World Trade Organisation. It is important that we bear that in mind when framing them.

That takes us straight to the schemes coming from the European Union, and to the mid-term review, because modulation is part of all that. There is now a serious question mark over whether dynamic modulation—which simply involves taking more money off farmers to put into environmental schemes: a progressive tax—is to go ahead. The impression that we got when we were in Brussels was that Brussels was pretty well reconciled to that item on the agenda slipping, at least in the present

negotiations. Some Ministers have also told us that they have the same impression—indeed, that they rather hope for that outcome.

This is important for the United Kingdom for several reasons. First, we are depending on that mechanism in Brussels, as Lord Whitty told us, to fund for ourselves some of the enhanced programmes that are going to move us more towards the support of public good benefits in agriculture. Secondly, the Government will need to look at how our own programmes for shifting from production to environmental support—our own domestic modulation—will sit with the European model, and, in particular, at the redistributive effects that they will have in the United Kingdom. There will be such effects between one farm or area and another. We must also consider the implications for British farmers if we alone are taxing their production aids, or if we are doing so at a much higher rate than is being done elsewhere.

Sir Don Curry put forward the argument, in his report, that we should go to 10 per cent. modulation in the absence of a major CAP reform—which always seemed to me like whistling in the wind—and then, perhaps, even to 20 per cent. I note a very guarded tone in the Government's response to that argument, as though they had not really committed themselves to going that far. There may be a case for doing so, but not until they have done the analysis, to which I referred, of the impact of such a measure, both internally and in terms of our competitive position.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) and other hon. Members have mentioned the retail industry. Here, again, I notice a coyness in the Government's response. I am usually glad when the Government are coy about things. I have a certain inbuilt coyness when it comes to interfering with the marketplace. I want to say to the Minister that I see no reason why we should not see a consolidation of the retail sector. There is more competition in Britain than in many other densely populated markets—Holland, for example, has only two such retailers. The regional importance of retailing in Britain is perhaps slightly different from the national picture.

It is fairly obvious that Safeway has a "For Sale" sign over it at the moment. It is believed that Sainsbury's would have been for sale to Asda had the right offer come along. There is speculation that Sainsbury's and Safeway may have to put something together to hold off the relentless advance of Asda, which is breathing down Sainsbury's neck. Tesco keeps telling everyone that it would be intolerable to have any further merger, but of course that would create a much bigger competitor to Tesco. I see no reason why there will not be further consolidation of the retail sector. I am not sure whether there are any serious competition grounds to prevent that. If it were to happen, there would be even more cut-throat competition, and the playback, as it were, for the production of farmers would be even more acute.

The Government must take a pretty hard look at the implications. The consumer gets good benefit from competition among retailers. I find it difficult to choose which pre-packed, pre-washed, mixed special salad to buy at my local Tesco. It is rather like getting a free vote: it tends to confuse me. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said, the farming industry believes that it faces a monolith in terms of purchasing power. There are ways into that market, but they must be explored and sustained. With the current level of the pound, the incentive is to purchase overseas.

I wish to press the Minister on another point. The Curry report referred to a policy on nutrition. The Government are guarded about that. I have attended conferences at which people have talked about the need for a dramatically interventionist Government policy to tackle problems such as obesity. It is argued that there should be different codes for different foods according to salt or sugar content, this, that and the other. I would be interested to know whether the coyness of the Government's response shows a reluctance to go down that path—I hope that it does—or whether lurking behind that phrase about nutrition is the intention to take a much more interventionist stand.

Several hon. Members have mentioned the World Trade Organisation. The WTO at the top end and the consumer at the other are the great drivers for change in agriculture. The Government talked about enlargement as one of the levers for change. That was never very plausible, as it was clear that we would never have tried to stand in the way of enlargement to get change in agriculture, because we would were too strongly in favour of enlargement for broad, macro-political and geo-political reasons. The WTO is an imposer of change.

On reflection, I do not necessarily subscribe to the view that the budget deal is permissive, as I think that world circumstances could turn it into a tough deal. We must get support for the new member states. Sugar and milk regime reform may come out of the budget proposals. The Schröder-Chirac deal could turn out to be tougher than people think. A short perusal of the commentary in the French press disabuses us of any idea that President Chirac has won vast plaudits from his own agricultural community for this deal. It says that this is the death of farming as we know it, and it cites the number of farmers, farm workers and farm holders who are going out of business. Exactly the same cycle as we have had in the United Kingdom is reproduced elsewhere.

It is legitimate to ask what is left of the mid-term review. If the dynamic modulation is gone, the main thing left is decoupling. It is important to press ahead with decoupling, although not necessarily with the agenda as it stands. It is an important complement to our national policy. If we are to be joined up, we must join up national policy with the broader European policy and—dare I say it?—we must be joined up across the internal frontiers of the United Kingdom. There is an increasing dislocation of policy across the national responsibilities within the UK.

The thing about the CAP is that change is never as dramatic as its critics demand, but it is probably more constant than they realise. It grinds along undramatically, and the CAP as it is today is massively different from the CAP as it was even 10 years ago.

The review by Lord Haskins is enormously wide-ranging. Its terms of reference are encyclopaedic. It excludes the Rural Payments Agency, which is a pity, since some fairly drastic attention needs to be paid to it. It also covers regional development agencies, local authorities, English Nature and the Countryside Agency—it is particularly unhappy for any organisation

[Mr. David Curry]

to have the word "agency" stuck to it. It will extend well beyond the scope of Government. I suspect that it is a bit over-ambitious. I am not sure whether Lord Haskins realises what he is taking on. How many days a week will he devote to the task? How big is his secretariat? Is he alone, or are others helping him? How long has he to complete the job? The review, after all, goes to the heart of some of DEFRA's rural responsibilities, and spills out beyond that.

Let me suggest one or two lines of inquiry. There is undoubtedly confusion about the providers in the business of what might broadly be called rural regeneration and economic developments. There is also confusion about the differentiation of schemes, along with a lack of definition in regard to the core tasks of bodies such as the Countryside Agency, the RDAs and the training and skills councils. If Lord Haskins could introduce more rationality, and more clarity and differentiation in terms of function, he would not just do a service to the consumer but do an administrative service to the Dept. A simpler architecture for purpose and decision making would be welcome.

If there is one thing that would help my rural areas it is broadband, which I think was mentioned by the hon. Member for Sherwood, but such high technology is not available to rural areas. People running companies tell me that they would be willing to locate in places such as Settle, which was at the heart of the foot and mouth outbreak—it would be a wonderful place for a cottage industry with three or four employees—but, because they cannot obtain the necessary technology there, they operate in Surrey, where they can. Technology is almost more important than anything else. It is not even possible to use a mobile telephone in large parts of the Yorkshire dales. If we are to have 3G—I must say that I am even more coy about that than about everything else I have mentioned today—it would be helpful to have mobile phone contact in the dales, although I will not intervene in planning decisions there.

I agree with what my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said about Horticulture Research International. We need decisions. The first stage of the review has ended; there are customers and people who might be involved in the reorganisation, and there are employees who need to know their fate. The sooner those decisions can be made, the better.

DEFRA contains some outstanding people. So, as a matter of fact, did MAFF: let someone fly the flag for MAFF for once. DEFRA administers some extraordinarily complex schemes, especially those related to the environment, which have major implications for businesses. The operation of the packaging directive, for instance, is a market-based scheme. The Department must make forecasts and specify targets for companies, and trading is involved. Such activity requires considerable statistical and economic skills, and the Select Committee genuinely doubts whether the Department can exercise the strength and depth that are needed. An analysis and some retraining are probably required.

There is a lot of sense in the Curry proposals. They make some extraordinarily heroic assumptions about CAP reform, and there is the occasional slightly dotty recommendation from, no doubt, a member of the panel with a bee in his bonnet. There are also some curious omissions from the monitoring body that will be chaired by Sir Don. I think I am right in saying that the Environment Agency is not represented, although it will play a central role in managing the environmental activities of farmers. It is to be the nominated body, as I think the term is, dealing with the water framework directive.

The Government's response to the report seems, on the whole, sensible and balanced, but I ask them to keep checking on value for money. My great fear is that if we move away from production subsidies, which have proved very difficult to dislodge, we will create a parallel structure of green subsidies—which are probably even more fiercely defended, because the environmental lobbies have a great deal more money than the agricultural lobbies or the political parties—and become frozen in a kind of immobility. I would like to see them flexible, digressive and, above all, based on a market. If we are talking about the farmer responding to the market, why should we define the market purely in terms of his productivity capacity and not in terms of other goods that he is seeking to make available to the public?

4.40 pm

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): Much of the tone of this very interesting debate has been based on an acceptance of what has happened in the farming industry since the war. My hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) described how subsidies were originally provided for farmers. It seems unreasonable in the 21st century still to be running the farming industry on the basis of trying to secure victory in the second world war.

We need revolutionary rather than evolutionary change. The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) gave us the traditional image of farming as a dependent industry that seeks more and more subsidies. He complained that there was not enough excitement or leadership from the Front Bench today—however, there was £500 million. If £500 million was given to the aluminium or steel industries, I would put up with the lack of excitement or leadership.

In Wales, manufacturing industry contributes 27 per cent. to GDP, while farming contributes less than 1 per cent.—in fact, it is probably a minus figure now. I believe that the figures for England are about 20 per cent. and 2 per cent. Yet more public money is poured into farming than into the rest of the economy and the manufacturing industry. At the heart of the very valuable Curry report is a stark message. Taxpayers are handing out huge subsidies every year for a policy that is destroying economic value, consumers are paying more for their food, the environment is being degraded and farming incomes are on the floor.

Mr. Jack: I am sorry if I lost the hon. Gentleman. In talking about the subsidised sector, I wanted to provide a point of contrast with the non-subsidised sector. I picked on horticulture to point out some of the difficulties that the non-subsidised world was having, because eventually I hope that the rest of farming may

move in that direction. I am sorry if I did not make my remarks clear, but it was to the horticultural industry that I wanted right hon. and hon. Members to look.

Paul Flynn: I understood precisely what the right hon. Gentleman was saying. He wants to make all parts of the farming industry dependent.

Let us look at another non-subsidised industry. If we had told the steel industry that we would treat it the same as farming, we would not have lost 1,500 jobs in my city in the past 12 months—instead, we would have had a set-aside blast furnace. We would have told the blast furnace men to carry on producing and said, "You are making something which, unfortunately, for a brief period, is not competitive on the world market but if you continue producing it, we will dump it in a hole somewhere. We will pay everyone their full wages whether they are working or not and we will train people up to take apprenticeships for jobs that do not exist." However, the conditions that created the situation in the steel industry are precisely the ones that pertain in the agricultural industry, about which the right hon. Gentleman and others are complaining. The products produced in the steel industry are artificially dear when they are sold in euroland because of the value of the pound, while those produced in the Netherlands by the sister firm of the one in my constituency are artificially cheap, although the firm is less competitive than the one that has largely closed down in my constituency.

We have an industry that is in serious trouble but has been subsidised by the taxpayers for a long time. However, I have a piece of good news for the right hon. Gentleman. Something was published today, but unfortunately the Farmers Union of Wales did not issue a press release about it, nor did the National Farmers Union, despite the fact that I have had a blizzard of press releases from them throughout the year. Somehow they missed this one. Let us cheer everyone up a little. The news is that cash incomes for all dairy and livestock farms in Wales rose from £18,600 last year to £21,100—admittedly still low, but I have more good news to cheer up the right hon. Member for Fylde. Cash income from hill and upland farms, the worst-off farms, increased by £3,500, to £20,800. We should celebrate that slight amount of good news.

Mr. Jack: Before the hon. Gentleman paints me into the corner of subsidy and nothing else, let me tell him that my point about the horticulture industry was that it received no subsidy. I made my living in that industry before entering Parliament, and I solidly adhere to what the marketplace and responsiveness to customers' needs can do without subsidy.

Paul Flynn: Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman why I do not want that industry, which he knows well, to fall into the dependency culture. We should not create an industry that is subsidy-sensitive but market-blind. It is nothing new for people to be leaving the agriculture industry. Very few of those who are now leaving are going bankrupt or joining the dole queue. Those who own their farms can sell them and move into other industries, or do something else. People have been leaving agriculture for a very long time. A. G. Street wrote a book about farming in the 19th century, and depopulation, with the ironic title "Farmer's Glory". "The Deserted Village", written in the 18th century, begins:

"Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey".

The process of depopulation in the farming industry is a continuous one. Unlike redundant steelworkers, who are not given a chunk of the blast furnace to take away, most farmers have the benefit of assets. About 15 per cent. of farmers are tenants and the rest are owners. Farm incomes have certainly dropped in recent years, although they are still in the top decile of their group, but the other assets have increased enormously: a 100 per cent. increase in real terms in the value of land from 1993 to 2009 and a similar increase in the value of farm buildings. A farmer leaving with such assets will have his prosperity assured.

The people who are left out are the tenant farmers. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) gave a definition of modulation. As I understood it, modulation was taking money from the rich millionaire English farmers and giving it to the small Welsh hill farmers—a policy that I strongly support. The Conservatives are very keen on the right to buy, so why not allow tenant farmers, after they have been farming for 10 or 15 years, say, to acquire the valuable assets on which they have been working?

The Conservatives have said that there should be an inquiry. I congratulate the Government on the way in which the reports have been published. The Anderson report was probably the most significant. I will not quote what Conservative Members said during the foot and mouth epidemic, as many of them would be embarrassed about the steps that they urged on the Government, for example on closing rural footpaths, which did the main damage to the tourist industry and proved not to have been necessary.

Everyone was wrong on occasion about foot and mouth, because the outbreak was unprecedented in scale. The Government have rightly and realistically accepted their responsibilities. We should not deceive ourselves and believe the myth that the outbreak was caused by the Government's mistake in allowing food imports. What happened here, which did not happen in the Netherlands, France, Ireland, or Scotland, was a vast spread of the disease. The Anderson report illustrates the great cobweb of movements that took place between the time of the first outbreak and when it was detected—a period of three weeks. As a result of that vast number of movements, more than 1 million animals were potentially infected. That was the reason for the scale of the calamity.

The only way to protect against that is to reduce such movements. Some of them were illegal, and most were about making the animals more profitable. Bed and breakfasting for sheep was one of a number of ways in which dealers moved animals about—ways that do not make any sense. Thanks to the courage of the Government, we now have the 20-day movement rule. They have compromised in that regard—there is a strong case for a 28-day movement rule, because of the incubation period of the disease—but it is not just foot and mouth that we should worry about. We should also be concerned about blue tongue virus, vesicular stomatitis and a great many other diseases that will almost certainly come at some time. We will have an

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outbreak of some disease in the near future. Blue tongue virus poses a particular and new threat, because of various changes that are taking place in climate, and so on. If such diseases do arrive, we will need those restrictions on animal movements. There are alternatives to such movements.

The problem is that the industry is extremely conservative. It does not like to change in any way, or to form co-operatives, and it was very slow to enter organic production. During the foot and mouth crisis, animal movements were greatly and necessarily reduced. In many cases, the industry then started to use video links, the internet and direct sales, which had all manner of beneficial effects. Such methods were very efficient and quick. They cut down on the number of journeys made by animals, which also reduced animal suffering. The industry could well return to that, if it accepts the absolutely essential precaution of the 20-day rule, which is complained of in the amendment from the Opposition.

I shall briefly mention my experience of organic farming. I vividly remember a number of friends of mine starting up organic farms in Ceredigion in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Now, they are all extremely prosperous, but at the time they were regarded as weird and strange. They were laughed at by their neighbours, who said, "The soil is too thin, you won't be able to grow anything here." Now, it is the neighbours who are suffering privations. It was those organic farmers—sadly, as it happens most of them came from outside Wales—who had the leadership and the foresight to realise that organic farming had a great future. However, it is a sad fact for the entire farming industry that some 75 per cent. of the organic food consumed in this country is imported. We were very late entering into that market.

People still go on about blaming the supermarkets, and I am sure that there is a case to be made in that regard. The Competition Commission conducted two major inquiries into the way that supermarkets treat their relationship with farmers. Both inquiries concluded that there is nothing wrong, and that supermarkets are behaving in a reasonable way. However, there is an answer to the problem. As has been pointed out, in France and in other countries farmers combine into co-operatives, but the problem remains of the endemic conservatism of our farming industry, and the reason for that is the dependency culture.

Since the war, farmers have got into the frame of mind whereby they believe that, when a problem occurs, someone else will solve it for them. They look to the Government to come up with a subsidy; indeed, today the Government are being asked to provide solutions. Other industries do not do that—the high-tech industry is not asking the Government to solve its problems, and nor is any other manufacturing industry. Because of farming's dependency culture, it is looking to Europe, to the Welsh Assembly and to anywhere else to solve all its problems. When the farming industry decides to stand on its own two feet, we can look forward to a firmer and better future for agriculture.

I am very much in favour of the suggestion that was made about changing the nature of farm subsidies in the light of environmental subsidies.

However, a great mythology has grown up: we have to be grateful to the farming industry for our beautiful countryside. It is as though, if farming comes to an end, the hills and mountains will fall flat, the rivers will dry up and we shall no longer have an attractive landscape. Our countryside is beautiful because of what nature has done. In northern Scotland and in Iceland, there are sites of great natural grandeur in areas that have never been farmed. In many farming areas, the blots on the landscape are the agricultural buildings and silos that have been put up without planning permission.

Mr. Hayes: I intervene only in case there is no time later for me to refute the crass points about our landscape that the hon. Gentleman has just made. He is a man of great experience and insight so he must know that the vast bulk of rural Britain is a manufactured landscape—it is not just mountains and streams. In any case, even streams have to be maintained. The countryside has to be husbanded and it is husbanded by farmers. We owe our countryside to farmers and I hope that the hon. Gentleman has the generosity and common sense to acknowledge that.

Paul Flynn: If the hon. Gentleman had been listening carefully, he would have realised that I was making the point that farming is not essential and that nature was beautiful before farming arrived and will be beautiful when farming ends. Compared to the way in which we use vast tracts of land at present, the future for farming will be entirely different in 50 years; as we can see, for example, in the plans for farming being developed at Delta park in Rotterdam. We must not fall into the trap of believing that huge tracts of land cannot be used for leisure purposes that are not necessarily connected with farming. I am sure that we shall see that in my grandchildren's time.

This is the first time that I have spoken in a farming debate in the House, although I represent a constituency where there were three outbreaks of foot and mouth last year. Some farmers no longer farm their land and use it as a large garden, but there are also a number of working farms. I want to cite one example to answer those people who say that we must never change anything and that if land has always been in production, it must remain so.

In one area of my constituency, two and a half farms employed no more than four people. The farms received subsidies and were a drain on the economy, like most farms. Nowadays, the land is no longer farmed but is occupied by an enterprise—a resort employing 400 people. The resort will host the Ryder cup in 2010 and will be of huge advantage to the nearby city. There has been a huge improvement in the use of that land.

Another farm that closed down was replaced by a golf course which employed 2,000 people. In many rural areas, when farmland is reused for other purposes, especially for recreation, more people are employed in almost every case. There are benefits to the local economy and there is no longer a drain on the Exchequer because subsidies are no longer needed.

We must have that change. The idea that we should continue farming hundreds of acres, employing only one or two people, is false. There is no economic need to do

so. By the time the produce from most farms gets to the farm gate, it is already worth less than the cost of production. That does not make sense.

Mr. Jack: The hon. Gentleman's analysis misses out one element: the strategic need for agriculture. Within the past few weeks, because of drought in the United States and Australia, feed wheat from the United Kingdom is being exported to Australia. We need to take a world-strategic view on farming from time to time, not merely the hon. Gentleman's view.

Paul Flynn: Let us consider the most serious strategic view—the most depressing thing that happened during the foot and mouth epidemic, when the production of meat almost closed down in this country. What would have happened if that had been any other product in any other industry? There would have been shortages, price increases and queues at the supermarket. However, during the foot and mouth epidemic, there were no queues, no shortages and no price increases. The reason for that is a good one. We should look to a country where, in 1984, 40 per cent. of its income came from subsidies, yet by 1987 it had no subsidies. That country looks back to 1984 as the dark days of dependency. It does not want to go back to them. It does not want subsidies again. In that country, if I could draw the attention of the right hon. Gentleman to the strategic situation—

Mr. Jack: Tell us that it is New Zealand, and get on with it?

Paul Flynn: Yes, it is New Zealand. It is cheaper to bring meat from New Zealand to meat processors in Wales than to buy the cattle on the hills around the meat-processing firm. The right hon. Gentleman may well know that the Consumers Association analysed the price of food in Britain and New Zealand. There were no subsidises on the other side of the world, but the basket of all farm foods was half the price of our food in this country. That is precisely what Curry is saying in his report. The policies on agriculture that we have pursued for so long have given us high prices, a degraded environment and a farming industry that does not have the rewards that it should have.

5.1 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I have listened to all the speeches in this debate with great interest, and I have agreed with a substantial amount that has been said by virtually all hon. Members, especially the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who always puts a very reasoned case on agriculture and rural issues. However, the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) has displayed why it is perhaps a good job that he has not spoken in agriculture debates before. Very few people who understand farming, the countryside and the rural economy would recognise the picture that he painted. He missed the point—this was touched on by my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack)—that farming is about producing food.

The hon. Member for Newport, West referred to New Zealand, and I have huge admiration for the way in which it has changed its policy, but we have to recognise that proportionally it is a very large country with a small population—fewer than 4 million people, I think—to feed and its agricultural land area is much bigger than that of the United Kingdom, even if we include all the highlands of Scotland as prime agricultural land, which, of course, they are not. So there is a very great difference.

We need to consider how food will be provided in the future, which is why I intervened on the Secretary of State. To talk about taking vast swathes of the British countryside out of agriculture in the way that the hon. Gentleman describes raises the serious question, which I want to come to in a moment, about strategic food supplies in the long term—not just in the next few years or even the next decade or so—given the world population projections to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) referred earlier.

Before I make my own remarks, I must remind the House of my interests as declared in the Register of Members' Interests. I fear that I fall entirely into the category to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) referred. I have a tiny piece of land, which can only be described as a lifestyle farm, but, because it grows corn, I have to declare the issue to the House.

A number of hon. Members have said that farming is in its worst state since the 1930s. That is perfectly true. The hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), who is no longer in his place, very clearly and capably encapsulated in a few sentences how we got into this situation and what has happened since the 1930s. He drew a distinction between the depression of the 1930s and what he called the recession of today, and he rightly said that the thing that differentiated the two was land values.

I would argue that it is only the value of the land that has stopped today's situation in agriculture becoming as bad as that in the 1930s, because it has provided farmers—at least owner-occupiers—with a significant asset. Agriculture is a very low-geared industry, so owner-occupiers can at least get out and buy a house to live in. Whether there is sufficient capital to generate an income to live on depends, of course, on the circumstances. Land values are now being held up for non-agricultural reasons: the most important being that, for individual reasons, large numbers of people from the more prosperous sectors of the economy espouse the ownership of land for its own sake. They want a nice house in the country, so they buy a house with farmland all round it, without being particularly interested in farming. They are prepared to pay very large sums, which inflates the value of land. The impact of roll-over tax relief for farmers in the south-east in particular—and for anyone else who owns land in the south-east, sells it for development and wants to roll it over—holds up the value of land, too. Were it not for those extraneous pressures, we would have seen a huge collapse in the price of land, which would have exacerbated the overall problems facing farming, because the asset value would have disappeared, and the gearing of many farmers, who today may seem relatively low-geared, would have gone up dramatically if the asset value had collapsed with it.

Relevant to the environmental aspect of the debate is the fact that in large parts of the country huge numbers of individuals have gone out of farming, but the land has

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not come on to the market—again thankfully, as it would have led to a collapse in land prices. Those are predominantly arable areas, where farms are now taken on by other farmers under some kind of farm business tenancy, contract farming or management farming arrangement. It is common knowledge that many farmers in arable areas now farm what are very large chunks of farmland in totality. In my part of the world, there are several farmers farming between 3,000 and 6,000 acres. That land is probably in the ownership of 10 or even 20 different landowners who were formerly small farmers but who have decided that it was not worth continuing and have come to an arrangement with another farmer who is prepared to invest in the high levels of machinery required to farm that sort of land.

That is not to the environmental advantage of the area, as some 200-acre farms are being farmed by contract farmers who come in with vast equipment—sometimes 300 horsepower equipment on four wheels or tracks—which rips up the farmland, ploughs and drills it, and is gone again within a couple of days. In the meantime, huge disruption is caused to wildlife and the local environment, which would not have occurred if there had been traditional farming, with a man using much smaller equipment and taking his time.

I want to refer to a couple of other small points. In her opening address, the Secretary of State did not show much humility, and, as other right hon. and hon. Members have said, the motion shows none whatever. It is strong on fine words but real commitment or action is woefully absent. Nowhere is that clearer than in relation to the foot and mouth outbreak and what happened in response to it. I had the privilege to sit on the Front Bench when the foot and mouth outbreak was at its peak and I witnessed the then Ministers being clueless as to what to do. The former Minister of Agriculture is a perfectly decent, nice man, but he was clearly totally out of his depth when trying to control and manage that crisis. Yet we have seen no humility, about its handling by the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food or by the rest of the Government who were involved.

Contrary to the view expressed by the hon. Member for Newport, West, the vast majority of farmers accept the need for change, and most of them realise that it is bound to happen.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I do not want the hon. Gentleman's remarks about my former ministerial colleague in the old Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food to pass unchallenged. The hon. Gentleman was on the Opposition Front Bench in that period and he will remember that there was much praise for my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown) for the way in which he handled the Department in the crisis. That crisis was unprecedented, as independent reports have recognised, but it was brought under control within the same time scale as the much smaller 1967 outbreak and it did not restart, unlike the 1967 outbreak.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has made it clear quite openly that mistakes were made in handling a crisis on that scale. We are not trying to pretend that they did not occur—so, in that sense, there is no lack of humility. The hon. Gentleman is very fair-minded, but his remarks about my right hon. Friend the former Minister at MAFF were unfair.

Mr. Paice: I want to emphasise that I hold no grudge or grievance against the former Minister. I have immense time and respect for him. I like him very much. I do not want anyone to be under a misapprehension. In that respect, my remarks were not a personal criticism. However, I believe that the right hon. Gentleman was out of his depth as a manager of a senior Department. It was evident at that time that he was responding to all sorts of advice and pressures and was not able to handle the crisis as a head of a Department should be able to. I am afraid that—whether it is fair or not—the buck stops at the top. I also notice that if the right hon. Gentleman had been so wonderful, he might have been the current Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs instead of being moved down a rank in the subsequent reshuffle.

I was about to say that most farmers want and welcome the need for change. That change will mean reduced production support. I say "reduced", because, although I share other hon. Members' view that we need to move away from production support altogether, the reality of CAP reform is that such support will not go entirely. There will be a reduction.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I perfectly understand my hon. Friend's argument, but does he not think that it is a funny world when it is estimated that the aid that the developed countries give to the developing countries is only one seventh of what the developed countries give in subsidies to agricultural production?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend tempts me to consider the whole issue of helping the under-developed or developing world—what we used to call the third world before it became politically incorrect to do so. I have a huge personal interest in the subject, having visited many such countries. I do not want to spend much time considering that aspect of the CAP, but I agree that it is an obstacle to the development of those countries.

Those of us who have farmers in our constituencies will admit that some farmers will resist change. They have always done the same thing and want to continue doing the same thing. If that is what they want to do, that is their choice—so be it, and I would not for a moment suggest that the House, the Government or the European Union have a responsibility to ensure that they should be able to continue as they have if they are not prepared to face up to the need for change. But most farmers want change.

As others have said, most farmers and people in the countryside generally feel immensely let down by the Government. Many farmers do not understand the difference between food production in the terms that the Government use and the need for the strategic supply and the security of the food supply that I mentioned earlier. They do not understand why the Government have openly—it is in the documents that were published

this morning—decided that security of food supply is no longer a facet of agricultural policy in Europe. Farmers hear Ministers refer, as they do in the motion, to

"a vibrant food and farming sector",

but the Government appear unwilling to support it.

I know that Labour Members will not like my next comment, but I must refer to a very small incident that was of nevertheless of huge importance. The Secretary of State went to Paris to promote the export of British beef, but refused to eat it. *[Interruption.]* The Minister makes a dismissive gesture and a guttural utterance, but his response demonstrates more than anything that the Government do not understand how important it is to be publicly supportive of people. I received phone calls and letters about that incident, as I am sure did my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and other hon. Friends who represent areas that produce more livestock than mine does. People were incensed by the right hon. Lady's refusal to eat the beef. I do not know what was behind the incident. Civil servants scrabbled around for reasons to explain her refusal, but it demonstrated that she was not prepared to show the courage to stand up for British beef.

Mr. Michael Beaumont, a butcher in a village in my constituency, rang me the day after the incident. He was "absolutely disgusted" at the Secretary of State's refusal to eat that beef, and he is not even a producer.

Mr. Morley: She had it for dinner.

Mr. Paice: I am delighted to hear that, but I am sure that a little snack during the day when the cameras were on her would have served a far greater purpose.

A number of hon. Members mentioned biofuels. I welcome the Chancellor's U-turn in the space of 18 months in deciding to reduce by 20p a litre the duty on bioethanol. When we debated the Finance Bill on 24 April 2001, the right hon. Gentleman flatly refused to extend the reduction to bioethanol despite introducing it to biodiesel. The only thing that changed in the interval was the fall in the price of grain. I want to issue a word of caution on that. Although I doubt that 20p will be sufficient to trigger the industry, as the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) said, we need to recognise that the figures have been worked out on the price of wheat today, which is roughly £55 a tonne. That is less than half what it was 10 years ago. Whether or not £55 a tonne is an economical feedstock price for the production of bioethanol, it is certainly not an economic price for the production of wheat. Farmers will not continue to produce wheat at £55 a tonne, especially as their production support—their integrated administration and control system cheque—reduces alongside it.

The linkage of payments to the environment is often quoted. Some 14 years ago I wrote a paper for my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), the then Minister, advocating a broad and shallow scheme similar to that now advocated by Mr. Don Curry. Although I think the new proposal is sensible, the article in *Farmers Weekly* has made me concerned about the bureaucracy involved.

In considering both the shallow scheme and the reported narrow and deep scheme that will replace the stewardship scheme and environmentally sensitive areas, we need to bear three things in mind. First, we must ensure that any scheme does not incur excessive bureaucracy that eats away the budget. Secondly, we must truly recognise, as the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) said, the total cost to the producer and the landowner. Costs are not merely equivalent to the loss of growing a crop. If a farmer is going to lose money growing a crop, it will not make any difference if he does not grow it and he will still lose the same sum. He will just be replacing one non-profitable land use with another. The sums involved have to produce a return for the care of the environment.

The third consideration is that we must recognise the conditions under which competition exists within Europe and across the globe. The Government regularly wax lyrical, as indeed do I, about the inequities of the CAP and its impact on free trade, especially with the developing world. However, I wonder whether we understand the consequences for our own producers as well as overseas producers. There are obviously factors such as labour costs on which we cannot compete. I have seen workers in Kenya and Zambia picking peas for a dollar a day for Tesco—clearly, we cannot compete with that, and nor should we try to do so. However, many competitive issues arise from our obligations to our producers and are a challenge that no Government have got to grips with. To return to the crucial issue of food production, we cannot expect British farmers to compete successfully and contribute to the vibrant food industry sought by the Government if they are vying with imported food which is inferior or has been produced under less rigorous regulatory systems. Regulations on animal health and welfare, pesticide control, waste management, landscape obligations and nitrate vulnerable zones all add huge costs to British producers, but they are not borne by many other producers, in both the developing and the developed world.

This is not just a selfish plea on behalf of farmers—there is also an impact on consumers and livestock, and the issue should be on our conscience. If the use of certain agri-chemicals or animal health products is banned or limited to certain purposes, it is usually in the name of food safety or sometimes environmental safety. It therefore does not make sense to expose our consumers or livestock to those chemicals in imported food, and is especially absurd in the European context, where there is free movement of goods. Enlargement will bring in central and eastern European countries that have already undermined many of our traditional markets, particularly the soft fruit market, where the produce all comes from Poland, largely destroying the soft fruit trade in this country. We need to consider carefully whether such food is as safe as ours to eat. Do they still use products that we have banned in this country?

On animal welfare, surely we have learned that onerous controls on welfare make no overall difference to individual animal welfare. If, as the Government wish, we ban all battery cages yet continue to import egg or egg products produced that way, we will not have improved overall the welfare of a single chicken. We can, in all conscience, claim to have improved the welfare of British chickens, but if they are replaced as producers by 10 times more chickens in battery cages in Poland, the United States and Brazil, have we done

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anybody or any chicken a favour? We face the same dilemma with environmental issues. We all want to protect our environment, whether water or air quality, the landscape or wildlife, but should that be at the expense of the environment in other countries? It may be argued that if Australia wants to continue growing wheat on land where it may not be wise to do so, and cause salination and desertification, it should be free to do so. The same argument applies to parts of Africa and the developing world, where the land cannot sustain intensive agriculture. Similarly, we could argue that it should be up to Brazil if it wants to destroy the rainforest.

However, we do not apply that rule to timber. As was said earlier, we have strong controls on the import of timber from virgin rainforests, as that could cause untold environmental degradation, but we do not impose the same controls on food imports from countries where production results in environmental degradation. That does not make sense, but how are we to respond? The first option, which I reject immediately, is significant import controls—they would be illegal in many cases and run counter to free trade. The second option is to abolish or lower dramatically our standards and regulations. That is equally undesirable and would probably be politically unpopular and impossible. Many regulations could be removed—I decry the Government's failure to assess regulatory controls, especially in Europe—but abolishing all of them or reducing their powers is not acceptable. So we come to the third option, which is to allow our producers to compete fairly. The only way to achieve fairness is to cost properly the impact on our producers of the regulations that we impose on them and which are not imposed on other producers who compete in our food markets. If we feed those costs back into the support system, we can to some extent level that famous playing field.

I do not believe that British farmers are opposed to competition. Like hon. Members in all parts of the House, I go out and speak to countless farmers. They object not to competition, but to unfair competition from people who do not have the same conditions imposed upon them as on our farmers. I am not advocating supporting inefficient producers. The regulations are not necessarily for the farmers' good; they are for the public good and for the environment, so in my view they are totally justified. It might also discourage Government from imposing ever more regulations on the industry if they knew that they would have to pay for them.

The document published by the Government this morning proposes to take forward the concept of whole-farm management plans. That is a commendable idea, and it provides the vehicle for what I am advocating—a vehicle for recognising the extra costs put on our farmers, so that they can compete fairly. All the other factors will then come into play and allow the good, efficient farmer to compete successfully. Those who cannot will not be able to blame the Government, only themselves. They may try to blame others, but they will have no justification for doing so.

I believe in a competitive British farming industry. Unlike the hon. Member for Newport, West, I believe that it has a great future, but only if it is allowed to compete fairly. The Government have failed to grasp that nettle. There is no mention of fair competition in any of the documents published this morning. If I am honest, I must say that I do not think that the previous Government grasped the nettle as firmly as it should have been grasped. That is the only way we can ensure a future for British agriculture, not just for food production, but for the whole rural economy and the maintenance of so much of our landscape, which is a crucial benefit from agriculture. We can achieve that only if competition is fair, and that is up to Government. So far we have seen no sign that they recognise that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. There are roughly 65 minutes left before the winding-up speeches begin and nine hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. If the Back-Bench speeches continue to approximate to the average so far, six of those hon. Members will be unlucky. I appeal to hon. Members to take as unselfish a view as they can.

5.28 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a pleasure to contribute to the debate. Agriculture debates in the House in the early part of last year were far more emotional and far more divisive as a result of the foot and mouth crisis. It is a pleasure to see that there has been some recovery since then.

I agreed with the last point made by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice). Since the immediate post-war period, Governments of both parties have not had an adequate long-term farming strategy. The hon. Member with whom I disagreed most today is my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), which saddens me greatly as we have neighbouring constituencies. As soon as he moves north out of the lovely town of Caerleon in his constituency, he comes into the Usk valley in my constituency. Where does he think the milk comes from that is drunk in his constituency? It comes from the dairy farms of Wales—of the Usk valley—and many of those milk producers barely cover their own costs, even though in recent months the price of milk has gone up. Who does my hon. Friend think maintains the beautiful Usk valley? It is the farmers who maintain the Usk valley and the Llanthony valley in my constituency, and even many parts of the beautiful Wye valley in my constituency, although most of it is forested.

I am pleased to be able to contribute to this debate because it centres on the Government's response to the Curry report. About a year ago, I attended a meeting of farmers in Raglan in the middle of my constituency. I gave a brief summary of the Curry report and the equivalent report that had been produced in Wales by the then Welsh Minister for Rural Affairs, Carwyn Jones. I had greater sympathy with the Welsh report than with the Curry report, which I thought was more market driven and had a more pessimistic outlook for the farmers of my constituency. None the less, the farmers to whom I spoke were far more impressed with the Curry report and thought that it was more realistic. They recognise that the future of subsidies is limited and that there must be a much greater shift towards agri-

environmental schemes, which have been applauded in Wales. In particular, increasing numbers of farmers in my constituency are taking advantage of the tyr gofal scheme.

Some 12 to 18 months after the foot and mouth crisis, some of the farmers in my constituency who were deeply affected are recovering. The recovery is slow, as the outbreak had important consequences. Hon. Members may have seen a story in the press this week about Mr. Bill James, the owner of the abattoir in the middle of my constituency who was prosecuted by the Food Standards Agency for exceeding his slaughter limit by about 20 per cent. He admitted that he had done so and pleaded guilty in Newport magistrates court, but said that he had acted under pressure from the farming community, when, during the foot and mouth crisis and its aftermath, he was being required to slaughter increasing amounts of stock. It seems that he did so with the tacit approval both of DEFRA and of Carwyn Jones, the Welsh agriculture Minister. When I wrote to the Minister on behalf Mr. James asking about raising the limit, he said that it had already been exceeded. However, there was no suggestion that he was doing anything particularly wrong or that he should suffer a prosecution. I was very pleased when Mr. James received only a conditional discharge earlier this week. I hope to see him in his Raglan slaughterhouse tomorrow. I have been there many times before and have been mightily relieved to get out alive, especially when I have been lobbied hard about vets' fees and the other regulations facing abattoirs. I can visit tomorrow and say, "I am glad that I was able to produce a little bit of the evidence that helped to get you only a conditional discharge from your prosecution."

Paul Flynn: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. May I assure him that I do not have to visit his constituency to find the people who ensure that the Usk valley is still green? They are very much the people of Caerleon. If I want to go to the places where milk is being produced, I can go Rogerstone, Bassaleg, Lower Machen, Llanfihangel-yn-fedw, Peterstone, Wentloog, Coed Cernew, St. Brides, Llansantffraed and many other places in my constituency.

Mr. Edwards: When my hon. Friend goes to see all those places, I hope that he can give a little more support to the farmers who produce the milk than he seems to have given in the House today. He and I have differences on both farming and drugs, although I respect his ability to speak articulately about those issues.

One of the issues that is affecting my farmers is movement restrictions. We all know why the 20-day standstill was introduced, but it is causing a certain amount of hardship to farmers in my constituency. Those who take their stock to market and cannot sell it have to bring it back to their farm and keep it for another three weeks. They might then have to take it back to market, and if they do not sell it again six weeks will have gone by in which they have been keeping stocks that they do not want. That has been a particular problem and I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will review the current situation with regard to the 20-day standstill.

A second issue that has been especially important in my constituency is late payment. I have been getting quite a few complaints from farmers because their sheep annual premium, IACS—integrated administration and control scheme—payments, organic conversion payments and other tyr gofal payments are very late this year. We constantly hear that that will all be rectified by a new computer system in Llandrindod Wells, but the evidence is that there are still considerable delays.

Like other hon. Members, I was disturbed when I attended a seminar in the House last week on the problem of illegal meat imports. I had known that the farmers of my constituency cited illegal meat imports as one of the causes of foot and mouth, but I had not realised how extensive the trade was. We were given a very disturbing presentation. I hope that the Government will be able to give Customs and Excise the resources necessary to ensure that illegal imports are reduced as much as possible, if not eliminated, and thereby help to reduce the black market in meat imports. Some of it will be going into the food chain—and possibly to reputable butchers. We need more investment to enable environmental health services and Customs and Excise to control the system.

There are a few poultry producers in my constituency. A few weeks ago, I had the great privilege to visit Mr. Tom Vesey, president of the Free Range Poultry Producers Association. He raised with me an important issue affecting his industry—the lack of contracts between supermarkets and egg packers, which is leading to insecurity throughout the industry.

I have been contacted about the problems of disposing of hens that are no longer producing eggs. The market for meat from those hens has disappeared in countries such as Nigeria. As a result, hens that are no longer required are being put into landfill sites. There are potentially about 13 million such hens in the United Kingdom. Without some way of supporting that part of the industry, the environmental costs will be huge.

Improvements have been made recently. I give credit to the Welsh Development Agency and to the farming connect service, which is helping farmers to diversify and is giving them business support. More investment has been made in education and training for farmers and the farming community. I believe in the Government's commitment to lifelong learning. It seems that such commitments have never previously affected people involved in farming and related industries. I hope that there will be greater investment to help farmers with diversification.

One area of diversification that I would not support that affects especially the Usk valley in my constituency is sand and gravel extraction. As a result of the Symonds report, 29 sites have been identified in my constituency where there are sand and gravel deposits. I initiated an Adjournment debate on the subject in the Welsh Grand Committee last week, so there is no need to go into the arguments that I advanced on that occasion. However, I hope that the Welsh Assembly and the local authority will have environmental policies that are robust enough to resist applications for sand and gravel extraction, and that the beautiful Usk valley will be protected and will become a more prosperous area for the farmers in my constituency.

5.37 pm

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): I am grateful to be called to participate in the debate. I was optimistic that we would hear more encouraging words from the Secretary of State. However, the right. hon. Lady's speech was one of the most complacent that I have heard in this place. It was especially complacent, coming on the back of a Select Committee report that states:

"In order to carry out that work effectively the Department must provide accurate and comprehensive data, and must set itself targets against which performance can be measured. DEFRA has not succeeded in doing so this year. In part this may be due to confusion over Treasury guidelines for presentation of financial information. These need to be clear, stable and transparent. In future, we expect its Annual Report to be considerably improved."

The report goes on to be quite a damning indictment of the way in which the Department has been managed over the first 12 months of its existence. However, to hear the Secretary of State, one would think that everything was fine and that the Department had got off to a glowing start. We have only to read what the Select Committee set out in its comprehensive report to learn that, unfortunately, that is not the case.

That feeds across to agriculture, which is an especially important industry in west Derbyshire and in the Derbyshire dales. Huge numbers of visitors come to the Peak district. People come to enjoy the countryside, but I agree with the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) that it does not exist through nature but because it is farmed, maintained and looked after. Our farmers look after it. Without their work, it would not be there for many millions of people to enjoy at weekends and on bank holidays. Anybody who does not acknowledge the uniqueness and importance of agriculture does it a grave disservice.

Farming is in the sixth year of recession, and it has faced many problems in that time, not least foot and mouth disease, to which my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) referred. I shall not go into detail about it because of the shortage of time. However, my hon. Friend was a little tough on the previous Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, who perhaps did not have enough of a free hand to handle the outbreak because the Prime Minister was always breathing down his neck. The general election was far more important to the Government at that stage than the tragedy and the problems of British agriculture.

Farmers in my constituency talk about the collapse of commodity prices from the late 1990s. Farming has been hit by excessive red tape and the way in which the United Kingdom gold-plates some legislation. The nitrates vulnerable zone legislation has already been mentioned. Excessive regulation is becoming a major problem for the industry and it is getting worse. In February next year, new regulations will require the tagging of individual sheep. I am worried about whether that will have long-term benefits.

In 2002, there have been major delays in payments under various cattle subsidy schemes, to which several hon. Members have referred. Data held by the Rural Payments Agency were not reconciled with those held by the Cattle Movement Service. It is vital that those payment and verification schemes be renewed so that the problems that have occurred this year are not repeated in 2003.

As many hon. Members have said, there has been a tremendous loss of jobs in agriculture. Although the industry has gone through changes, some 67,000 people have lost their jobs and 8,600 have abandoned farming. Investment is at its lowest for 30 years. The indicators are worrying for the future of farming.

Young people are not coming into agriculture. Who can blame them for asking, "What is the point?" The Government introduced the minimum wage. Most farmers would like to be on it because they work longer hours for less money than the minimum wage. That also applies to many people who work on family farms.

One of the most disturbing aspects is the difference between the price that farmers receive for a product and the price that the consumer pays for it. Beef has a farmgate value of about £1.72 per kg, yet the retail value is £6.58. The farmer therefore receives some 26 per cent. of the retail value. It is estimated that farmers receive 25 per cent. of the retail value of milk, 21 per cent. of that of eggs, and 8 per cent. of that of potatoes.

The average age of farmers is 58. The suicide rate among farmers is extremely worrying. I recently received a letter from a mother whose son had committed suicide in Monyash. She told me of the resulting devastation in the family. Perhaps those individual tragedies do not get the national headlines that bigger tragedies receive. Nevertheless, they are devastating for families and communities.

The UK dairy industry is the seventh largest in the world and the third largest in Europe. We have 30,000 dairy farmers, 150 of whom are in west Derbyshire. It is one of the largest sectors in the agricultural industry, and it deserves to have more notice taken of it by the Government. Dairy farmers have been trying to ensure that the 2p a litre rise in milk prices announced by the retailers in recent weeks is passed on to them, after prices were reduced at the start of this year. There is no doubt that most farmers are now selling their milk for less than they get to produce it.

A number of the ancillary industries that are so reliant on agriculture have also been lost. In my own constituency a few weeks ago, Nestlé announced that it was closing a plant in Ashbourne that had been in operation since 1911. That has had a devastating impact on the town, because the factory was seen very much as part of the local community. I hope that the Government will consider some of these issues, and be far more positive about them.

I shall return in a moment to my remarks on agriculture, but, while I have the Minister's attention, I would like to say a few words about the review of English national park authorities that the Government published earlier this year. The Government are suggesting that the size of the national park authorities should be substantially reduced, in terms of their governance and the number of members that sit on them. I urge the Minister to look at this proposal very carefully. It is vital that national park authorities have local representation on them. The parish representatives, who were introduced some years ago by my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), were criticised at the time, but I think

that most people would now accept that they have played an important part in providing the authorities with an elected element. I have never argued for a directly elected national park authority. We have to recognise that there are matters of national importance that the authorities should rightly consider. I would be very sad if the Government decided to press ahead with some of the recommendations to reduce the size of these authorities. It would be a retrograde step for the parks, as it would reduce local representation.

Time is of the essence, so I shall say just one more thing to the Minister. It is essential that his Department become more of a flag-bearer for British agricultural industry. The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution said in September:

"British farming needs a new and constructive relationship with the Government. The perception currently among ordinary farmers is that the Government is at best not bothered and at worst, hostile to the interests of British farming. The trust between the farming community and DEFRA is mutually at an all time low."

I do not think that that is what the Government want. It is certainly not what the agricultural industry wants. It is essential that DEFRA should try to turn those attitudes around, so that agriculture can believe that the Department is carrying a positive message for it, and also giving a positive message to the countryside. Unlike the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), I believe that most people in this country appreciate and value the countryside. If it is not maintained and looked after—which is what he seemed to wish to see—the Government will pay a very heavy price.

5.48

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I have listened with interest this afternoon to many fine speeches making a number of different points. I have to say that I disagree with some colleagues, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn). We agree on so many things, but, sadly, on this issue, he seems to be a convert to the economics of Milton Friedman, and I certainly do not agree with that.

Yesterday, I made a speech about the CAP in an Adjournment debate. I do not want to repeat that speech now, but in it I put forward the proposition that the CAP should be abolished. We should put that proposition on the table and try to negotiate it with our colleagues in the European Union. I have even proposed a way of defusing some of the political difficulties that might be involved. This will have to happen one day, and we ought to start talking about it now.

The Adjournment debate in Westminster Hall was secured by my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), who made an excellent speech. I refer hon. Members to what he said. The conclusion that we should draw from his arguments is that the CAP should be abolished. I have felt that for a long time, and I have said so many times. It should be replaced by a repatriated system of agricultural policies, with subsidies where appropriate. Appropriate subsidies should be decided by Government according to needs. We could debate those at length. Many areas do not need subsidy, but some do. We should consider the needs of consumers, farmers and the environment in designing a new agricultural policy that is tuned to our own needs.

Every EU member state is different, especially those about to join, and their agricultural policies should be adjusted and tuned to their own needs. Redistributive incomes across the European Union should be assessed according to prosperity and not determined by some arbitrary system through the CAP. Some richer nations are net beneficiaries and some slightly poorer nations, such as the United Kingdom—we are not as rich as Denmark—are net contributors merely because of the perverse effect of the CAP.

The common fisheries policy has been touched on, and my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary knows my view on that. He does not agree with me. I have great respect for him, and he does a fine job, but I believe that the CFP should be abandoned forthwith. It has been a complete and utter disaster. The only way to preserve fish stocks in the North sea and the shores around the European Union is by nations establishing extensive national fisheries that they husband themselves. They will have a natural self-interest in doing that. The only country in Europe that still has reasonable fish stocks is Norway, because it has its own fishing fields and is not part of the CFP. I make that point strongly, and I hope that one day the abolition of the CFP will come to pass.

There are political ways forward on all these difficult issues. Clearly, some countries would be upset, but they could be reassured if there were tapering arrangements to deal with subsidies over a period.

A number of hon. Members have also referred to energy policy, which should include low-carbon vehicles. Many of my constituents have worked in the motor industry for many years—far too few of them since the closure of Vauxhall Motors. Vauxhall still has an office in Luton, and recently I saw a prototype of a fuel cell-driven car. It is an impressive vehicle, but it is unfortunately still very expensive. I suspect that motor manufacturers are still committed to the standard internal combustion engine, driven by petrol or diesel oil. Obviously, replacing that capital investment will be expensive and will take time, but Governments have a duty to encourage and pressurise manufacturers to move in that direction. I look forward to driving a car that does not produce carbon dioxide, but instead produces water. When hydrogen is burned in the air it produces H_2O. The electrical input must be created in another way, but there are alternatives to carbon for electricity generation.

It is disappointing that we have been so slow to adopt solar heating and solar electricity generation for domestic, commercial and industrial buildings. Global warming may make that easier to do in Britain. Within the next year or two, I am hoping to lead by example and have solar-voltaic cell panels on my own home. The Government provide a 50 per cent. subsidy, which is welcome, and I congratulate them on that great advance. I think that that will persuade people, but the advance is still painfully slow. The number of people installing solar panels in their roofs is low. The initial capital cost is the problem. There should be novel ways of overcoming that. They could be installed free with a capital charge on the value of the house. I am sure that something could be done. If we invested money in solar roof panels—water heating and photo-voltaic panels—rather than in nuclear energy, we would be spending our money much better.

[Mr. Kelvin Hopkins]

Over a long period, it might be possible to provide the whole country with solar roof panels. Photo-voltaic cell panels can now be made in a way that makes them look very nice: they look like ordinary roof tiles, while generating electricity. They can be plugged into the mains, enabling people to put electricity back into the mains from their houses and to gain a financial benefit. There are obviously tremendous advantages in this, but it must be sold hard, supported, sustained and driven forward. We could in fact develop a big solar roof panel industry, which would help manufacturing.

I am also concerned about transport, particularly public transport. For a long time I have advocated the building of a freight railway running from the north-west through the channel tunnel to Lille, skirting round or going through London. That "central railway" is one idea, although there are variations on the theme. In any event, we could do with a dedicated freight route that could cope with fully sized lorries and trailers. There would be no need for specially cut down trailers. It would be a roll-on, roll-off service from the north of England—of course, it could accommodate Scotland and other areas as well—to the continent and, ultimately, to its industrial heartland.

That would be a tremendous advance. It would be extremely attractive to hauliers. It would reduce the need for road-building; it would also reduce road damage, environmental degradation throughout the country and the traffic jams around Birmingham and London. It is a modest proposal, involving four trains an hour in each direction and a roll-on, roll-off facility for lorries travelling from the north-west through the Pennines to Sheffield, past the east and west midlands to the continent—hopefully taking our goods out as well as bringing its goods in.

We could look at many other aspects of public transport. I travel by train nearly every day from my constituency; indeed, I have travelled by train to London nearly every day for 33 years. I like to lead by example in that as in other respects! We must build rail capacity, and ensure that fares are right. The recent proposal to increase fares in order to deter train users strikes me as retrograde: I hope that the Government will invest heavily in both passenger and freight rail services, and that there will come a day when rail travel is much cheaper in relation to car travel than it is now. I hope that public transport will come into its own again.

I have spoken briefly because I know that others want to contribute, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister has at least noted what I have said.

5.58 pm

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): No one could accuse the motion of not being comprehensive. I was only surprised not to find, half way down, mention of mothers and apple pie. I must tell the Minister, however, that the phrase

"commends its drive to promote thriving rural economies and communities"

will send a hollow laugh around the coastal rural communities of Scotland.

Agriculture is proportionally more important to the Scottish economy than to the United Kingdom economy as a whole. That applies particularly to the export of meat and livestock. Some 70,000 people in Scotland work in agriculture, about 40,000 of whom are owner-occupiers—although, interestingly, fewer than half of them now work full-time in agriculture. That is an indication of the change in agriculture in Scotland and, I am sure, in many other areas over the years. Farmers have had to find alternative sources of income to boost their agricultural income.

Last year the average annual farm income was just over £9,500 outside the area affected by foot and mouth; in that area, obviously, it was less than zero. There has been much talk today about farmers diversifying into other areas. They have been trying to do that for many years. In my area, for example, they have gone into the usual businesses—bed and breakfast, holiday cottages and more esoteric enterprises such as quad biking. Others have expressed interest in diversifying into green fuels by growing crops for biomass energy or biodiesel, although commercial uses for these may be some years off. As I said in an intervention on the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), it is important that the plant should be up and running to encourage farmers to move into these areas. If not, it will be difficult to persuade them to do so, because of past problems. I remember one case in my constituency in which the great saviour of agriculture was to be the growing of flax. Many farmers invested in the crop but the plant that was supposed to process it never opened and many lost a great deal of money, so they will be reluctant to go into that area again.

Apart from diversification, most farmers want to be farmers. They are not racetrack operators or oil producers. They have made attempts to find new markets and niche markets for their agricultural produce. Many other right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned the growing number of farmers' markets throughout the country, but with the best will in the world, farmers' markets and direct selling cannot provide a big enough market for all farmers in the UK. The main purchasers of agricultural products are and will continue to be supermarkets. We cannot condemn this too much. After all, how many Members can truly say that they do not make the bulk of their food purchases at Sainsbury, Tesco or one of the other temples of mass consumerism? That is the rub that farming faces. How do we ensure that supermarkets do not use their huge economic power to push down the price paid to farmers? One effect of the European Community and free trade agreements is that supermarkets can source food from elsewhere in the world.

The Curry report, along with many others, talks about moving into organic produce and niche markets. Many have urged farmers to go organic to get a premium for their produce. That is fine in theory but how realistic would it be for the bulk of farmers to turn to organic produce? Do not get me wrong—I am in favour of organic produce. I seek it out, as I am sure many others do, and we accept that we have to pay a little more for it.

Some 50 per cent. of organic land in the UK is in Scotland. There has been an increase in the output of organic food in Scotland, but the UK market continues to be dominated by imports. If farmers attempt to go organic, the huge costs mean that it is some years before they can be fully organic. They find exactly the same

problems in dealing with supermarkets as do conventional farmers. The supermarkets use their huge economic power to push down the price they pay. They impose the same standards on organic produce as they do on conventional produce, so there can be much greater wastage in organic production. If organic production takes off to a large extent, it will inevitably mean that the premium will be gradually eroded and may indeed disappear altogether. Farmers could find themselves back in the same situation as they are in now, but with greater costs.

To get round this, we have to tackle the problem of how we deal with supermarkets. I asked the hon. Members for Lewes (Norman Baker) and for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) about this problem, because I do not see a ready solution to it. I hope that the Minister will say something about the Government's attitude. It is touched on in the report, but there is no real sense of how Governments will deal with the large supermarkets and ensure that they take a greater amount of organic and local produce.

There are real concerns about genetically modified foods, particularly the trials that are taking place. In an earlier intervention, I mentioned the British Medical Association's evidence to the Scottish Parliament. Quite rightly, there is some consumer resistance to eating genetically modified food, yet there is huge pressure from the producers of the seed and the substances that are put on it for farmers to move towards producing genetically modified foods. Almost alone among European Government, this Government seem determined to promote its use. Again, if it goes wrong, it will not be the supermarkets that suffer but the farmers, who may be left with contaminated fields. They will be the real losers.

The common agricultural policy has been mentioned. We are told that the European Commission is considering decoupling support from production, and that is also the thrust of what the Curry report said. That would bring an increase in modulation, leading to a projected 20 per cent. cut in support payments, but only payments of more than €5,000, which I am told is just over £3,000, will be modulated, so throughout Europe more than 60 per cent. of farmers will not be modulated. They are mainly small farmers in southern European countries, but only 9 per cent. of Scottish farmers would be exempt, which could cause a massive and unsustainable reduction in already low incomes. Experience shows that much of the support available will go to large landowners rather than rural communities.

Scottish farming is badly affected by the UK Government's reluctance to draw on European compensation funds, allegedly because matching funds are required. The decision not to seek agrimonetary compensation will lose Scottish growers more than £11 million over the next two to three years.

The question of how a rural community is defined has also been touched on. There is no mention of fishing in the motion, although the Secretary of State referred to it. Many rural communities in the north and east Scotland rely on fishing. If the current proposals from the European Commission are allowed to proceed in anything like their current form, they will spell disaster for rural Scotland.

The Scottish Executive have estimated that 44,000 jobs in Scotland are dependent on fishing. Many of those are in rural areas where there is little other employment, especially given the recent difficulties with agriculture. If fishing goes, many of our small rural communities may well go with it. The European Commissioner said that the industry will not be expected to bear the burden alone and hinted that there will be decommissioning schemes and compensation. That is all very well, and will help those who are currently in the industry, but it will not help the communities that rely on fishing, because there will not be jobs in the future. Money may be available—I expect that in Scotland much of it will have to come from the Executive—but it will not secure the future of those communities. Drastic economic decline could follow. That is no way to

"promote thriving rural economies and communities".

The hon. Member for Lewes rightly mentioned animal transportation. Few of us would be against controls on the transport of live animals, but I urge Ministers to bear in mind the specific problems for many remote rural areas, and island communities in particular, if too tight a definition is applied. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, many local abattoirs were closed, meaning that in many communities animals have to travel substantial distances for slaughter.

Mr. Morley: I want to give the hon. Gentleman two reassurances. First, I understand the problems of the fishing industry and the pressure on fishing communities, and that will be reflected in the policies that we advocate next week. Secondly, we will always argue for a derogation from rules on animal transportation for remote and offshore communities.

Mr. Weir: I am grateful for that helpful intervention.

The motion refers to green technologies. Scotland has great potential for wave and tidal power, but much of it is in the north and the west, where there is no ready access to the national grid. One of the problems is that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is responsible for environmental matters, but the Department of Trade and Industry is responsible for many energy matters. Often, there is no link between the two. Ministers must look at ways in which investment can be put into the national grid, in order to extend it to those very areas where wave and tidal power systems can be set up.

6.10 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): In view of the time, and fortified by the British beef sandwich that I had for lunch, with apple pie for pudding, I want to make just three brief points on three different aspects of British agriculture and rural life. First, I want to touch on the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) about tenant farmers. Second, I want to touch on horticulture, an issue that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) dealt with in some detail. In particular, I want to bring news to the House of November's national conference of cucumber growers, and to give the Minister a couple of ideas that

[Mr. John Grogan]

emerged from it. Thirdly, I want to touch on biofuels and particularly bioenergy, which was mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) and many others.

The problems of full-time tenant farmers, particularly those on marginal land, are highly specific. The Tenant Farmers Association estimates that perhaps 2,000 farmers are hanging on by their fingertips. They are too poor to retire because they have nowhere to go to live, their land is marginal and they have no asset to sell. Indeed, several tenant farmers in my constituency who came to see me recently said, "What are the Government doing about their manifesto promise to provide a retirement scheme—an outgoers scheme—for farmers?" I said, "Come back next month, and in the meantime I will research the issue."

I asked my researcher to look at our manifesto to see what commitments we made on British agriculture and fishing. He consulted the House of Commons Library, and I returned to the farmers with another piece of paper saying that no such commitment was made in the Labour manifesto under the section on British agriculture. An elderly Yorkshire farmer looked at me and said, "Yes lad, you're right: no such commitment was made under the section on British agriculture, but look at the section above, on British rural life." It has to be admitted that reference was made to outgoers schemes and early retirement schemes, particularly in relation to foot and mouth. Indeed, such commitments were made in the manifestos of both main parties.

The Curry commission looked at this proposal on value-for-money grounds, and rejected it. I urge the Government to consider what we can do for tenant farmers. There are difficulties in targeting a scheme at tenant farmers—the Tenant Farmers Association has come up with a scheme that would cost £25 million a year—but I urge the Government, and, indeed, other political parties, to consider the problems of tenant farmers in particular. We need to consider not just those who would do best to leave the industry—indeed, it would help to consolidate the industry if they did so—but those who want to continue to make a living, and who find it more difficult to access grants for diversification than do owner-occupiers, because they have the status of tenant.

The right hon. Member for Fylde has mentioned Horticulture Research International. Stockbridge house, in my constituency—the Minister has visited it—is a world-renowned horticultural research centre. To be frank, the best thing that happened to it was the announcement of its closure, in 2000, by HRI. That forced Stockbridge house and many local stakeholders to get together to establish a scheme—with no Government subsidy whatsoever—to buy the site, in order to continue the valuable practical research that takes place there. Now, as we have heard, there is a question mark over the entire future of HRI.

I want to mention two particular issues in which Stockbridge house is involved, and which have wider resonance in the industry. An article in the most recent edition of *The Commercial Greenhouse Grower* refers to the problems of combined heat and power in the industry. Many horticulturalists have invested in this particular form of energy, which is suited to the industry. The article states:

> "Moves by combined heat and power supplier Nedalo UK to switch off CHP plants on horticultural sites has left major growers across the country uncertain about how they will heat their new-season crops."

That development—the company is a subsidiary of TXU—reflects the recent problems with CHP, which have resulted from the increase in gas prices and the decline in electricity prices. I hope that, after Christmas, the Government will review the matter in their energy policy.

The Horticultural Development Council has agreed to fund a practical idea proposed by the cucumber growers—a new technology demonstration project at Stockbridge house. To meet pressure from retailers the growers need to produce all year round, and that can be simply achieved by installing extra lighting during the winter months. The cucumber growers have stumped up some money for the research—as has the HDC—and only a small amount is required from DEFRA. It could help CHP production because some of the energy from a CHP plant could go into that extra winter lighting and there would be no need sell electricity into the national grid.

A further suggestion from the cucumber growers would help to reduce red tape. Many horticulturalists face the fact that in future they will be unable to use pesticides that they used formerly. Part of the solution might be the biologicals, which are an important range of products, including fungus spores, pheromones, and natural plant or fungus toxins. They can control fungal diseases as well as attacks by some insects without leaving residues. Unfortunately, at present the authorities treat them as though they were chemical pesticides, so some of the small companies that are trying to market those biological products face costs of more than £300,000.

May I urge Ministers to look into ways of reducing the red tape in respect of such projects? For example, in this country, we are leading users of predatory insects for pest control, especially in the cultivation under glass of cucumbers, tomatoes and peppers. Such means are now being used world wide and Stockbridge house is the centre of research. As there are no registration requirements for the use of predatory insects, massive strides can be made in the research.

On biofuels and bioenergy, I support the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood and others who said that 20p a litre is welcome but it is probably not quite enough to accelerate the use of biofuels as much as we want. The Country Land and Business Association suggests a 10 per cent. target for renewable fuels for road transport by 2010. That is one way in which progress might be made.

I draw the attention of the House to an example of the use of bioenergy in my constituency. I think that my hon. Friend the Minister may have visited the Arbre project at Eggborough, which is a revolutionary demonstration plant for wood burning. Fifty farmers signed 20-year contracts to supply the plant. It was difficult to persuade farmers to diversify in that way and great efforts had to be made before they would do so. It took three or four years to get the farmers to sign up.

Earlier this year, the owners of the plant decided to close it. Fortunately, however, due to the efforts of the Government, especially the Department for Trade and Industry and DEFRA, and the European Union, there is every prospect that the plant will be rescued soon after Christmas. I understand that there are four prospective buyers.

When farmers are persuaded to grow alternative crops and when demonstration plants are set up, it is vital that we see the projects through. I very much hope that there will be good news about Arbre during the next few months and that the plant, supported by the Government and the EU, will go into full production some time next year.

6.18

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am aware that time is limited, so I shall keep my remarks as brief as possible.

It is a pleasure to have an opportunity to contribute to what has been an engaging debate. There has been a great deal of consensus on many issues. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) told us that he was speaking in an agriculture debate in the House for the first time. Although some hon. Members did not welcome the hon. Gentleman's contribution, I did. He presented a challenging opinion and his views should be addressed by those people who present themselves—as do the Government—as the champion of farmers and of the countryside.

I fear, however, that the hon. Gentleman was fighting old battles. He compared steelworkers with farmers and argued that there was a dependency culture in the agriculture industry that had never existed in the steel industry. If he had heard the whole debate, he would have realised that there is cross-party agreement that we should be moving away from production supports, as the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) pointed out in a very good speech.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who is no longer in his place, made some challenging points. He was perhaps unnecessarily critical of the previous Minister of Agriculture, the right hon. Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), whom, I think, he described as clueless at one point. During the foot and mouth outbreak, particularly in the early days, I found that there was a parallel human disease, which I described as the benefit of hindsight disease, the symptoms of which were brass neck and short-term memory loss.

In fact, during the very early days of that outbreak, the whole House agreed with the plans put in place by the right hon. Gentleman, who acted very quickly at that stage. The criticisms were made only with the benefit of hindsight, when it became easy to do so. Of course we can all make mistakes and we can learn from them, but there was an unnecessary assassination of the Minister's character at that time.

I would say, perhaps with the benefit of foresight, that the Government have an unwritten farming policy, which they sometimes describe as restructuring. Perhaps the cat was let out of the bag by the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who is now back in his place. Frankly, the aim is to get rid of small farmers to a large extent. Although the NFU and the Govt have regretted the fact that 15,000 farm workers left the industry last year—a larger number than at any time since the second world war—they want that level of restructuring to take place in the industry, and the removal of a large number of farmers from the industry is part of that plan. I do not doubt that they quietly welcome that situation.

The right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), who is no longer in his place, made a number of telling points, with which I agree, in relation to the Government's rather slothful, mañana approach in response to the Curry commission's report. He certainly endorsed a view that my constituents and I have about the Whitehall mentality. My constituents view Whitehall and Westminster as rather remote and insular places, where the pace of life is extremely slow. Perhaps if people looked at rural areas from the other end of the telescope, they might get a different impression of the culture that exists here.

Farm-gate prices was a theme pursued by many hon. Members during the debate. Of course it is extremely difficult to draw a decent comparison between what happened 50 years ago, when the basic raw materials were put on retailers' shelves, and what happens now, when so much food is processed. However, it is clear that the proportion of the final retail price that farmers receive is considerably smaller than many decades ago. We can be sure of that because if it were the other way round the processors and retailers would be telling us about it.

The code of practice, which pays lip service to that issue, has no real teeth at all. Although the Government's response suggests that the Office of Fair Trading will issue reports regularly, what will happen when processors and supermarkets do not abide with the rulings under that code of practice? They will face no sanction.

With regard to the collaborative ventures under recommendation 8 of the farm plan, are the Government saying that they regret breaking up Milk Marque? In effect, they are saying that farmers should co-operate, but the fact that they broke up Milk Marque only a few years ago made it much more difficult for farmers to co-operate at the level needed to compete in the international market.

With regard to recommendation 2 about farmers getting the benefit of receiving their support payments in the euro, reference is made to putting in place a computer that will allow that to come online late in 2004—once again, the mañana attitude mentioned by the right hon. Member for Fylde. In fact, the Prime Minister brought in the euro compatibility exercise in February 1999. What consideration did the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and its predecessor Departments give to euro compatibility to ensure that farmers were getting the benefit of euro payments before today, let alone waiting a further two years for the benefit of that measure? Surely we need to do a great deal more as far as that is concerned.

The Secretary of State mentioned several matters to which I do not have time to refer, as other hon. Members want to speak, but it is clear that the Department is not just a champion for the environment; it should also be a champion for rural areas. In relation to the White Paper, I question whether the Department is talking to other responsible Departments. On rural housing, for

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example, the 50 per cent. council tax rebate on second homes has not been removed, which we were expecting and which was originally proposed in the White Paper. There is no serious attempt to address the need for a twilight market somewhere between social housing and the open market, as there is a clear mismatch between earnings levels and house prices in many rural areas.

The key issues facing rural areas are those relating to the mid-term review of the common agricultural policy, and as the Minister will know well, those relating to the important debate that will take place in Europe next week on the future catch in the fishing industry. On the CAP, I urge that we do not allow a situation to emerge in which we simply turn the countryside into prairie and ranch and move from blue-box to green-box subsidies, as the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said. That recognises, as perhaps the hon. Member for Newport, West did not, that the factory floor of farming is a place about which we all care. We walk across and have recreation in that area, and farmers should be properly paid to fulfil an important role in that regard.

Next week, the Minister has some important negotiations on fishing quotas. I hope that he will listen to the industry, whose response to the current crisis has been very responsible, as he must accept. Quotas will have to be cut in certain areas, but there are ways, using tactical and other measures, of avoiding absolute catastrophe, which will otherwise occur across many coastal areas of Britain.

6.28 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I had hoped to speak in this debate as someone who has a long-standing interest in the environment and in agriculture, and, more narrowly, as a constituency MP representing one of the few seats in which fruit farming predominates.

I grew up in the area that I represent—I was born and educated there, and have lived there all my life—and it means a great deal to me. As a result, I believe that fruit farming is something that we all ought to support. It is wholly unsubsidised, it produces high-quality produce close to the marketplace, and it is extremely good for the environment. It is therefore, in many ways, a model for the kind of agriculture that we, as a country, should be looking to support.

At the moment, however, the future looks pretty bleak, and the stakes are extremely high. On DEFRA's figures, given to me in a written answer a couple of weeks ago, 10.9 per cent. of the national orchard has been grubbed in the last three years. That is a staggering amount, and were it to happen anywhere else, it would be a national scandal.

What is going wrong? A number of difficulties are wholly outside the Government's control, and I will not go through them all. Many imports are coming into the country, supermarkets have enormous power over the market and the changes to the UK climate clearly affect growers enormously. Their falling revenues have hindered their ability to reinvest.

Growers have made great advances in meeting the challenges and, to be fair, the Government have helped them in certain respects. For example, the Government have let growers off the environmental impact assessment, allowing orchards out of its clauses, and they have stalled negotiations on the EU marketing standard, and that has been of enormous use. The Government have also increased the number of workers allowed in under the seasonal agricultural workers scheme to 25,000 and they have given growers a rebate on the climate change levy. That has been of enormous value.

However, there is great concern about the activities of the Agricultural Wages Board. No one in the fruit-growing industry would dispute the headline rate, but the changes that have been made to the casual workers rate are estimated to add about 14 per cent. to the bill of the average grower. In an industry in which between 40 and 60 per cent. of the cost base is down to payment to workers, that is an enormous hike.

I want to say a few words about Horticulture Research International—hon. Members on both sides of the House have touched on that. It is most unlikely that horticulture and the fruit-farming sector can continue to develop as we would wish without a proper research base. HRI is recognised across the globe for its excellence, and the quinquennial review has asked that DEFRA guarantee 40 per cent. core funding in research stations. When the review is completed in January, I hope that the Minister will take note of that.

Time is short, so I shall quickly stress that we should all support the fruit-farming sector. It is unsubsidised, it produces high-quality food close to the marketplace and it is good for the environment. The growers whom I represent want nothing more than to run their farms as small businesses, free from regulation and with an achievable long-term vision for the future of horticulture. I hope that DEFRA will be able to help them to achieve that.

6.32 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): This has been a vital, thoughtful and disturbing debate. It has been vital, because rural Britain is vitally important as the home and place of work of millions of Britons and because the countryside is, in my estimation and that of Members on both sides of the House, the brightest national jewel.

Although we have not heard this in the debate, it has become fashionable to underplay the economic significance of agriculture and horticulture. To do that when one considers the 500,000 people employed in those sectors is neglectful. To do so mindful of the wider affects of farming and growing is irresponsible. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) pointed out, without viable agriculture there can be no viable countryside.

The debate has been thoughtful as well as vital, because Members have made clear, well-informed and incisive points. The debate has been characterised by good information and a lack of rancour. There was clarity from the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), who talked about the need for imports to conform to the same standards as home-produced products. In particular, he referred to poultry and turkeys, and he will know both that turkey production in this country has virtually halved and of the competition that comes from countries such as Brazil. We are raising turkeys in

Britain and doing so very efficiently but our turkey farmers have to compete with people from south America, Africa and further afield. The hon. Gentleman was right to raise those important points and to defend that important industry.

There was clarity, too, from the hon. Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), who talked about the damage caused to the livestock industry by the 20-day rule and described the ongoing problems that are faced in that respect. His commitment to his farmers was well illustrated by the forceful way in which he argued his case.

We had information on horticulture and particularly on horticultural research from my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde. He and I share a profound concern for the subject. We also had information on integrated crop management from the Chairman of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry). In a well-made point, he was right to say that the benefits of such an approach can find form more quickly than is often imagined.

We had incisiveness from the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), who talked about labelling, liability and food localism. He made a compelling case for reconnecting the consumer with the producer and so shortening the food chain. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) was an ally of those of us who recognise that the common fisheries policy has been a disaster for the sustainability of fishing communities and for conservation. The debate was also thoughtful because of the recognition by hon. Members on both sides of the Chamber that we need to think long and hard about the future of farming and its relationship with the rural economy and society at large.

The hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who, like me, has for many years enjoyed participating in long debates on such matters which have gone into the night, spoke about the "consensus for change" and the need to consider the issues in a thorough and non-partisan way. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde—I do not want to keep referring to him in case he thinks he has become my mentor—said that farming is a cultural issue that extends beyond pure economics. He explained that there is something deeper to it, and he is right. It is about what we value and prize; about defining our obligations as custodians of a rural and natural heritage; about the legacy that we wish to pass on to the next generation; and about the investment that farmers make in that heritage and legacy.

Some would say that I am being excessively romantic. If so, I plead guilty. A passionate romantic attachment to that which is beyond the narrowly material is the prerequisite of vision. The absence of vision on the part of the Secretary of State and Ministers has made the debate—in addition to vital and thoughtful—disturbing. As hon. Members repeatedly said, the Secretary of State's speech lacked passion. It was as though she was going through the motions. However, I do not want to be unkind or ungenerous because I am not an unkind or ungenerous person, as the House knows. The Curry report is important. It was limited by time and resources, but it is a useful start none the less. The Government's response is better than nothing. However, as Curry said:

"Partial support is not acceptable without funding, we will not achieve the refocusing that is needed unless the report is adopted in full."

We certainly have not had that commitment from the Government.

Some things are welcome: the help with small regional producers; the improvements in competitiveness and marketing, which are an ambition of Government policy; and a serious look at entry-level stewardship. There is some recognition of what my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) highlighted as the link between food and farming, that vital connection which cannot be ignored in Government policy or our debates.

There are significant gaps, however. We need to take seriously a policy that allows our farmers to add value to their products by developing processing capacity, so improving their opportunities to make a good and decent living. For example, the dairy industry in most other countries is able to add value because the producers have processing capacity. In this country, processing capacity is focused on a few enterprises and that opportunity does not exist. The Government need to assist in that.

We also need a real commitment to deal with the burden of regulation. We also need serious investment and an appreciation of the value of food. Perhaps most of all, however, we need an acceptance that the relationship between retailers and producers—the shortening of the food chain, as it has been described—will be taken seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) and other hon. Members on both sides of the House made that point. Frankly, the Government's comments on shortening the food chain are weak as water. They talk about

"actively encouraging retailers . . . to apply the principles and practices set out in the code on a voluntary basis."

As my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde said, that is not sufficient to restore producers' faith in a Government who need to do an awful lot to restore farmers' and growers' faith in them. We must face up to the disproportionate effect that a few retailers have had on the food chain. Rebalancing should be a priority—it is not fair to let a commercially capricious retail sector put the kind of pressure on producers that it is putting on them at the moment.

As I have said, there is a lack of vision and strategy. There is no business plan for farming and growing in this country or, to use the Secretary of State's words in response to an early intervention, no feeling for an appropriate number of producers or level of production. We do not ask for precision, but any business plan or strategy would take a notional view of which sectors will be productive, and how many producers there will be over the next year or five years. We cannot ask our farmers and growers to develop business plans if the Government do not provide them with leadership or a sense of direction.

There should be a balance sheet for agriculture and horticulture which measures their social, economic and cultural effects. It is not unreasonable to ask DEFRA to introduce such a cost-benefit analysis and for it to be

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debated and discussed. Such an analysis should be dynamic and produced regularly—not an unreasonable request from the industry or Conservative Members—and should be based on the partnership approach identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) in his stimulating and apposite analysis of the Government's response to Curry. That approach would reinvest in faith, making farmers and growers believe that the Government care, but would also achieve coherence and co-ordination between various schemes and their management by Government agencies. This lack of coherence and co-ordination was identified by my right hon. Friend the Member for Skipton and Ripon and is exemplified by the incompatibility of the IT systems of the Rural Payments Agency with those of DEFRA, and the ensuing confusion that has caused misery to livestock farmers and others throughout the country.

We need an understanding of the problem. The long-term fall in commodity prices is seemingly inexorable, and for many years farmers' share of the retail price of food has declined, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Derbyshire pointed out—what a champion of the farmers of Derbyshire he is and has always been. Through no fault of their own, British farmers' purchasing power has fallen relative not only to general inflation but, as Members know, to inflation in key agricultural inputs, undermining their capacity to invest in improvements. Falling incomes and rising costs are the cutting blades of the so-called agrarian scissors and are the only meaningful context in which debate can take place. Without addressing the key issue of farm income, anything that we may hope to achieve environmentally, socially or culturally is impossible.

Whatever the vision of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who clearly lives in a different world to the one occupied by the majority of hon. Members, farming is the force that shapes four fifths of Britain's land area. There is no conceivable alternative that could provide the same coverage, but without sustainable incomes farming will cease to be viable in the greater part of this land. The only sustainable agricultural policy is one that identifies and counteracts the power behind the agrarian scissors—excess production and the payments associated with it. Frankly, farmers have been trapped in a system of production subsidies that provides perverse incentives for the commodification of agriculture when almost all other industries in this country have prospered by producing ever more sophisticated goods and services, adding value to them, and marketing them on the basis of quality.

We need better alternatives: payments that provide sustainable farm incomes and serve as an incentive to environmental good practice as an integral part of marketing food production. Those are important challenges, but they must be seen in the context of real difficulties and problems. In their response to Curry, the Government could bring themselves to acknowledge only challenges. Unlike the hon. Member for Sherwood, they would not say that there was a crisis, and less still that that crisis was as wide-ranging and deep as it has been in agriculture at any time since the 1930s. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) spoke of 67,000 people leaving the industry over the past five years.

There are hon. Members of all parties who care about agriculture, horticulture and the countryside. I do not deny that for a second, but there is only one party that has rural Britain at its heart and soul. That is the Conservative party. We will be unfailing in our determination to fight for British food and farming, unstinting in our efforts to ensure that our farmers can compete on a level playing field, and unhesitating in our protection of our rich environmental heritage. We will always be ready to be the proud and passionate champions of the interests of rural Britain.

6.46 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): There has been a good standard of debate in today's opportunity to discuss the range of work that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does and the range of responsibilities that it has. There were thoughtful contributions from the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker), my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson), the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), my hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who expressed his traditional robust views, the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), who expressed equally robust views in defence of his farmers and the rural community, the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin), my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins), the hon. Member for Angus (Mr. Weir), my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan), the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), the hon. Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson), and not least the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes).

One or two hon. Members referred to this as an agriculture debate, but it was not. It was intended to recognise the role of DEFRA and the Department's new responsibilities. The motion is so wide ranging as to enable hon. Members to speak about those issues, as my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham, South did when he took the opportunity to speak about genetically modified crops. The motion is in no way self-congratulatory. Our priority is to deliver and to seek to improve on the delivery of services and commitments that we have made. That is why, incidentally, DEFRA appointed Lord Haskins to carry out a review of our agencies and consider ways of improving the delivery of our services; and why DEFRA set up the food and farming commission and presented a detailed response to the commission today, which received a broad welcome from right hon. and hon. Members.

I acknowledge that most of the speeches were balanced. In general, the setting up of DEFRA was welcomed, particularly by the hon. Member for Lewes. There is a consensus on the need to reform the common agricultural policy, and recognition of the commitment that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has demonstrated, and which my ministerial colleagues and I share, to promote sustainable development across the

whole of Government, and not just within DEFRA. We are not complacent about such matters, and we recognise that there are issues on which we must concentrate to ensure the delivery of sustainability.

We recognise the need to ensure that all our delivery systems are efficient. I accept some of the criticism from hon. Members, especially in respect of the Rural Payments Agency. There has been a problem with computer compatibility. The Department is only 18 months old, and these are matters on which further work is necessary. In our spending programmes, we have committed substantial sums for IT upgrades and improvements, which will improve the service to farmers. However, we have made good progress in a short period.

The hon. Member for Lewes mentioned turnover in DEFRA. The latest figures, which might interest him, show that from 1 January 2002 to 31 May 2002 turnover was 2.8 per cent., which is not unreasonable in a Department the size of DEFRA. The figures relate to overall turnover. Turnover may be higher in some lower grades, but the employment of many temporary and agency staff partly accounts for that. The figures demonstrate that morale in the Department is good and is improving. It is a privilege to serve with the dedicated staff whom we have in all parts of DEFRA—especially those who joined us from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions.

Sue Doughty: I thank the Minister for giving way. I am concerned about morale in the information technology department in Guildford, as proposals to outsource the department risk losing a tremendous amount of flexibility and expertise. They may mean that not all of DEFRA is quite as happy as he would want us to think.

Mr. Morley: I appreciate the hon. Lady's point, but she will also appreciate that, in order to ensure improvements in service and cost-effective delivery, we have to examine a range of options. Of course, we are consulting the trade unions and those involved will be kept informed of the progress of those talks.

I should like to repeat the comments that I made when the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire spoke about my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend (Mr. Brown), now the Minister for Work. I do not think that his comments were justified. The foot and mouth epidemic was a time of great stress for all concerned, with farmers and others trying to deal with the epidemic. The efforts of my right hon. Friend were widely recognised and appreciated at the time, as many Opposition Members have pointed out.

We have backed up our response to the food and farming commission with the allocation of £500 million over three years. That is intended to allow the comprehensive proposals to be implemented. As hon. Members have pointed out, there have been changes in agricultural employment in recent years and a decline in the number of farms and farm workers. There is nothing new about that; it has been going on since the 1930s. However, every rural constituency has unemployment levels that are at a 25-year low. The right hon. Member for Fylde raised the issue of unemployment, but I notice that unemployment in his constituency has fallen by about 21 per cent. since 1997. That has happened throughout rural communities.

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole): I am pleased to say that my constituency has also benefited from that trend.

In this wide-ranging debate, nobody seems to have mentioned the pig sector, which is very significant in my constituency. Will the Minister take on board the imminent welfare directive, which France is apparently not going to implement until 2013, the problem of sow infertility in the herd, which needs urgent research, and also the question of pig identification? If pig identification is needed—many think that it is not—it must be implemented very sensitively.

Mr. Morley: I recognise that my hon. Friend is a great champion of pigs and I shall certainly take those points on board. The Department has committed considerable sums to investigation of the pig-wasting disease. Sow infertility is part of that. We are talking with the industry about how to use the money most efficiently and are reviewing the pig identification rules. On welfare directives, I assure him that we expect to do things at the same time as other European countries. We also expect European countries to apply the measures in the same way as we will, including measures in respect of pigs.

We recognise that bovine TB is a major issue, and we have already introduced a package of measures and are considering further ones. Mention was also made of the 20-day movement restriction, which is under review, but is very important in terms of disease control.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood recognised the need for change in agriculture and pointed out that change is not always comfortable for people, especially when it affects them directly.

Mr. Roger Williams: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have only seven minutes left and I should like to deal with some of the remaining points.

Change is not always comfortable, but the Department is providing leadership and support. As was pointed out, a great deal of change must come from the industry itself. We do not have a command-and-control economy. While we can provide support in helping farmers to get closer to the market—the main thrust of the Curry report—a great deal of what happens must come from them.

I also recognise that very good points were made by the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon, who spoke about the need for value for money in the proposed new broad and shallow schemes and in entry-level agri-environment schemes. He also spoke about a market for environmental goods, which is worth exploring, support for integrated crop management and the use of agri-environment schemes for other purposes, such as pollution control. These are all sensible suggestions that are worth considering in some detail.

There is an action plan for nutrition. It is a joint DEFRA and Department of Health proposal, which is not over-prescriptive. It addresses and deals with real

[Mr. Morley]

issues in relation to diet, consumption of vegetables and other matters that I do not think Members would find controversial.

Many Members have said that the CAP is not delivering to farmers in respect of their incomes and that there is a need for change. I can tell the right hon. Member for Fylde that, in relation to the mid-term review, market change, decoupling and modulation will be discussed at the summit. I think that there is agreement on market change. There is also strong agreement on decoupling. Modulation is a much more complex issue. Some of the Commission's proposals are not exactly to the benefit of the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, modulation is an important issue and one for which we shall continue to press.

As for Horticulture Research International, we are considering responses following public consultation. We shall announce our decision early in the new year. We recognise that it is important that people know the future of HRI. We want to support research and development in the horticultural sector. I recognise that it is unsupported and we want to play our role in supporting the sector.

I turn to some of the environmental issues. DEFRA champions sustainability across government. We have demonstrated that with our green Ministers' network and our links with other Departments. We recognise that we need to do more, but we can point to real achievements on the environmental front. Not least, we can take some pride in our leadership on climate change, which has been fully integrated throughout government right to my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, who has played an active role. There has been success also at the Bonn and Marrakesh meetings. That was achieved by my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State and the Minister for the Environment. That has laid the foundations for the implementation of the climate change agreement at Kyoto. It was a great success, and the UK had a leading role.

We have worked and co-operated with Departments such as the Department for International Development on sustainable forestry. I understand that sometimes there are problems in trying to source timber from sustainable sources. There are weaknesses and problems with certification. However, the UK was the first G8 country to embrace a policy for the procurement of timber from sustainable sources. I am glad to say that due to our success at the meeting of the convention on international trade in endangered species, where we managed to get mahogany uplifted to appendix 2, it will be a great deal easier to ensure that the timber that we procure has come from properly certified sources. That success was the result of working with the Foreign Office, the Home Office, Customs and Excise, DFID, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and, of course, non-governmental organisations.

We had success at Doha, especially on non-trade issues, which are important in terms of welfare and environmental issues that are connected with farming. There has been success in raising water quality standards in this country. DEFRA had success in working across government, including the involvement of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister at the world summit on sustainable development. We led the way on the agreement on water and sanitation. That is valuable in terms of international development and an example of where the Department has been leading from the front.

We are the European leader in agri-environment schemes and the application of them. We have had great success in reducing fuel poverty, which has been acknowledged. We have introduced—*[Interruption]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Conversations are breaking out throughout the Chamber, and I am finding it difficult to hear to the Under-Secretary.

Mr. Morley: We work and co-ordinate matters with the Department of Transport. In his recent statement, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced one of the biggest ever public transport schemes in Manchester.

DEFRA is a new Department that continues to develop. Our achievements are already internationally recognised. We are making progress and I am proud of our achievements so far, and of those that we shall make in future.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 145, Noes 238.

Division No. 23] **[6:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard

Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Weir, Michael
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Angela Watkinson and Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, rh John
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, rh Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin

Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(CIwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
White, Brian
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and Charlotte Atkins

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 232, Noes 141.

Division No. 24] **[7:12 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Burgon, Colin
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Cooper, Yvette
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Denham, rh John
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keeble, Ms Sally
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonnell, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Raynsford, rh Nick
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Thomas, Gareth *(CIwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
White, Brian
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Joan Ryan and Charlotte Atkins

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burstow, Paul
Butterfill, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jenkin, Bernard
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Weir, Michael
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes: Mr. Mark Francois and Angela Watkinson

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House welcomes the Government's commitment to sustainable development, balancing environmental, economic and social aims both domestically and globally; commends its drive to promote thriving rural economies and communities, including a vibrant food and farming sector, that protects and ensures the sustainable use of the environment, as well as contributing to productivity; applauds the launch on 12th December of the Government's Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy; further welcomes the Government's commitment in its response to the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiry reports to a massive programme of work and reform; recognises the substantial strides the Government is making in tackling climate change, and the leading role it played at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in securing global commitments to tackle poverty through sustainable development, such as halving the number of people without access to adequate sanitation; further welcomes its focus on the sustainable and efficient use of the urban and rural environment and the need to work with business to promote the country's competitive advantage by embracing and leading internationally on green technologies, landscapes and the countryside for all to enjoy and benefit from, its commitment to animal welfare and its focus on evidence-based policy-making and science; and urges the Government to make continuing progress in advancing global environmental priorities, including radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy, not least as part of the UK's commitment to reducing poverty and hunger in developing countries, to the World Trade Organisation, and to further cuts in carbon emissions worldwide.

EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation) and Order [28 November],

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Pre-Budget Report 2002 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.—[*Mr. Jim Murphy.*]

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I think the Ayes have it.

Hon. Members: No.

Division deferred till Wednesday 18 December, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002]

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6) (Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

PROCEEDS OF CRIME

That the draft Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 (Cash Searches: Code of Practice) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 25th November, be approved.

JUSTICE

That the draft Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 (Amendment of section 46(1)) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 27th November, be approved.

COMPETITION

That the draft Supply of Beer (Tied Estate) (Revocation) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 21st November, be approved.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Question agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Pet Travel Scheme (Pilot Arrangements) (England) (Amendment) (No. 2) Order 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 2850), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

PETITIONS

Woodside Adolescent Unit

7.23 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): I rise to present a petition on behalf of residents of the Epsom and Ewell area, relatives of those treated at the Woodside Adolescent Unit and others across the south-east of England concerned about the unit's future. For the information of the House, the unit is a psychiatric unit aimed at young people; it was a pioneer in its field and faces closure as a result of the transfer of services across the border into London.

The petition declares:

The petitioners strongly oppose the plan to close the Woodside Child, Adolescent and Family Psychiatry Unit and call upon the NHS and Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust to keep it open.

The petitioners request that the House of Commons joins them in calling upon the NHS and the said Surrey Oaklands NHS Trust to keep the unit open.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Food Supplements

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): The petition that I have the pleasure of presenting is on behalf of more than 600 consumers of food supplements and natural health products in Petts Wood, Orpington and the surrounding areas. The signatures were collected by the Health Matters store in Petts Wood in my constituency.

The petition declares:

Consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies and fear that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Richard Allan (Sheffield, Hallam): The House may have a strange sense of déjà vu when I present my petition on behalf of Ralph Pike, who has collected 5,435 signatures on behalf of Consumers for Health Choice. The petition states:

Consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): My petition is identical to the two that have just been introduced, so I shall not repeat the text. In this case, the petition was organised by Mr. Fordham of the Spice of Life health food shop in Bemisters lane, Gosport, and was signed by more than 200 of my constituents. The fact that an identical petition should come from three different constituencies underlines the widespread concern about the matter.

To lie upon the Table.

School Closures (Leeds)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

7.27 pm

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I feel out of place, as I do not have a petition to present.

I am very grateful to Mr. Speaker for this opportunity to raise important matters relating to school closures affecting my constituents. Some of my colleagues may want to speak about schools in other parts of that great city of Leeds, if they catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I am aware that the Minister has less statutory involvement in school closures than before, but certain aspects of the current educational unrest in Leeds lead to his and his colleagues' doors, and this is an excellent chance to acquaint him and the Department with the difficulties that they are unwittingly causing.

The Minister will be aware that Education Leeds is reviewing both high schools and primary schools, which is sensible and necessary on both demographic and educational grounds and is clearly overdue. My remarks today are definitely not about being defensive over the closure of buildings. The demographic changes alone make some closures inevitable. This is about three issues on which departmental involvement is in danger of distorting sensible educational decisions and, above all, undermining the democratic process.

The first issue concerns academy status, which has ministerial blessing and has been conferred on Agnes Stewart Church of England high school. The plans agreed with the Minister envisage a new Agnes Stewart Church of England academy, merged with Braim Wood boys high school on a new site in Fearnville fields.

Agnes Stewart school has been in special measures and is now regarded as having serious weaknesses. Instead of being given this new status and some £18 million in funds from the Department for Education and Skills, it is more of a candidate for closure. It has let youngsters down for many years, as scrutiny of the Ofsted report and of exam results over the years will clearly confirm.

Braim Wood—the school that Agnes Stewart is taking over as part of the move towards an academy, and which, in effect, it is closing down—is smaller, but it has double the exam successes of Agnes Stewart. Braim Wood's size may well be explained by the education authority's making public its desire to let Agnes Stewart take it over. That has resulted in Braim Wood's being blighted, and parents are understandably not over-keen to send their children to a school in which their education will clearly be disrupted. Regardless of that, it has had a decent Ofsted. It is in a very attractive, semi-rural location and is well placed to attract a social mix. Whether the single sex aspect can be justified is forming, and has formed, an interesting part of the consultations.

A really controversial aspect of the academy is the proposed new site on Fearnville fields. I should point out that I live on a nearby estate, and have done so for the past 20-odd years. Residents' meetings have made it absolutely plain that they see no environmental sense in the proposal to build on one of the much prized and very scarce green spaces in the inner city. Perhaps even more importantly, nor do they see much educational sense in building there. What enrages local people is that, on standing in the field—the proposed site of the new academy—and looking northwards, one can see just 700 yd away a redundant high school building that is still standing. It was closed some five or six years ago, and is being used by the council for other activities. This raises some obvious questions. Although it is being used for various purposes, it could be made available, and it has land within its curtilage on which another school could be built. In other words, an educational establishment is still standing within 700 yd of the proposed site.

Local people ask the obvious questions: if there is a need for the school in that vicinity, why ruin green fields, when an educational establishment is located so close? Even more pertinently, they ask, "Before you build a school there, is it not worth examining the reasons for the closure of the former high school?" As a local councillor at the time of the closure, it was evident to me that the high school closed because it failed to achieve a social mix. My hon. Friend the Member for Elmet (Colin Burgon), a distinguished former teacher-lecturer, contributed to what little success that establishment achieved, but even that failed to prevent its closure.

This issue is linked to the Minister for School Standards because it was he who agreed last July to the plan to build an academy on that site. His Department and Education Leeds have since spent an estimated six-figure sum on developing that plan. The trouble is that Education Leeds has bid for an academy according to a specific timetable, and it is under the impression that it has £20 million to spend on this project. The problems are twofold. Having consulted interested partners, it is discovering not only a lack of support for Braim Wood's closure to accommodate the proposed Agnes Stewart Church of England academy, but real puzzlement at, and strong hostility towards, such use of the site.

The second part of this exercise is the young persons academy—a different type of academy that will attempt to provide 16-plus education in the inner city. That comes to Leeds like a thief in the night and is just as welcome.

In inner-city Leeds, we have the usual problems with 16-plus education: small sixth forms, with little breadth of choice. The building of an academy is one way forward but, as the House will agree, it is not the only way. Schools in the outer suburbs have been encouraged to form partnerships and networks. That could be the answer in the inner city; for example, partnerships could be formed with local further education colleges.

The Leeds academy is described as having 900 students, yet there is no indication of where they will come from. There are two obvious places: the further education colleges and the existing schools. That must have an adverse financial effect on both sectors, but that is spelled out nowhere—nor are we told which sixth forms are to be affected.

Once again, a bid has been made. The Minister has agreed to the concept and to the money, but the consultations are unreal because the full details and consequences are not spelled out. Furthermore, some people feel that money rather than education is leading in this case.

The proposals for the young person's academy led to the most outrageous part of the whole exercise. To find a site for the academy, Education Leeds decided to

[Mr. George Mudie]

demolish one of the best primary schools in inner east Leeds—Shakespeare primary school, which is in the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn). It is an award-winning school and the decision seemed dreadful. Under the guise of dealing with surplus places, Education Leeds decided that it could save Shakespeare but only at the expense of another fine primary school in the vicinity—Ebor Gardens.

The proposal is that Ebor Gardens be closed and demolished and that Shakespeare be moved to that site to make room for the academy.

Colin Burgon (Elmet): I pay testimony to my hon. Friend's commitment to the local community. Does he agree that, just as we suffer in Leeds from the two-speed economy, if we have a two-tier education system that ignores the needs of the inner city and the estates, it will be bad news for the city of Leeds?

Mr. Mudie: I wholly agree with my hon. Friend. It is an important matter. We face a great challenge. There are great problems and change is needed. Thanks to the funds coming from the Labour Government, for the first time in my political career there is a real prospect of delivering a decent education to inner-city youngsters and of giving them real opportunities. That is why we must be careful to ensure that partnerships continue. We have a one-off chance in a generation to do something for those youngsters.

As I was saying, it is proposed to rebuild Shakespeare primary school on the site of Ebor Gardens school. To the absolute fury of parents, staff and governors, that property manipulation is being described as "surplus place adjustment". If the Minister cares to peruse Education Leeds school organisation booklets for the past two years, he will see that there is no hint that there might be a problem with surplus places at Ebor Gardens. Only last year, Education Leeds completed a £1.1 million refurbishment of Ebor Gardens—the very school that it proposes to knock down to make way for another primary school. Surprisingly, however, in this year's booklet, there is a specific reference to Shakespeare's figures as worrying.

All those points would be sufficient to raise public concern as to the genuineness of the consultation on surplus places even if the Department for Education and Skills had not re-entered the picture. Last Thursday, as the consultations were coming to a close, Education Leeds held an open day for any developers who were interested in private finance initiative packages for a group of primary schools, and yes, sadly, the rebuilding of Shakespeare on the Ebor Gardens site was on the list. How can we persuade parents, teachers, staff and the community that those consultations are valid when, before they have even ended, developers are being invited to make bids to rebuild the school?

So we bring together those three projects. Education Leeds, in the knowledge that it needed resources to help to deal with the real problems in the inner city, made bids to the Department for Education and Skills. It has had three successes: the academy, the young person's academy and the primary school PFI. It has spent time and money developing those three schemes during the past few months. It fitted them into the framework of the high school review and the primary surplus places review and then proceeded to consult.

As the consultation exercise comes to a close, it is fair to say that the educational objectives have been accepted, but a consensus is growing for a different package. There is genuine concern that Education Leeds, conscious that it is very tightly strapped for resources, fears that, if it wavers from the various parts of the consultation that it has already agreed with the Government, it will lose the money and any reorganisation will be in difficult, if not totally damaged.

I want to plead with the Minister publicly to assure Education Leeds that, so long as the educational objectives are met, the differences and even delays that may result from listening to people in Leeds will not cause the city to lose resources. I hope that the Minister will assure Education Leeds along those lines, or the whole consultation process will be seen as an insult to the hundreds of genuine people who turned out in the evenings to give their views at those consultation meetings.

If the Minister can assure Leeds that this is a mature Government who listen, there is a chance of a real partnership being pulled together to succeed in giving those inner city youngsters the chance of a real future—something they have been denied in the past few decades.

7.41 pm

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on obtaining this debate and thank him for allowing me to say a few words. I want to back up what he has said about Braim Wood high school, which is in my constituency. Braim Wood is a boys only school. Its exam results have been somewhat better than many schools in the area and, as my hon. Friend said, certainly better than Agnes Stewart Church of England high school, which has had a poor Ofsted report and is likely to close.

I want to back up some of the points that my hon. Friend made about the £18 million for the academy that has been promised to Agnes Stewart high school on the understanding that it will relocate to the current Braim Wood boys school. As the local Member of Parliament, it seems to me that Braim Wood, as my hon. Friend said, is in a very pleasant area of the city, but it has a catchment area among a very mixed social group.

If that school were to become an academy outside the Church of England and a mixed school, it would attract a very big social mix from an area that includes very wealthy areas of housing and some poor and deprived areas to the east of the school. So my plea to the Minister is to look very carefully at what has been proposed and to create a school that would have a far better social mix and achieve far higher standards and results than what is currently proposed.

I wish to make a point about the other part of Education Leeds's proposal that affects my constituency, and it also relates to the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary

Benn). The City of Leeds high school is very small, but has had a good Ofsted result, and it could well attract many more pupils were it to be allowed to continue as a school. The consequence of Education Leeds's proposal to close that school is that it would also close a perfectly viable and highly successful school in my constituency: Carr Manor high school, which has achieved a considerable improvement in its results thanks to a dedicated management team and an excellent head teacher.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East has referred to the public meetings that have taken place as part of the consultation exercise, but he may not have known that, on Thursday last week—just seven days ago—550 parents and pupils turned out to say that they did not want that school to close, merge with the City of Leeds high school and reopen as a new school on that site. That seems the best way to guarantee that all the achievements of the past few years would be wiped out. The excellence and improvements that have been achieved at that school can continue, and it would be far better if that school were rebuilt, offering new facilities for all the pupils.

7.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Stephen Twigg): First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East (Mr. Mudie) on securing this important debate. I am well aware of the amount and strength of interest being shown by people living in Leeds in the reviews of school provision that are currently taking place there. Clearly, that is reflected in the presence in the Chamber this evening of most if not all of the Members of Parliament for Leeds, including my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton), who spoke briefly, and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn).

First, I congratulate the heads, teachers, other staff and, above all, the pupils of Leeds on some of the results that they have been producing in the key stage tests in recent years. The results at key stages 1, 2 and 3 have been consistently good and improving in recent years, and it is important, in the context of this evening's debate, that that is recognised and commended. At GCSE, progress has been made, but, on average, the Leeds schools lag somewhat behind the national average, in contrast to their performance at key stages 1, 2 and 3. I agree with my two hon. Friends who have spoken that the focus of any changes to schools provision in Leeds should be on educational objectives, educational priorities, and, above all, educational standards. We have common ground in saying that.

These reviews are being undertaken by Education Leeds, a company that is responsible for many of the city's local education authority functions, although it is owned wholly by the council. First, it is important to state clearly that any decisions on whether an authority should proceed with proposals for closures of schools, arising from the review, must be made by the council through its executive. Those are not matters to be dealt with directly by Ministers. I shall return to that point in a moment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East in particular raised a number of issues focusing on the provision of secondary education. He sought a number of assurances from me in relation to the educational objectives that are being pursued, and particularly in relation to the genuineness of consultation. I am well aware that there is considerable interest in this consultation, which has been reflected in the public meetings to which both my hon. Friends referred in their speeches.

Education Leeds, in its consultation document on secondary schooling, explains that its vision is that all secondary schools in Leeds should be able to offer excellent teaching and learning, and high-quality educational opportunities, with an expanded programme of vocational and academic courses linking to opportunities in colleges and universities and work-based and advanced training. It also recognises the need to increase the popularity of inner city schools among staff, young people and their parents, setting targets to deliver higher levels of achievement for all the pupils in Leeds schools, and guaranteeing a post-16 place in school or college for all those who wish to continue with their learning. All of us who have spoken in this debate would agree on that statement of objective.

As we have been told, Education Leeds is now consulting on its proposals to create new facilities to replace a number of schools facing challenging circumstances. It is therefore important to look at what Education Leeds plans to develop as well as what it plans to close, and to make a judgment as to whether those facilities are likely to provide the standard of education that all children and young people in the city deserve.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East focused on three of the issues that are being considered as part of the consultation. First, he referred to two schools: Agnes Stewart and Braim Wood. The proposal from Education Leeds, upon which it is consulting, is that the two schools should work together to form a city academy. I emphasise that no final decision has been taken on this at a ministerial level, and that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills will be asked to approve any plans for an academy. I am acutely aware that both my hon. Friends have made alternative suggestions and that my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East expressed the possibility of a mixed academy being established at Braim Wood. I urge them to put those proposals to Education Leeds, so that they are considered as part of the consultation and debate on the future of secondary provision in Leeds.

The second issue raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East related to a young persons academy. Again, I see that constructive alternative suggestions have been put forward, and it is important that they are first considered at local level. I do not believe that any decision has been taken at ministerial level that prevents Education Leeds from looking again at this aspect. If a viable alternative is put forward by the local community or by hon. Members, it has the opportunity to consider it as part of the outcome of its consultation. That also applies to the primary school reorganisation that is proposed for Leeds. I hope that that reassures my hon. Friends that decisions have not been reached here in London by ministerial colleagues and that there will still be opportunities for the alternatives that my hon. Friends have constructively put forward in this debate to be considered as part of the consultation.

[Mr. Stephen Twigg]

It might be helpful if I explain the procedure that education authorities have to follow if they are considering the closure of a school, and I shall consider where Education Leeds is in that process. The Schools Standards and Framework Act 1998 places a duty on each local education authority to ensure that sufficient school places exist to meet the needs of the local population. The Government encourage authorities to avoid wasting resources and we urge them to remove empty places when doing so supports the basic agenda of raising school standards. They must review the position regularly, and take action when a significant imbalance between supply and demand is identified. They carry out this responsibility through the annual preparation of a school organisation plan.

If an authority decides to close a school, it must by law consult all appropriate parties by providing sufficient information to enable all those being consulted to form a considered view. Education Leeds is currently at this point with most of its proposals. The authority should then use any views received during that period to inform the decision as to whether to proceed. In Leeds, the decision must be made by the council's executive, and I understand that Education Leeds intends to put a paper on the outcome of the consultation exercise to the executive in January.

If the council's executive decides to proceed with the closure of any school, statutory notices must be placed in the local press and in a prominent position at the school or schools concerned. A copy of the notice and other supporting documentation must be sent to the local schools organisation committee. The committee will usually comprise five or six groups with local involvement in education and representatives of the local council, school governors, Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, learning and skills councils and sometimes a further group at local discretion. For two months after the publication of the notices, or for one month in the case of a school in special measures, objections may be submitted in writing to the authority. Should no objections be received, the authority may then implement its proposal. If there are objections, they must be referred to the school's organisation committee, together with the authority's comments on the points raised. Each group on the committee has one vote and should consider all the evidence before reaching a decision. If a unanimous decision cannot be reached, the case is referred to the independent schools adjudicator for a final decision.

I said that school closure decisions are not a matter for Ministers. The structures for local planning and decision making that I described allow for the concerns, objections and interests of local people to be fully considered. It is clear that Education Leeds and Leeds city council are at an early stage in the process that they must follow as they consider how best to meet their important responsibility for the appropriate provision of school places.

I urge everyone in the city to think carefully about the proposals that Education Leeds is making for school provision in their areas, to participate in the consultation exercises, and to consider whether they wish to express views as statutory procedures are followed. My hon. Friends made constructive alternative proposals on behalf of their constituents. I urge them to submit those to the consultation process so that they are fully considered by Education Leeds. I reiterate that it is an open process. No decisions have been made about any aspect raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, East. What we have in common is the desire to get the best possible deal in terms of the provision of education for the children and young people of Leeds.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at five minutes to Eight o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 16 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Museums

1. **Syd Rapson** (Portsmouth, North): What effect free entry to national museums has had on attendances. [85568]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The first 12 months of full free entry have seen a 70 per cent. increase in attendances at DCMS-sponsored, formerly charging museums and galleries. We are carrying out a further analysis of the impact on each institution, which will be published shortly. This represents a promise made and a promise delivered by the Government, and millions of people are deriving the benefit.

Syd Rapson: I thank the Secretary of State for that answer. The Government should be congratulated on that phenomenal result. Two years ago, the Secretary of State commissioned a report by Dr. Alan Borg of the Victoria and Albert museum to consider whether Portsmouth's maritime heritage collection could be contained in a national museum. Given that Portsmouth has the Victory, the Warrior and the Mary Rose, along with the museum, it should have a national museum by now. Has any progress been made on that report?

Tessa Jowell: I thank my hon. Friend for his question and commend him on his continued support for those four very important visitor attractions and heritage sites in his constituency. He rightly refers to Alan Borg—a distinguished former director of the V and A, who looked at the relationship between the four museums in or near to my hon. Friend's constituency and proposed that their management would benefit from closer integration, which is why we propose to set up a company with a single chief executive to run the dockyard. There will be further meetings this week to ensure that a rapid conclusion is reached on those arrangements, which will benefit my hon. Friend's constituents.

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): I declare an interest as a director of HMS Warrior 1860, which is an unpaid position of which I am very proud. May I wish this project well and tell the Secretary of State that, if the unification of the facilities in the Portsmouth heritage area proceeds, account should also be taken of the other tourist attractions around Portsmouth harbour, because the essence of the millennium project is that people should be encouraged to use water transport and to visit all the attractions around the harbour?

Tessa Jowell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his suggestion, which certainly sounds eminently sensible, and I shall ensure that it is drawn to the attention of those who are engaged in the negotiations to which I referred.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): It is really great to see so many people taking advantage of our wonderful museums and art galleries through free admission, but, of course, that means that those museums are looking around for additional funding as well, and the other part of the Government's policy is to ensure that they are properly funded. The national portrait gallery, with which I have my own connections, has an acquisition budget of only £305,000 in the current year. Does my right hon. Friend agree that that is pretty appalling for one of the premier collections of portraits in the world?

Tessa Jowell: I recognise the point that my hon. Friend makes, but the extremely successful outcome for all our national museums and galleries in the last spending round means that they will receive real-terms increases of 1.5 and 2.5 per cent. respectively in 2004–05 and 2005–06. Of course every museum and gallery in the country—whether regional or national—could benefit from more money, but we have now pulled back from the generation of underfunding that occurred under the previous Government, and I pay tribute to those museums and galleries that are considering other sources of funding, on top of the Government's very generous settlement.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire): Does the Secretary of State agree with the conclusion of the recent Select Committee report, which defined as opaque the present process of allocating funds to museums and galleries and concluded that, if funding decisions were totally dependent on Treasury fiat, either the Treasury must be involved round a table or the other parties should not waste each other's time? Can the Secretary of State be as candid with us as her ministerial colleague was about the Turner prize and admit that she has been wasting her time and that of the museums?

Tessa Jowell: There is nothing conceptual about the business of allocating resources to our museums and galleries; it involves dealing with hard facts on the basis of the Treasury allocation, and the decisions are made by my Department and by me, in discussion with the heads of the museums and galleries, who broadly declared themselves to be very satisfied with the

allocations that they had secured. A very important part of the settlement was to ensure the continuation of the extremely successful policy of free entry.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): While welcoming the national free entry to museums scheme, does my hon. Friend agree that it leaves certain regional museums at a disadvantage, such as the Beamish museum in my constituency, and the Bowes museum at Bishop Auckland, both of which have collections of national significance? Will my right hon. Friend consider what support can be given to museums such as those, which have national collections but are at a clear disadvantage under the present scheme?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend refers to two extremely successful and significant regional museums. He will be aware that we have announced, this year and over the three years of the next spending round, a settlement of £70 million to begin the regeneration and rebuilding of our regional museums and, specifically, to establish closer links between national museums and regional museums. That is all part of building our commitment to access to excellence wherever people live in the country.

Churches and Church Halls (Licensing)

2. **Mr. John Randall** (Uxbridge): What estimate she has made of the costs that will be incurred by churches and church halls as a result of the provisions contained in the Licensing Bill. [85569]

4. **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): What representations she has received from church organisations concerning the Licensing Bill. [85572]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): Any costs for churches and church halls under the provisions of the Licensing Bill as it stands would depend on the licensable activities, if any, which are undertaken and their frequency, and whether temporary or permanent permissions are sought. The Archbishops Council of the Church of England wrote to me to express its concern that the provision of entertainment in churches outside Greater London would be brought under the licensing regime by the Licensing Bill. I hope that right hon. and hon. Members will accept that while I cannot provide them with a solution today, the Government have made a commitment to reconsider our position on this issue and will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Mr. Randall: I am very grateful to the Minister for seeing sense. The sooner we get the new regulations, the better, as that part of the legislation would best be described with the words that he used to describe certain types of modern art.

Dr. Howells: I could not possibly comment.

Mr. Boswell: We have the answer for which we were hoping. Would the Minister accept as representative the comments of my constituent, Mr. Williams, who is chairman of the trustees of the Holy Sepulchre restoration trust in Northampton? In particular, he points out that the use of his church, which is an 11th century crusader round church, is as important to the schools that perform there as to the church which brings in the takings. Will the hon. Gentleman give us an absolute assurance—or as absolute an assurance as he can—that nine centuries of history are not going to be sacrificed to nine minutes of ministerial inadvertence?

Dr. Howells: I will certainly do my utmost to ensure that that does not happen. If I may, however, I ask the hon. Gentleman to hold his fire until we have reconsidered our position on the matter.

Alan Howarth (Newport, East): Can I—I think I can—congratulate my right hon. and hon. Friends on intervening to restore common sense and ensure that, in an uncharacteristic excess of bureaucratic zeal, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport does not wipe out the indispensable tradition of music-making in churches? Will they go further and impress on the Arts Council the need to support church and cathedral music positively, just as English Heritage has supported the conservation of the physical fabric of our churches and cathedrals?

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend has fought long and hard to help church and cathedral music wherever he can. I reassure him that I have no intention of doing it any harm whatever, and that I will do all that I can through regulation to ensure that it thrives.

Mr. Gordon Marsden (Blackpool, South): Having met a group of clergy in Blackpool on Friday, may I tell my hon. Friend how welcome were the words of Baroness Blackstone in another place on Thursday? Does he appreciate the extent to which many places of worship depend on the activities and income that come from such events, the licensing of which is now to be reviewed? Will his Department do everything that it can to make sure that a perfectly reasonable attempt to correct an existing licensing anomaly does not become an unfair and intolerable burden on places of worship?

Dr. Howells: Yes, I can give my hon. Friend that reassurance. I also thank him for the work that he has done to make my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and me very much aware of the circumstances that obtain both in his constituency and in those of many other right hon. and hon. Members.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Does the Minister agree that, in the absence of the guidance promised in the Bill, it is quite to hard to decipher the Department's intentions on church concerts or anything else? Do we need to license activities in church at all, given that there has not been a serious public order offence in a church since the time of Thomas à Becket? Does he accept that, even if he waived the fee, the application process would in any event be an unwelcome layer of bureaucracy for already hard-pressed volunteers?

Dr. Howells: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point very well. I hope that he will accept the statement that I made earlier.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Is my hon. Friend aware that his statement will be widely welcomed, not least in rural areas where churches and church halls sometimes provide the only facility in which cultural, educational and musical activities can take place? They are therefore an essential part of the fabric of rural communities for those as well as other purposes. Will he ensure that, when he reconsiders the matter, churches and church halls are finally completely exempted from the proposals?

Dr. Howells: I get my right hon. Friend's message loud and clear. I shall certainly consider what he said.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): I welcome the Minister's statement as far as it goes, but does he accept that a Bill that will require anything up to 15,000 parish churches—not to mention the places of worship of other faiths—to apply for a licence at a not insignificant cost cannot possibly be described, as the Secretary of State has described it, as deregulatory, and that anything less than the continuation of the existing exemption and a complete abandonment of the proposals in the Bill will be unacceptable?

Dr. Howells: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will know that, for a long time, the Conservative Government had a chance to get rid of the rule that has existed for 40 years, which says that churches inside London have to apply for and receive a licence for the playing and singing of secular music. I hear what he says, but I hope that he will accept that we do not need lessons from the Conservative party on getting rid of the regulations.

Mr. Whittingdale: I point out to the Minister that the existing exemption for churches was granted by Parliament in 1982, under the previous Conservative Government. However, given his willingness to see reason this afternoon, perhaps he would like to consider another aspect of the Licensing Bill, which is that covering licensing for the live performance of music. Will he explain how a Bill that will require thousands of live musicians to perform only in licensed venues, when there is at present no requirement for a licence, is deregulatory?

Mr. Speaker: Order. That goes far beyond the original question.

Hotels and Tourist Accommodation

3. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the voluntary schemes for standards in hotels and other tourist accommodation. [85570]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The English Tourism Council research shows clear benefits in terms of higher occupancy levels for those establishments that participate in the national quality assurance schemes. We want to improve their impact further and will shortly commission a review of accommodation quality as part of our tourism reform programme.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree that the work that Scarborough borough council has done to establish its own scheme, which feeds into the national scheme, should be regarded as an exemplar by many people around the country? If they met the high standards that exist on the Yorkshire coast, it would do the UK's tourism and hospitality industry an awful lot of good and would put us where we should be as a world leader.

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend can justifiably be proud of Scarborough's achievement. It won the 2002 England for Excellence award as the most improved resort. It has faced great difficulties over the past 30 years and has succeeded to a significant degree in reinventing itself as a first-class resort and as a great tourist attraction.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): Does my hon. Friend accept that booking hotel accommodation can be a bit of a lottery, as I found to my cost in Blackpool at the recent Labour party conference? Does he also accept that that lottery is made even more difficult when it comes to booking accommodation for people with a disability? Will he look into that specific aspect of regulation to ensure that guidance to hotels makes it clear that their advertisements should state whether they are wheelchair or disabled friendly?

Dr. Howells: I have been very concerned that hotels and bed and breakfasts that advertise themselves as being disabled friendly or wheelchair compatible turn out not to be so or to be only partially so. That often means that people who have spent very good money on holidays are greatly disappointed when they do not get the facilities that they require. I know that the English Tourism Council has also been very concerned about that and we will take it forward as an important theme in the review of our support for tourism in this country.

Crime Prevention

5. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): What visits have been made to Nottingham, North constituency by ministers to discuss funding for sport to divert youngsters from crime since 1997. [85573]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): There have been 18 visits by the Department's Ministers to Nottingham, North since 1997 to discuss sport. I shall send my hon. Friend a total list of those 18 visits.

Mr. Allen: I know that the Minister for Sport is aware of the position of the Henry Mellish school, which hopes to come out of special measures and is the last school in the constituency to do so. It has problems in the local area with crime and hopes to divert youngsters from that by getting them involved in sport. Will my right hon. Friend give a fair wind to the new opportunities fund bid for a new £1 million sports hall so that we can use sport to divert those youngsters and youngsters outside school from activities that we do not want to

encourage them into? Will he also put a possible opening date in his diary so that he or his right hon. Friend can come up and do the honours?

Mr. Caborn: I would love to give the bid a fair wind, but it is a matter for the new opportunities fund. I understand that congratulations are in order for the Henry Mellish school for passing the first stage of the new opportunities fund application. My hon. Friend knows that it is an arm's-length organisation and that it will make an objective assessment. The bid comes on the back of £750 million of investment in sports facilities through the new opportunities fund. We can all be proud of what the lottery has delivered. Contrary to what we read about school playing fields on the front page of *The Guardian* this morning, the investment in sports facilities and playing fields is at as high a level as it has been for many years.

Lottery Funding

6. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When she next expects to meet representatives of village communities to discuss lottery funding for local projects. [85574]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The lottery review has provided an opportunity for representatives of village communities to put forward their concerns about the lottery funds for local and rural projects. I welcome their representations and would be happy to meet them once the representations, which I gather have been submitted, have been considered.

Mr. Bellingham: Does the Secretary of State agree that some ridiculous and undeserving organisations have received substantial amounts of money? For example, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns has received £740,000 to mount legal challenges against her Home Office colleagues while all the time deserving organisations in my constituency—local groups and parish groups—are being turned down. What will she do to ensure that the community fund changes its priorities? What will she do to get a grip on it?

Tessa Jowell: I am very surprised that the hon. Gentleman wants to associate himself with the nasty campaign against the community fund. I draw his attention to the fact that since 1995, it has awarded £109 million for building, extending and improving more than 2,200 village halls as part of £645 million that has been given to projects in rural areas. That is good constructive work, using lottery money to do the things that people want. It does neither the hon. Gentleman nor the Opposition any service at all to make that cheap point.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): I am delighted to hear that my right hon. Friend will be meeting representatives of village communities, but may I urge her not just to think of villages as being places in rural areas? There are villages in former mining constituencies, many of which share the characteristics of rural constituencies, such as difficulties with access and, in particular, in attracting lottery funding. I urge her to keep under constant review the question of how we can fairly make more money available to former mining constituencies.

Tessa Jowell: As ever, my hon. Friend is speaking up for the interests of his constituents, who have benefited from his advocacy and, with other villages in coalfield communities, from the increased lottery allocation of which he will be aware. One of our concerns about the way in which the lottery operates is that village communities may find themselves falling between two or perhaps three different distributors when seeking lottery funds, and one of the tests of the review will be how effective it is in tackling such bureaucracy.

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): The Secretary of State's appalling answer to the legitimate concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) on behalf of his constituents will be unacceptable to my constituents. I have been besieged by letters from them protesting about the fact that a valuable village community centre has failed to get a grant from the community fund because it does not provide facilities for asylum seekers. If the Secretary of State wants to dismiss the concerns of millions of British citizens about the community fund's appalling decisions, she will rue the day. The Home Secretary has attacked one of those decisions—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Tessa Jowell: We have heard a rant from a spokesman for the nasty party. The point remains that 5 per cent., or £12 million, of community fund grants go to asylum seekers, and those broad allocations were approved by the Government. As I have already made clear to the House, there has also been major investment in rural communities, as there should be. The community fund exists to serve communities of all kinds in all parts of the country; that is what we expect it to do and that is what it will do.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the new opportunities fund has significantly underspent its funding from rounds 1 and 2, it is rumoured by as much as £200 million? As that money was taken from the original good causes such as the community fund, whose funds are now even more depleted as a result of falling ticket sales, and as it is Christmas, will the Secretary of State consider returning some of that money to the original good causes for more community projects? It is not that there have not been any such projects, but many applications are turned down because of a lack of money. We need more community projects such as village halls and grass-roots sports clubs. That is not an unreasonable request.

Tessa Jowell: I would certainly like to see more money going into grass-roots sports facilities and into the communities on whose behalf Members on both sides of the House have been making representations.

I do not recognise the figures that the hon. Gentleman has just quoted. He may be confusing money committed by the community fund with money that is part of the income stream. I shall certainly look at the figures.

In answer to his broad point, I am absolutely determined that the level of lottery balances will fall; the present level is unacceptably high. However, we have to distinguish clearly between money that has been committed but not yet spent by the projects concerned, and money that is available. That argument may be a touch too sophisticated for many of those on the Opposition Benches.

National Lottery

7. **Mr. Adrian Flook** (Taunton): When she last met Camelot to discuss methods of improving lottery ticket sales. [85575]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed ticket sales with Camelot in April, and I plan to do so next month.

Mr. Flook: I thank the Minister for his reply. Given that there is a direct correlation between sales and the public's impression of money going to good and worthy causes, does he not agree that the lottery is being severely undermined, as falling ticket sales month in, month out have demonstrated, by the raiding of the cookie jar to support programmes that should be funded by the taxpayer? Should he not have met Camelot much earlier than next month?

Mr. Caborn: First, credit is due to the John Major Government for introducing the lottery, one of the most successful lotteries in the world. The House ought to reflect from time to time on the amount of damage done to what is now a national institution. Since its inception, £35.8 billion of tickets have been sold, and it has delivered £13.5 billion to good causes. Indeed, 100 of the most deprived local authorities are now receiving nearly half of the lottery moneys that are going out. The attacks on the lottery by the *Daily Mail* and others, including Members in the House this afternoon, are unfortunate. As I said, everyone in the House can take credit for the introduction of one of the best and most successful lotteries in the world. Papers and individuals—not the entire official Opposition—who undermine its credibility should reflect on the damage that they are doing to a national institution.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): When the Select Committee looked at the issue, it found that Camelot would be the best operator, but that Virgin had the best marketing for the lottery. Does my hon. Friend agree that the next time we advertise for the lottery, we should have a not-for-profit operator so that we can have the best operator and the best marketing company?

Mr. Caborn: As my hon. Friend knows, we are consulting on the next licensing round. All the points that he made will be factored into the discussions that are under way. It is in everyone's interests to make sure that we get the best deal possible for the lottery and thus the good causes.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): But the Minister recognises that lottery sales are falling worryingly. Despite his protestations in the House this afternoon, they will fall if the public feel that their money is not being spent on causes of which they approve. Will he therefore tell us whether his Department has given any further thought to an idea floated some months ago—that in buying lottery tickets the public could have more discretion about where that money is spent?

Mr. Caborn: First, I have just come back from New Zealand, which is experiencing exactly the same problem of a decline in lottery sales. We had those problems before in 1996 and 1997, when lottery figures went down to £4,723 million. We have not reached that low this time and hopefully we will not—hopefully, ticket sales will plateau out and increase again. These things go through a cycle and need to be refreshed from time to time. Indeed, Camelot is doing so by bringing a number of products on to the market, with the support of the Government and the commission. I hope that the British public and Members of Parliament will get behind the lottery; as I said, it is a credit to all political parties.

Media Ownership

8. **Mr. John Grogan** (Selby): If she will make a statement on the Government's policy on whether owners of large shares of the national newspaper market should be able to own terrestrial TV stations. [85576]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): We will deregulate cross-media ownership to promote investment in growth while retaining the key rules that safeguard a plurality of media voices. The Communications Bill, which is currently in Committee, therefore makes it possible for a large newspaper group to own Channel 5, which at present has only a 6 per cent. audience share and 80 per cent. coverage of the UK. To safeguard plurality, however, we will keep the rule that prevents a large newspaper proprietor buying into ITV which, in contrast to Channel 5, has universal access to a mass audience.

Mr. Grogan: Surely as a representative of the nice party and in the interests of plurality and democracy, my right hon. Friend must be a little worried about giving one man who owns 30 per cent. of our national newspaper market and the dominant satellite subscription system the chance to own Channel 5—a terrestrial channel with no public service obligations—and to cross-promote and hoover up rights, as that would seriously undermine other commercial broadcasters with significant public service roles, such as Channel 3 and Channel 4?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend has raised these matters on a number of occasions. He will be aware that the proposals in the Bill are proprietor-neutral. There are clear codes of guidance in relation to cross-promotion, which are currently monitored by the Independent Television Commission and will become the responsibility of Ofcom, once it is established.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the right hon. Lady believe that the competition aspects of the Bill will be strong enough to deal with the type of scenario that she has just set out?

Tessa Jowell: Yes, precisely because of the balance between deregulation to promote competition and the safeguards to ensure that high-quality programming continues on our screens and radios.

Libraries

10. **Mr. Andrew Miller** (Ellesmere Port and Neston): What progress she has made towards the goal of putting all libraries online. [85578]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The £100 million lottery-funded people's network programme to connect all UK public libraries to the internet is well on course—4,085 libraries have been connected. There are 69 libraries—39 in England and 30 in Scotland—that have still to be connected. I am pleased to say that that represents a further election pledge that the Labour Government have delivered.

Mr. Miller: I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. If he comes to Ellesmere Port library, which, as he knows, is located close to some of the poorest parts of the constituency, he will see the fantastic enthusiasm of, and progress made by, many residents who have had little access to modern technology. Several organisations are helping to train people in the constituency. Training is the biggest gap remaining. Will he add to the commitment that he made by working with colleagues in other Departments to help the training of people from disadvantaged communities?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so: we are investing £20 million in a training programme to make sure that the 40,000 staff in UK libraries are information and communications technology-literate and can help the constituents to whom my hon. Friend referred. To give a flavour of the success of the programme, the net corner at Croydon library offers free internet access across a network of 15 personal computers. The corner is in constant use, offering some 1,700 user sessions per week to users who collectively speak 65 languages other than English. The service is opening up a whole new world to them. That is a small example of the scheme's impact across the United Kingdom.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): As a former librarian, I welcome the steps that the Government have taken in that regard. Does the Minister agree that the next step is to make the resources of public libraries more open and available? It is one thing to have online resources in public libraries, but another to open up their resources and riches to the community at large. May I draw to his attention a project based in my constituency at the National Library of Wales called "Gathering the Jewels"? It includes not only libraries but the best resources in museums and other public institutions in Wales, and brings them together on one website with not just information but pictorial representations, maps, sound files, media files and so on. That is surely the way forward. I hope that he will look at the project and consider how it could be rolled out in libraries throughout the UK.

Mr. Caborn: I agree. As the hon. Gentleman says, libraries are now much more than they have traditionally been. They are a major resource for the community and open up all sorts of opportunities well beyond the scope of traditional libraries. What hon. Members have described is mirrored across the country by the progressive library service that we have.

Archaeology

11. **Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham): What steps she is taking to (a) promote archaeological research in the UK and (b) safeguard sites of archaeological interest. [85579]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): The Government are firmly committed to the maintenance of an effective framework of statutory protection for all the elements of the historic environment and widening our understanding of the heritage. Protection measures include a new order extending the definition of treasure and the introduction of portable antiques schemes. The commitment is to introduce a Bill preventing the illicit trade in cultural objectives and a review of our heritage protection legislation framework. English Heritage is developing a research framework both for its own work and for the sector as a whole.

Tim Loughton: The Minister may like to revisit some of the words that he used in that answer because they were wrong. Will he acknowledge that, weekly, important archaeological sites are being lost under the plough or because of new buildings and development? Will he read the new report from the parliamentary archaeological group, taken from a series of hearings held throughout this year, which shows patchy coverage in respect of sites and monuments records, that professional archaeologists have to survive on salaries of £12,000 or £13,000, and that competitive tendering provides the bare minimum for research in many parts of the country? Will he read that report, help to raise the profile of British archaeology and make his contribution by bringing together a much more joined-up approach to archaeology between his Department, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Education and Skills, so that one of them takes ownership of this subject?

Mr. Caborn: The answer is yes, I will read the report.

Deregulation

12. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): How many regulations relating to live entertainment and sport her Department has (a) abolished, (b) repealed and (c) withdrawn in the last two years. [85580]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): My Department has revoked one regulation relating to the prohibition of live

entertainment in casinos. As a result, there is no longer an automatic prohibition to prevent casinos from offering dancing, live music or entertainment.

Mr. Cameron: I thank the Minister for that answer, but is not the revocation of one regulation in the past two years a little disappointing? If his Department is to be the ministry for fun, is it not time for it to do better? As the Government are fond of targets, why do they not have some for getting rid of the bossy regulations that apply to everything from bingo to bookmakers? Will he introduce a moratorium on new regulations, such as those discussed earlier in respect of the Licensing Bill, that could impose new burdens on churches, music teachers and local organisations?

Dr. Howells: As a humble Under-Secretary of State, I do not have the money to visit a casino and find out whether deregulation has had the effect that the hon. Gentleman suggests. In introducing the Licensing Bill, we are certainly looking to reduce the burden of regulation wherever possible. Instead of the current plethora of licences, including those for holding entertainment in public houses, there will be only one licence: a premises licence that will include other forms of entertainment and cut cost and bureaucracy. I am sure that he will welcome that.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Will my hon. Friend consider urgently the case for new regulations in sport to help with the possibility of our hosting the Olympic games? Such regulations should be considered, not least because of the huge benefits that the Olympic games would bring for sport, business and regeneration.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport will have heard that request.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is it not a triumph of stultifying bureaucracy over freedom of expression that the ludicrous three-in-a-bar rule should be replaced with a none-in-the-bar rule? What on earth has the Minister's Department got against live music?

Dr. Howells: It is the two-in-a-bar rule, not the three-in-a-bar rule, but I know what the hon. Gentleman is talking about. I can assure him that, as a great supporter of live music and especially of some of the brands of music that are sung in pubs in Somerset, I will do all that I can to ensure that such venues are strengthened, not weakened.

Antisocial Behaviour

14. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): What plans she has to tackle antisocial behaviour associated with drinking alcohol. [85583]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary intends to present a Bill on measures to combat antisocial behaviour during this Session, but as the House is aware, we have also recently introduced into the House of Lords a Licensing Bill containing a number of measures designed to tackle alcohol-related and antisocial behaviour. That includes extending the powers of the police to close noisy or disorderly premises and reinforcing and strengthening laws on the purchase and consumption of alcohol by young people under 18.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's campaign in her constituency on alcohol consumption by children.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and welcome the forthcoming measures in the new Bill. She will be aware that her colleagues in the Department of Health have an alcohol harm reduction strategy out to consultation. Will she undertake to consider the early lessons that may emerge in January, before the Bill comes to the House of Commons?

Tessa Jowell: In tackling under-age drinking and the aspects of antisocial behaviour that concern my hon. Friend and, I suspect, the whole House, it will of course be important to consider the conclusions drawn from the work undertaken by the Department of Health with the Prime Minister's strategy unit and to ensure that the Licensing Bill takes them into account. I am also sure that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will want to bear those issues in mind in considering the detailed drafting of the Bill on antisocial behaviour.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): The Licensing Bill is currently going through the House of Lords. How does the Secretary of State think that the Government's plan to stamp out antisocial drinking is compatible with the idea of 24-hour licensing, which will give a free rein to anyone who wishes to drink in parts of my constituency such as Soho and Covent Garden that are beset by drunken incidents in the early hours of the morning, especially on Saturdays and Sundays?

Tessa Jowell: The Government certainly sympathise with the hon. Gentleman on the second point, and we are considering the adequacy of measures to deal with the problem. One reason for our introduction of flexible opening hours for pubs, however, is the current detrimental effect on law and order caused by the presence of large numbers of people on the streets at the same time. Indeed, all the evidence shows that staggered opening hours reduce the number of people staggering out of the pubs.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Political Parties (Grants)

29. **Martin Linton** (Battersea): What discussions he has held with the Electoral Commission about (a) grants to political parties for training, for e-communications and for international work and (b) increased grants for policy development. [85598]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The commission has told us of its intention to launch a project in spring next year to review the existing system for policy development grants. It will consider the case for extending the areas on which those funds can be spent.

Martin Linton: Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that there is now cross-party support for training, e-communications and international work, and that there was cross-party support for policy development grants during the passage of the Bill that became the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000? That gives us the first opportunity for a generation to proceed on a cross-party basis, and extend state funding to areas of party political activity that are generally agreed to be part of the functioning of our democracy.

Mr. Beith: Some of those matters are covered by the review, but others may extend beyond the Commission's present responsibilities into the area where, for instance, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy works with the support of grant-in-aid from the Foreign Office. All concerned, however, will have heard the hon. Gentleman's expression of support.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Will my right hon. Friend confirm that there is huge support for the work of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, which has supported democracy building in such places as Sierra Leone and the non-EU applicant countries in eastern Europe and elsewhere? Could the Commission examine ways in which we can maximise the benefit of public sector, voluntary sector and party funding to ensure that best practice here and in Europe is spread in other countries that are keen to learn from our experience?

Mr. Beith: I will draw my hon. Friend's remarks to the attention of the commission, which is of course aware of the role played by the foundation and the parties themselves in promoting democracy in many parts of the world. That is not the focus of the commission's own responsibilities, but there is obviously experience to be shared.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): If there is to be more public funding for the work of political parties, will the right hon. Gentleman discuss with the commission ways of ensuring that the money is well spent—not least because since 1997, Short money has been increased by 300 per cent. without any discernible improvement in the Tory party's performance?

Mr. Beith: I am sure that the commission's chairman is pleased that he does not have to rule on the performance of parties in receipt of Short money. Nor, on this occasion, do I.

CHURCH COMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Clergy Licences

30. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What representations he has received from clergy who have not had their licences renewed by their bishops about their financial and employment position. [85599]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I have not received any such representations from clergy who have not had their licences renewed; neither has the Archbishops Council.

Andrew Selous: What protection does the hon. Gentleman feel the Church should afford to some clergy who, I understand, have had to give up their licences and their vicarages when they have felt that doctrine did not agree with the views held by their bishops?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful for the opportunity to comment as well as answer a question. In answer to the question, financial assistance may be provided in cases of especial hardship experienced by those to whom the hon. Gentleman referred. Most such clergy have their licences renewed or find another post without undue difficulty. However, the Archbishops Council supports improvements to the security of clergy without freehold, and we are now discussing the matter with the Department of Trade and Industry. The Clergy Discipline Measure that comes before the Ecclesiastical Committee next week will doubtless cover it.

I leave doctrine to others.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My hon. Friend knows that, in recent years, the Church has maintained a steady policy of trying to persuade more clergy to have not freehold but short, temporary licences of between five and seven years. We do not give clergy proper employment rights. Does not that mean that the Church is becoming one of the worst employers in the land?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend should know that better than me, given his past. Off the top of my head, there are approximately 5,000 freehold clergy, 3,000 clergy on contract and 3,000 stipendiary clergy. On employment relations, the ministry is a mission of Christ, as my hon. Friend knows, and it is therefore for the incumbent to owe allegiance to Christ. However, employment relations and employment law are not mutually exclusive and my hon. Friend will be happy to know that we are moving rapidly on employment rights, which are linked to the Clergy Discipline Measure that the Ecclesiastical Committee will consider next week.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that it is not the Church of England's policy to abolish the freehold? If so, will he encourage bishops to stop abolishing it by stealth?

Mr. Bell: Again, I am asked to comment rather than answer a specific question. It is not the Church of England's intention to reduce the number of freehold clergy. The position of freehold clergy, contract clergy and stipendiary clergy forms part of the document that we have submitted to the Department of Trade and Industry. It will be available in the House of Commons Library. I believe that the hon. Gentleman and the House will find it positive.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Election Dates

31. **Mr. Derek Wyatt** (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): What discussions he has had with the Electoral Commission on moving elections to a Sunday. [85600]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): None. However, the Electoral Commission stated in its strategic evaluation of the 2002 electoral pilot schemes that it would welcome further pilots of weekend voting or voting over several days, including the weekend, instead of Thursday voting, to test voter preferences.

Mr. Wyatt: Who decides when a European election is held—the United Kingdom Government or the European Union? Most Europeans countries hold such elections on a Sunday, but we do not.

Mr. Beith: I believe that the United Kingdom decides, but I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to ensure that he has the correct information.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Local Authority Licensing

32. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What assessment he has made of the financial impact of the proposed extension of local authority licensing to church venues; and if he will make a statement. [85601]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): I draw the hon. Lady's attention to the Bishop of London's speech in the House of Lords on Second Reading of the Licensing Bill. He highlighted concerns on behalf of churches and cathedrals about the provisions for using places of worship for entertainment such as concerts and plays.

Miss McIntosh: The hon. Gentleman was present when the Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, who remains in his place, said that a review is under way. Will the hon. Gentleman join me in making urgent representations to the Under-Secretary, especially on the severe impact that such a licensing system would have on rural churches, which are a centre for many social and cultural activities as well as religious services?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Lady knows that the majority of musical events in her constituency take place in churches and chapels, from York minster to humble parish churches, including her own parish church of Sowerby. She will be encouraged to know that in last week's Committee stages of the Licensing Bill, the Bishop of London tabled an amendment to obviate the difficulties that churches would experience. It was supported in Committee. The Minister for the Arts said that she would consider it and we hope for a positive outcome in the House of Lords.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

E-democracy

33. **Mr. Graham Allen** (Nottingham, North): What proposals the Electoral Commission has to use e-democracy to improve low levels of participation. [85602]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): I understand that the Electoral Commission recently submitted its response to the Government's consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy. It welcomed consideration of the role of technology in promoting participation, but underlined that the application of new methods of voting alone could not be relied upon to increase election turnout. The Electoral Commission will continue to evaluate the operation and impact of electronic schemes that were piloted at local elections. It will also use new technologies to support its voter awareness activities when appropriate.

Mr. Allen: Every elector can now help us to make better law in this place, in that we can now put pre-legislative scrutiny online. Any electors watching that webcast can e-mail back to us their experiences and views to help to create better law. However, although online pre-legislative scrutiny will be available throughout the United Kingdom—and, indeed, the globe—it is not yet available to hon. Members in this place. We are the last people to be allowed access to it. I know that this is a matter of concern to the right hon. Gentleman. Will he tell the House what he has managed to do to allow Members access to pre-legislative scrutiny of Bills? Will he also commend this example of e-democracy, which will help to tackle some of the

problems of low participation by the electorate by allowing them to enter this place and make a genuine contribution to law making?

Mr. Beith: I can indeed commend the idea that the hon. Gentleman advocates, but it does not fall within the responsibilities of the Electoral Commission or, indeed, of the Speaker's Committee.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I notice that my right hon. Friend's response to the question about participation was framed principally in terms of electronic voting. Does he accept that the real problem relates not so much to what happens on the day of a general election as to what happens in the four or five years in between them? Can he ensure that, when the commission considers these issues, it looks more at what happens in between elections than at what happens on polling day?

Mr. Beith: Yes, I believe that the commission is very conscious of that issue. Indeed, my reply implied that the mere introduction of other mechanisms for voting will not, by itself, deal with the problem of low voter turnout.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Creative Arts

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): What assessment the Commissioners have made of the financial impact of the Government's proposal to license the performance of creative arts in places of worship. [85603]

Mr. Stuart Bell (Second Church Estates Commissioner, representing the Church Commissioners): Figures suggest that, under the Licensing Bill's proposals, churches or other places of worship seeking to provide entertainment five times a year would pay £100 each year. If more events than that were required, a full licence would be needed and annual inspections would be necessary, each of which would attract a fee.

Mr. Key: May I invite the hon. Gentleman to stiffen the resolve of the Government to look again at this issue, as the Minister said in the other place last week? For example, the proposals will affect not just a particular church, but any building within the curtilage of that church, as well as open-air events in churchyards. Salisbury cathedral, in my constituency, covers 74 acres, containing three schools, Sarum college, a museum, a conservation centre, a National Trust house, a medieval hall and 150 houses including the deanery and the bishop's house, all of which are used for entertainment and fundraising efforts. The bureaucracy involved in these provisions will surely outweigh the benefit to those collecting the licence fee in terms of tax.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me an inventory of Salisbury cathedral. He will be interested to know that 16,250 church buildings belonging to the Church of England alone will be covered by the proposed legislation. Many other denominations and faiths are also affected by the proposals as they stand. I invite the hon. Gentleman, and the Association of English Cathedrals, to write to the appropriate Minister to express their views, as we are doing as Church Commissioners, as the Archbishops Council is doing, and as the Bishop of London has so ably done in Committee in the House of Lords.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my hon. Friend accept that many churches, such as St. Peter's in Burnley, hold many more than five events a year? They do so not only to raise money, but to be part of the community. Such events provide essential community facilities, and we must ensure that that continues.

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend makes a wider point than he imagines, because the Church plays a central role in our local communities—with entertainment and charity events in church halls, for example—and that is to be encouraged. What we are seeing now is a Government who are prepared to listen. Baroness Blackstone has said that she will consider the amendment proposed by the Bishop of London, and we have heard favourable noises from the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and her team today. I am, therefore, hopeful that we will get a dispensation not only for churches throughout the country, but for churches in London that are already covered by previous legislation. My hon. Friend's point is well made and is being listened to. We are hopeful of a positive outcome.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Online Voting

35. **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the implications for privacy of voting of the introduction of online voting. [85604]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): The commission's evaluation of the May 2002 electoral pilots recognised concerns about the potential loss of privacy for voters involved in remote electronic voting and postal voting. However, the commission also noted that it was unaware of any evidence to suggest that remote voting led to an increase in formal allegations of electoral offences. The commission will continue to monitor closely the implications of remote voting.

Dr. Lewis: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the reassurance that the commission is aware of the possibilities of abuse, but is it not also the case that the best and most effective forms of abuse are those that are least capable of being detected? If there is good reason for us having separate booths for privacy when we go to the polling stations to cast our vote, surely voting at home online opens up the possibility of undetected fraud whereby pressure is put on some members of a family to vote en bloc in a way that they might not in the privacy of the polling booth.

Mr. Beith: One way to ensure that such pressure is not found too often is to make choice available to the electors as to how they cast their vote. Choice is one of the concepts that the commission has sought to encourage in its pilots so that people are not required to vote in ways that limit privacy.

European Council (Copenhagen)

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall make a statement on the European Council that took place in Copenhagen on 12 and 13 December. Negotiations were successfully concluded to admit to membership 10 countries from eastern and central Europe, and Cyprus and Malta. We hope that Romania and Bulgaria will be ready to follow in 2007.

Today, we take it for granted that the 10 countries are all democratic nations living by the same values as the rest of Europe, but for anyone who remembers the Hungarian uprising of 1956, the Prague spring of 1968 or the imposition of military rule in Poland in 1981, the transformation of those countries from tyranny to democracy and now to full European Union membership is a huge achievement of which Europe and Britain can be justly proud.

We have long been the champions of European enlargement. The negotiations for membership began during the British presidency of the EU in 1998, and I should like to pay tribute particularly to the Danish presidency and the Commission, which brought the negotiations to a successful conclusion.

Details of the final package are annexed to the conclusions of the meeting. Membership will bring immediate economic benefits to the candidates. It will create a single market of 450 million people. Our trade has increased nearly 10 times as fast with those new countries as with the rest of the world, and 14,000 UK firms now export to east and central Europe. Membership of the EU will boost the gross domestic product of those countries by nearly 1.5 per cent., and our own by up to nearly £2 billion.

The new member states are countries that have only recently rediscovered their national identity. They, like us, will want the further integration of the Union to be firmly rooted in the democratic accountability of the nation state. They shall be our allies in developing a European Union on those lines.

For some time, Turkey has been knocking on the door of the European Union. The response of the Union has rightly been to encourage a closer economic and political relationship, but to say that full membership would be possible only when Turkey met the necessary human rights criteria.

In the past year, Turkey has made enormous strides by abolishing the death penalty and adopting a range of human rights laws. The new Turkish Government have promised a detailed legislative timetable to accelerate that progress. I believe that it is massively in our interests to see Turkey as a modern democratic partner in Europe. For that reason, I have been urging our partners to offer Turkey a date to open negotiations for membership, provided that the so-called Copenhagen criteria are met. I am pleased to report to the House that that was achieved in Copenhagen.

The Commission will report on Turkey's progress and if, in December 2004, on a recommendation from the Commission, the European Council decides that Turkey fulfils the Copenhagen political criteria, accession negotiations with Turkey will open without delay. That agreement has contributed to a better climate on the long-standing Cyprus dispute. The Secretary-General of the United Nations and his special representative, Mr. De Soto, have been tireless in their efforts, as has our own special representative, Lord Hannay. A settlement remains within reach. I urge all parties to continue their efforts to find a comprehensive settlement, which would allow a reunited Cyprus to join the European Union, as set out in the conclusions of the European Council.

We were also able to resolve differences between Turkey and Greece that have delayed the agreement between the European Union and NATO necessary to allow the implementation of a European security and defence policy. We have now established the essential linkage with NATO, which means that where NATO is not involved the European Union can undertake peacekeeping operations using NATO planning, with the option of using NATO headquarters and NATO assets as well. As a result, the European Union stands ready to take over the military operation in Macedonia, in consultation with NATO, and to lead a military operation in Bosnia following SFOR.

The European Council issued a declaration on the middle east in advance of the Quartet ministerial meeting in Washington. The Quartet brings together the European Union, the United States, Russia and the United Nations, and its meeting on 20 December will take us a further step forward. In the short term, progress on the Israeli side will be limited by the general election campaign in Israel. However, I believe that we should use the intervening period to maximise the chances of successful implementation of the road map once a new Israeli Government are in place.

That means continuing to do what we can to secure an end to violence, and to reverse the deteriorating humanitarian situation. It also means ensuring that Palestinian reform is effective. To that end, I can announce today that I am inviting leading Palestinians to come to Britain in January for a conference, along with members of the Quartet and other countries from the region closely involved in supporting the reform effort. The participants will discuss progress on reform and consider how the international community can help. It is in the interests of Palestinians and Israelis that the reform efforts succeed, so that we can make a reality of President Bush's vision of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

The European Council also issued a declaration on Iraq, giving its full and unequivocal support for Security Council resolution 1441 and urging Iraq to seize this final opportunity to comply with its international obligations.

Finally, we speak against the background of serious problems confronting our fishing industry. In the past 30 years, cod stocks in the North sea have fallen from 250,000 tonnes to 35,000 tonnes. If fishing continues at the present rate there is a risk of there being no viable cod fishing industry left. That is why the European Commission has suggested a reduction in fishing of 80 per cent., to enable the cod stock to recover to its absolute minimum viable level. Scientists believe that the safe minimum is 150,000 tonnes.

We share the objective of enabling fish stocks to recover, but we believe that much more moderate measures could deliver recovery while maintaining a

viable industry. I have talked extensively both with the President of the Commission at Copenhagen and with Commissioner Fischler previously. Fisheries Ministers are now meeting in Brussels to reach agreement on the issue.

The UK fishing industry has benefited over the past year from £36 million of funding to support adjustment through decommissioning. This includes the Scottish Executive's action to help preserve fish stocks and ensure the industry's long-term viability with a £27 million aid package. If there are further cuts arising from the ongoing negotiations in Brussels, the UK Government and the Scottish Executive stand ready to help the fishing communities affected. I will meet leaders of the industry in the new year, and financial assistance will be made available if necessary, but the priority for now must be to get a fair deal for our fishing industry.

The summit was a remarkable achievement. It redefines the future shape of Europe. It describes a future in which Europe is reunited, a Europe of proud and sovereign nation states, working together economically, socially and politically in their common interest. The prospect of Turkey's membership has even more dramatic implications. A nation that borders the Arab world, that is Muslim, that is none the less striking out on a path leading to liberal democracy, is set in time to join the traditional nations of Europe.

The implications for the future of Europe are profound. In time, all these new countries will be part of the European economy, part of monetary union, part of European defence, part of the European political system. For us in Britain, the implications are equally profound. It is our job to be part of the new Europe that is developing, to be a leading power within it and to understand the degree to which our national interest is bound up with it. Isolation from Europe in this new world is absolute folly. That is why we shall continue to fight for our interests, but recognise that they are best served inside the European Union, not on its margins.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and join him in welcoming the conference that he has apparently announced today for leading Palestinian reformers, involving representatives of the EU, the UN, Russia and the United States. We will await more details on that before dealing with it in detail ourselves.

This historic summit is a tribute to the long, hard and sometimes lonely battles fought by successive British Governments to extend the benefits of EU membership to the former communist states of central and eastern Europe. Like the Prime Minister, I, too, congratulate the Danish presidency and in particular Prime Minister Rasmussen, who has been a diligent and honest broker for a working settlement on enlargement. However, I think that I speak for many on both sides of the House, as well as for millions elsewhere in Europe, when I express my regret at how long enlargement has taken. As the Prime Minister knows, for all British Governments it is 13 years since the Berlin wall came down: 13 years of excluding central and eastern European countries from western European markets, all because Brussels insisted on full compliance with social legislation. Only now has the EU lived up to its obligations; as I have said, it was successive British Governments who tried to lead the way. Enlargement may be the European Union's finest hour, but its delay reveals the vested interests in parts of the EU with which we have become all too familiar.

The Copenhagen summit showed a side to the Franco-German axis with which the Prime Minister is also becoming all too familiar. Back in October in Brussels, he was outflanked by France and Germany when they delayed common agricultural policy reform—a move that will greatly increase the cost of EU membership to accession states and to existing member states alike. Last week in Copenhagen, he was again outflanked—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must come to order.

Mr. Duncan Smith: Last week in Copenhagen, the Prime Minister was again outflanked by France and Germany over membership negotiations for Turkey. The Turks wanted them to start before the current round of enlargement was implemented, and they were supported not just by the UK Government, but by the Spanish, the Italians and even the Greeks. Yet, once again, France and Germany prevailed. Negotiations have been delayed until December 2004—well after enlargement will have been completed.

Does the Prime Minister agree that those actions by France and Germany have been to the detriment of the European Union? Does he also agree that it is imperative that we encourage Turkey, as a NATO ally and as a secular, democratic Muslim nation, to play a full role in the European Union at the earliest possible opportunity? We are constantly urging the benefits of democracy on the Islamic world, yet here is the EU telling Turkey that she must prove her intentions all over again. Does not the Prime Minister think that direct negotiations would provide the strongest possible incentive for Turkey to meet the highest standards on human rights? Does he also agree that negotiations would provide the ideal opportunity to ensure that Cyprus—now to be an EU member itself—became a united island again? Was not the decision to delay these negotiations a snub for the Government of Turkey and for all those nations that supported her?

The Prime Minister says that the Euro army has reached an agreement with NATO that will allow it to use the alliance's planning, assets and headquarters. This, he said, means that the Euro army "stands ready" to take over military operations in Macedonia. Is that not in fact an admission that the Euro army should have been inside NATO all along? Now we have the rather ridiculous sight of the Prime Minister pretending that the EU has no military competence other than NATO deciding what it will or will not do. Surely the Government's position on this throughout has been seen for what it is—baseless and solely part of a wider negotiation with France.

Last week I wrote to the Prime Minister asking him to raise the severe proposed cuts to British fishing quotas. There was not one word about the common fisheries policy in the presidency's conclusions. That seems strange, given that before Copenhagen the Prime Minister wrote that Scottish fishermen would have the Government's full backing

"right to the very top".

According to today's statement, that amounted to the Prime Minister holding a conversation with Romano Prodi on the margins of the Copenhagen summit. With

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

40,000 jobs at stake on the basis of a contested scientific report, Britain's fishing community surely deserves better than just a conversation. Instead, it seems that the Government fully accepted that further savage cuts would be necessary. Why did the Prime Minister not force discussion of the fundamental issues of the CFP on to the table, as would have been required? It seems doubly strange that the conclusions refer to Spanish fishermen and Portuguese farmers, whose concerns were raised and registered at the same summit, whereas our fishermen have been left out.

The Prime Minister is right: this ought to have been a truly historic moment for our continent, when the cold war divisions were replaced with a new European settlement on prosperity, stability and mutual co-operation. Instead, all too often, the EU élites, to which he never refers, are bent on creating some sort of superpower. The common agricultural policy and the common fisheries policy, which the Prime Minister simply fails to sort out, are left unreformed as part of wider discussions. The forces of old Europe seem reluctant to let go: making them do so will take more than the Prime Minister talking tough before meetings and backing down after he has been there.

The Prime Minister: Where does one begin, Mr. Speaker? First, for the right hon. Gentleman to say that the enlargement process has been a great setback for the European Union is bizarre. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry, but he effectively said that it was disgraceful that it had taken so long. I think that it is remarkable that, 13 years after the Berlin wall fell, we have managed to get 10 countries into the European Union.

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): My right hon. Friend welcomed it.

The Prime Minister: If I may say so, it was a slightly grudging welcome. Given the interests at stake, it is a remarkable tribute to the vitality of the European Union that these countries have been accepted. The Leader of the Opposition had to make this attack because at the very time when a large part of the Conservative party is queueing up to get out, this other lot is queueing up to get in.

As for what the right hon. Gentleman said about Turkey, what happened was not to do with the French and German objections. It is correct that Britain, Italy, Spain and probably Greece would have gone further, but many countries were deeply hesitant about whether Turkey could fulfil the criteria. The key was to get a date, and we have got a date. It could have been a few months earlier, but it is, again, a tremendous step forward in Europe's relations with Turkey. Although I am a huge supporter of Turkey's membership of the European Union, there are issues to do with human rights that must be addressed. It is important that we address them and that Turkey's new leadership, who are really trying to address the issues, are given time to do so properly. It is churlish to suggest that the European Union was snubbing us or snubbing Turkey. Given where we were, it is a big step forward.

On European defence, the whole point about Macedonia is that NATO does not wish to be involved. That is why it is sensible for European defence, using the full support of NATO, to do it. The reason that it is so important to have European defence—but on the right basis, fully consistent with NATO—is precisely because there may be situations when, for whatever reason, NATO does not want to be involved. It is important, therefore, that Europe has the capability to do that for itself. The British Conservative party is against European defence, but even America now supports it as the right way forward for Europe and for NATO.

The most disastrous thing that we could do in respect of the CFP would be to adopt what I assume is now the policy of the Conservative party and withdraw from it. That would give us no protection whatsoever. It would not actually stop cod stocks being fished before they migrate to British waters—it would not actually help our fishermen at all. We must recognise that there is a huge problem. We are fighting hard to get the best deal possible, but it is a cruel deception to pretend to the fishing industry either that there is not an issue or that there is some simple solution—neither is correct.

As for the Leader of the Opposition's statement that with the Conservative party we should get a better deal in Europe, I do not know of a Conservative party—it will be interesting to see whether Opposition Members can name one—anywhere else in Europe, in the existing EU, in the countries that are about to join or in countries that may join later, that supports the completely foolish, backward and isolationist policy of the British Conservative party.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): I thank the Prime Minister for his statement and join him in congratulating the successful Danish presidency.

Judging from the House's reaction to the remarks of the leader of the Conservative party, it widely shares the view that we felt no sense of history when the right hon. Gentleman described a time of such historic groundbreaking achievement for Europe and for the spread of democracy, stability, peace and security across the continent as 13 wasted years. I thought that that referred to a different period in history relating to the Conservative party.

None the less, the 18 years of unbroken Conservative Government in this country certainly helped to build the single European market. It helped to extend qualified majority voting—thanks to Mrs. Thatcher and the Conservative party—and it even helped to pave the way for the enlargement process on which Conservative Members seem to be trying to pour cold water today. They have no sense of history and even less sense of the future—that is the Conservative party.

Given that some of the continuing entrenched aspects of the common agricultural policy have become even more entrenched as a result of some of the decisions that were reached at the summit, what prospect does the Prime Minister see, with enlargement ahead of us, of achieving the genuine, long-term reform of the CAP that is inevitable, desirable and will come about only if our country plays its full part at the top table of Europe? It will not be achieved on the country club membership basis advocated by certain people.

Would not Britain's hand in Europe be strengthened more generally if we showed greater political resolve on the single European currency? Increasingly, we risk

marginalising ourselves, as well as suffering domestic economic disadvantage, due to continuing uncertainty about a referendum and about the Government's long-term political commitment on the issue.

I welcome the decision reached about Turkey. It is important that over the next two years there is full and active engagement with the Turkish authorities—not least as regards human rights—to ensure that as and when accession negotiations with Turkey are held, they are based on stability and dependable understanding as regards not only the commitment of the Turkish democratic authorities to Europe itself, but the need to maintain the fundamental values of human rights that Europe enshrines and to which we are signatories.

Does the Prime Minister agree that it does not help intelligent discussion of matters European in this country to speak in a completely misleading fashion, bandying about such shorthand terms as "Euro army"? In fact, there is a strategic and sensible basis on which NATO and the EU can co-operate when they want to do so or whereby they can pursue different or varying agendas when that is the most sensible course. Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that that message from the summit, following the most recent NATO discussions, is welcome and must be the sane way forward?

Fisheries are a major concern to many of our communities, not least those in Scotland, so I welcome today's statement from the Commission that it wishes to defer decisions on quotas for a further three months. In his discussions with the leaders of the fishing representatives after the turn of the year, will the Prime Minister take every opportunity to carry them with him on the discussions that must ensue about the scientific evidence? The fact that our domestic fleet has already made a good contribution must be recognised in Brussels to a greater and more sensitive extent than it has been so far.

Finally, I welcome the Palestine conference, which the Prime Minister has announced today, but will he underscore the need for Europe to be seen to be contributing to restarting the middle east peace process? Will he acknowledge that it would be appropriate for the Defence Secretary or the Foreign Secretary to make a statement before the recess about any possible British troop deployments vis-à-vis Iraq during the parliamentary recess?

The Prime Minister: I agree entirely with the right hon. Gentleman about enlargement. It is worth pointing out that Britain has always done best in Europe when it has been engaged. Although, of course, the Conservative party's history in Europe when it was in office has been somewhat rewritten, the fact is that Mrs. Thatcher was engaged in Europe for the first seven or eight years of her premiership, and the Conservatives were responsible for putting through the single market proposals. It is important to realise that, in the end, they were a lot more sensible then than they are now, and perhaps the same could be said of us.

The key is to ensure that we carry on getting the best possible deal for Britain. That is also true in relation to CAP reform. The leader of the Conservative party was quite wrong. CAP reform was not blocked at the Brussels summit. Indeed, the disagreement was about over insistence that the mid-term review should go back into the conclusions of the Brussels summit, so the agriculture reform programme continues, as the Commissioner indicated a few days ago.

The right hon. Gentleman knows that the position on the euro has not changed. I agree with what he says about Turkey. On the CFP, I also agree that it is important that we try to work out the very best deal that we can possibly secure for our fishing industry, recognising that there is a genuine problem. I simply say that people who complain that the Government are not doing enough but refuse to recognise that a fundamental issue has to be tackled—whoever was in government would have to tackle it—are not doing a service to the Scottish fishing industry because they are pretending that there is an easy solution when there is not one.

The right hon. Gentleman is right about European defence. The benefit of engagement is absolutely clear. The tragedy is that if we were not engaged as a country in the debate about European defence, it would not mean that European defence would not take place; it would simply mean that it would take place without us.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Is it not a fact that, for many people in central Europe, what has been agreed this weekend will represent a remedy to the great outrage of Munich and to the invasion of Poland on 1 September 1939? Is it not a great tragedy that the great statesman from Chingford cannot rejoice about the fact that the sacrifice of those 17 per cent. of the few who fought above this place, recklessly in our interests as well as theirs, will have the satisfaction that their countries will come into the family of European nations?

May I ask the Prime Minister whether he will now ensure that the United Kingdom Government and those in our commerce and industry go on an offensive to ensure that we get in on the markets of the new member states? Under the Labour Government, Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry have been insufficiently in attendance in those countries, and I hope that— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order.

The Prime Minister: I am sure that we will make every effort in that regard. Important commercial opportunities will exist for our business and industry. Those countries that will come into the European Union under enlargement will offer tremendous opportunities for our companies and we must ensure that we seize them.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In welcoming much of the Prime Minister's statement, may I ask why there was no mention of Zimbabwe? Was not the plight of southern Africa in general, and the terrible fate awaiting Zimbabwe in particular, raised during the summit? We were assured by a Foreign Office Minister last week, in an appearance before the Foreign Affairs Committee, that it would be raised. Why was it not?

The Prime Minister: It was discussed at the Foreign Ministers meeting. I say again to the hon. Gentleman—I know that he feels passionately about this issue, as everybody does—that we must have the specific remedies that will work in this situation.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I welcome enlargement, which is a tremendous cause for celebration. Given the impressive and widespread use of English in many of the enlargement countries, will my right hon. Friend lead an effort across Government not only to encourage industry to take opportunities in the new market, but to increase public awareness in Britain of the significance of this historic achievement?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right on this matter, and I know that she has done a lot of work on it. It is interesting, as my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has pointed out to me, that of the 13 countries to come in under this enlargement or to come in subsequently, 12 gave their addresses in the English language.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that, when in Copenhagen, he discussed with other Heads of Government their support for military action against Iraq? Can he tell us how many are so persuaded of the moral case for war, as against a legal cover afforded by the Security Council resolution, that they are prepared to pledge troops and assets in a military deployment?

The Prime Minister: Of course the issue was raised and discussed on the margins of the summit with many countries. I assure the right hon. and learned Gentleman that all the countries to which I talked are fully in support of the UN resolution and recognise that if there is a breach of that resolution by Saddam, action should follow. Whether they participate or not is up to them.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on the personal role that he has played in the enlargement process? As well as being a champion for enlargement, will he continue to be a champion for reform, and ensure that the points that he set out in his joint letter with Chancellor Schröder of 25 February this year, which will see the reform of the European Union, are followed? We will have a Europe of 25 nations. I know how much he enjoys these summits, but with 25 countries at a summit, it is very important that it should be as efficient and as effective as possible.

The Prime Minister: Likewise I pay tribute to my hon. Friend, and all that he did when he was Minister for Europe to push forward the process of enlargement, which was important. Secondly, in relation to the Council and the Convention, one of the interesting things is that when we talk, in the European Convention, about the reform process in Europe, most people recognise that we must make fundamental changes in the way that Europe works. It was interesting that when President Giscard d'Estaing addressed the Council he made it clear that we had to strengthen all parts of the European Union, including the European Council.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): Will the Prime Minister accept whatever share of the credit is his due for the success of the Copenhagen summit? Will he agree, however, that probably the lion's share of the credit should go to the Danish President of the Commission, who is, I believe, the political ally of the British Conservative party—*[Interruption.]* He is a Danish Conservative. Would the Prime Minister agree that that underlines the special urgency of achieving institutional reform of the European Union within the next 12 months, during which it will be decided whether we can have a better decision-making process for 25 member states than we have at the moment for 15?

Does the Prime Minister intend to stick to his principles of a clear leadership of the Council of Ministers, a clear leadership role within the Union for the Council of Ministers, intergovernmental approaches to foreign and security policy rather than the Community method, and greater democracy at the same time? Does he think that he can achieve all that? Will the new members be on his side or not in the difficult negotiations over the next 12 months?

The Prime Minister: I certainly pay tribute to the Danish President. I agree that the negotiations were conducted superbly by him, but he is actually President of the Council, not the Commission. I do not know whether he is an ally of this Conservative leader—but who knows whether he may not be an ally of any other Conservative leader.

I agree entirely with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's other points. The proper red lines for our national interest in the convention are that we have the Council able to play its full role and that it is properly organised. In our judgment, there cannot be a Communitisation of the common foreign and security policy. We have to make sure that we increase the democratic accountability of the European Union.

I entirely agree about the new members of the EU. After all, these states fought to be nations again. I said in my statement that they had rediscovered their national identity, but they have always had their national identity. What they have not had is the opportunity to express it. These countries will be our allies in the EU, which is why it is important that they see us playing our full part in the EU and are not at its margins.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on a truly historic summit that was good for Britain and for the whole European continent. However, will he use his good offices to apply pressure to the Turkish Government who, in turn, should apply pressure on the Turkish Cypriots to come to an agreement for the unification of the whole of the island under the Kofi Annan plan?

The Prime Minister: I hope very much that all sides in the Cyprus negotiations take them forward constructively. There is no point in my entering into the details now, but the United Nations proposal is an immensely clever and intelligent proposal that offers a way forward. I still believe that it is possible for the countries to come to an agreement. For years and years, as a result of disagreements between Turkey and Greece, many of these issues have been held up. However, what is interesting about this summit and the way it took place is that Greece was in favour of Turkey being given an even earlier date for the opening of accession negotiations. A few years ago, I would have been surprised to have been told that such a change would happen now.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The Prime Minister mentioned cod stocks. However, he must be

aware that, on the same scientific measurement, whiting and haddock stocks are at their highest for a generation and that they will be caught up in the same draconian cuts by the European Commission. Does that not indicate that time is required to come up with a management plan that conserves fish without provoking the economic destruction of entire coastal communities? The Prime Minister seemed surprised to find out that that view was emerging this afternoon in the talks. Will he now put his weight behind it and ask for a delay for pause and for thought, instead of rushing headlong to disaster over the next few days?

The Prime Minister: Of course that is precisely what we are trying to do. All that I have pointed out to the hon. Gentleman and to anyone else who has raised the issue is that we have to recognise that we will be fighting for the interests of the Scottish and UK fishing industry against the background of heavily depleted cod stocks. I agree that that is not the only issue, but it is important to recognise that it is the case. We will strive to get the very best deal that we possibly can, and that is precisely what Ministers are now engaged upon in Brussels.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): Does my right hon. Friend agree that this historic and marvellous achievement has been brought about by work done by many people over many years to create pluralistic democratic societies in central and eastern Europe? Does he agree that the job is not yet complete? Other European states still wish to join the EU, so can we ensure that, over the next few years, we continue to give support for pluralistic civil society and democracy building in countries to the east of the existing EU?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I pay tribute to the work that he has done over many years to encourage countries that are now applicant countries and countries that may become applicant countries to improve their democracy. I have no doubt at all that, in years to come, for countries in the Balkan region, in particular, EU membership will be the same magnet for change and reform as European membership has been for the 10 accession countries now. It is extraordinary how much change they have managed to undertake in a short time, but they have managed to undertake it only because there has been the goal and the vision of EU and NATO membership to aim for.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Does the Prime Minister agree on the need for a fair and balanced public debate in the candidate countries, especially in the run-up to their referendums on membership, to ensure genuine public support? If so, would he end the practice of EU budget funding for one side of the debate in those countries? Will he look into the known and documented abuses that have taken place and ensure that public money, some of which comes from this country, is not used in that partial way?

The Prime Minister: There are rules that have to be followed, and they should be followed. I know that the right hon. Gentleman is a sceptic about enlargement, but I think that European enlargement is of fundamental importance to our future peace and stability. As I said, there are rules in Europe. We are not pressing for changes, but any of those rules that are in existence have to be followed properly.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): May I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend and all involved on achieving the historic outcome of the European Council? He will know that as each country has acceded to the European Union since 1973, British exports to them have surged. Does he agree that the economic and political future of Europe looks good for Britain and casts the carpers, nit-pickers and isolationists into the outer darkness where they belong?

The Prime Minister: There is no doubt that British companies have done well as a result of enlargement. We have increased our exports to those countries by something like 10 times. Those people who are hesitant about the benefits of enlargement fail to understand that in the end we all benefit from a more prosperous Europe. Every time the European Union has enlarged, there has been increased prosperity for existing EU members as well as for the new ones.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): As the Prime Minister says, this enlargement is merely the prelude to a new enlargement, and we can easily envisage 32 or 33 states in the European Union; but that further enlargement towards the Balkans will raise even more difficult questions because it will introduce income disparities of a factor of 10 between the richest and the poorest members. It is therefore essential that the union begin at an early stage to help the states prepare for membership. What does the Prime Minister think should be done about that? Where does he think that the eastern and south-eastern borders of the European Union properly lie?

The Prime Minister: In respect of the latter point, it is important that we encourage Balkan countries to move towards the prospect of European Union membership. As the right hon. Gentleman implies, that is obviously some way off, and the income disparity is very great. In the meantime, however, the European Union has conducted agreements with most of those countries—in fact, probably all of them—to help them in that process. Again, the advantages for us are immense. This is the first period for years and years—other than during the appalling domination of the old Soviet bloc—when those countries seem to be reaching towards some sort of stability. We have got to encourage that. The way to do it is to help them financially, which the European Union is doing, and also to start, over time, to offer them a more obvious path to European integration.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): In congratulating my right hon. Friend on the indispensable role that he played at Copenhagen which resulted, among many other achievements, in the accession of two Commonwealth countries to the European Union and in the Turkish timetable, may I thank him for convening the conference with the Palestinians in London next month? May I also thank

[Mr. Gerald Kaufman]

him for his courage in meeting the President of Syria, as the hazards of peace are much preferable to the death and danger of war?

The Prime Minister: I hope that we can make real progress on political reform. After all, we are only going to get the peace process moving again in the middle east if the right elements are in place. One key element is the political reform process in the Palestinian Authority, and I very much look forward to discussing that with those who will come and contribute to the meeting. I have no doubt that it is better to engage with countries and try to bring them towards the peace process than to isolate them.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): The Prime Minister was absolutely right to say that it is massively in our interests for Turkey to join us as a democratic partner in Europe. Was he not just a little saddened that at an otherwise excellent summit, where so many countries from central Europe joined the European Union, Turkey's application was so badly delayed owing to the behaviour of Germany and France? Will he redouble his efforts to get that application moved forward because, as he knows, Turkey's human rights record is considerably better than that of some of the later applicant countries now entering the EU?

The Prime Minister: If the right hon. Gentleman had asked me a week ago whether I thought it likely that we would get a firm date for opening the accession negotiations, I would have been doubtful, so we have come a long way in the last few days. It was not only France and Germany that took the position to which he referred. That may be common myth, as many of these things are. In fact that position was taken by France, Germany and probably a significant number of the other countries. It was we, along with the Italians, the Spanish and the Greeks, who argued for a more forward position for Turkey.

Those negotiations are two years away. [*Interruption.*] The process will start without delay. During our presidency, we began accession negotiations almost immediately, so it is possible that, in this process, Turkey's accession negotiations will start in two years. The right hon. Gentleman is right to say that Turkey has made great strides forward, but this is still a pretty good timetable. It is not quite as good as we would have liked, but as people in Turkey reflect on it, they will see that after 40 years of trying to get a firm date, they now have one, and it is only two years away.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): The Prime Minister would have been justified in making more of the progress made on the European security and defence policy and the way in which the EU and NATO can work together. When it comes to further negotiations on Turkey, may I have his reassurance that we will have objective assessment criteria, such as the Copenhagen criteria, not ones based on the desire of some people in Europe to maintain a European Union of Christian countries?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. The important thing is that the Copenhagen criteria on political and human rights are clear, and we should follow them without fear or favour, treating Turkey exactly the same as any other country. It has no desire to be treated as a special member of the club. One of the great potential benefits of Turkey's membership of the EU is the notion that Europe can welcome in a nation that is predominantly Muslim, especially as almost all EU nations—including certainly our country and many other large countries—already have a significant Muslim population.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Prime Minister agree that the first presidency of the enlarged European Union in 2004 will be a very important job? Will he therefore be allowing his name to go forward?

The Prime Minister: Thank you—I am very happy being the British Prime Minister.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): My right hon. Friend was surely right to describe the agreement as redefining the European Union. The EU will be much larger but it will also be very different. Does he agree that the young democracies coming in from the east should be joining state-of-the-art democratic institutions, not ones that are in many cases 40 years old and prone to democratic deficit? Will he use enlargement to help to speed up the process of reform?

The Prime Minister: Yes, it is extremely important that we do so because there is no way Europe can function effectively as a Union of 25 or, as some have pointed out, perhaps 30 countries with the existing rules. The only point that I would make is that people often see this as a battle between the Council, the intergovernmental approach, and the Commission, the Community approach. In fact, we need to strengthen both. We need a strong, independent Commission to drive through processes such as economic reform, but we also need a strong Council, able to handle the management of the affairs of 25 or more nations, to give the EU a strong external voice and to set the agenda for Europe.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): Did the French President express appreciation both of the Prime Minister's sycophantic eulogy to him in *Paris Match* and of the fact that the British Prime Minister should take refugees from Sangatte? Why did the Prime Minister not include in his statement any comment about the immigration implications of enlargement? Why have the British Government decided to waive a transition period on immigration from countries coming into the European Union?

The Prime Minister: First, the President did express appreciation of that eulogy in *Paris Match*, and I received it gratefully. Secondly, of course we take seriously immigration issues to do with enlargement. However, we took the right decision in being forward—after all, we have been forward on the whole enlargement process. My advice is that that does not pose a great problem for us, and it is far more important to make sure that the enlargement process goes through

in those countries. Many of them, such as Poland, will be fighting referendums on that issue, and it is important that they succeed.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Just a word of caution after the cheering has ended. Does my right hon. Friend agree that when those visionaries way back in the early 1970s took part in that historic vote to take us into the Common Market, we were promised economies of scale and that we would be able to compete with the rest? If we joined the six, we were told, it would be wonderful. We had the same thing with the Single European Act and Maastricht. When the Union was enlarged to 15, we were told we would be able to trade more effectively. In all that time, they have never bought a cobble of coal from Britain, even though it is the cheapest deep-mined coal in Europe.

What reassurance can my right hon. Friend give me that 450 million people in the enlarged Europe will change their ways and buy British goods? Our manufacturing industries have been going to the wall throughout that period. A fortnight ago, the balance of trade deficit was the largest ever. At some point, that must end. All I say to my right hon. Friend is that the summit can be historic in many ways, but it ain't been all that good for people here who are working at the sharp end.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend knows of my admiration for his general political perspectives on these things—

Mr. Skinner: Unlike the Opposition, I never change my mind.

The Prime Minister: Perhaps we can leave that aside for a moment.

If we were outside the European Union, that would not help our industry. In fact, tariffs would be imposed on our goods going into Europe. My hon. Friend is right that we need to knock down a lot of barriers that still exist—that is extremely important. However, we are better placed to do so if we are inside rather than outside.

Finally, someone famously asked what good has come out of Europe in the past 50 years. I would say peace, security—they are important—and rising prosperity for years and years.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): NATO.

The Prime Minister: Yes, of course NATO has played a part, but the European Union has too—[*Interruption.*] Now I am told that Europe has done nothing in the past 50 years. I know that the alternative leadership has left the Chamber, but I simply tell the Conservative party that until it adopts a sensible attitude on Europe, it will find itself a long way from office.

Bain Report

4.24 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the future of the fire service.

This morning Sir George Bain published his final report, "Reducing Risk, Saving Lives". I am sure that the House will want to join me in thanking Sir George and his team—Sir Michael Lyons and Sir Tony Young—for an excellent piece of work and for delivering it on time, as promised. The House will recall that the review's terms of reference were to make recommendations on the future organisation and management of the fire service, and in that context, to look at pay and conditions.

The report recalls that there have been seven or eight major reviews of the fire service going back more than 20 years. As Sir George acknowledges, many of the recommendations contained in those reviews are repeated in the Bain report. However, the report concludes that

"what will really make the difference this time is putting those reforms into practice. That is a challenge which must not be evaded again."

The report describes a service where legislation is out of date, management practice is out of date, and the rules and regulations that govern the overall framework and the day-to-day work of the fire service are old-fashioned and restrictive. It says that despite the best efforts of the firefighters, the

"fact is that too many people in this country die in fires and the number of fires is currently increasing each year".

The report states that the UK has not been as successful as other countries in fire prevention. It concludes that what is needed now is a new system where there is far greater emphasis on preventing fires, and which ensures that the deployment of people and equipment means that they are in the right place at the right time to protect lives.

The report's first and most fundamental recommendation is to move to a system of targeted fire cover that is based on a careful, professional assessment of the real risk of incidents in each local area. At present, fire cover is based on rigid targets for a set number of appliances to attend an incident within a set time. Those targets are defined by property characteristics, rather than the risk to life. The targets apply day and night, during the week and at weekends, irrespective of the predictable daily changes to the level of incidents actually taking place. In the most extreme example, the targets lead to the situation in the City of London where there are the same number of firefighters on duty at night, when there are just 5,000 overnight residents, as during the day, when there are 500,000 people working in the area. That is not the most effective deployment of resources. But above all, as the Bain report concludes:

"The existing framework of risk categorisation does not reflect known risk factors. It directs resources away from areas and population groups at most risk."

Secondly, the report makes recommendations on better collaborative working. At present, there are 47 fire authorities in England. They rarely work in partnership. Better collaboration between fire authorities, and between fire authorities and other

[Mr. John Prescott]

emergency services, is common sense and would be more efficient. In Wales, for example, bureaucracy has been cut by reducing the number of brigades from eight to three, with no reduction in the number of fire stations or fire engines.

Thirdly, the report makes recommendations on working practices, where the fire service has fallen well behind other public services. This includes dealing with the fact that only 1.5 per cent. of firefighters are drawn from the ethnic minorities, only 1.7 per cent. of firefighters are women, and only 2 per cent. of firefighters are graduates. The report concludes that urgent action is required to tackle these problems.

In addition to these important recommendations for the fire authorities and the fire service, there is a raft of equally important recommendations for the Government. The Bain report recommends the repeal of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. Section 19 means that any reduction in the number of fire appliances or firefighting posts, or closure of any fire station, requires the Secretary of State's consent. That situation places detailed control of the fire service in Whitehall and makes modernisation on the ground far more difficult.

The report recommends primary and secondary legislation to modernise the fire service institutions; to deal with the difficulties arising from the discipline regulations, and the appointment and promotion regulations; and to bring fire authorities' statutory duties in line with a modernised fire service. The report also makes recommendations to improve the inspection and delivery of services, and to establish a new central organisation to drive forward the process of modernisation.

Many of the report's recommendations to the Government will require detailed consideration, but we have been looking at these issues for some time and we have given further detailed consideration since the publication of the interim Bain position paper on 11 November. Today, with the publication of the final Bain report, I can set out the steps that the Government will take to put into effect the Bain recommendations.

First, the Government accept the recommendation to repeal section 19 of the 1947 Act and we will do so at the earliest opportunity, as requested. Secondly, we accept in principle the report's recommendations for legislation to modernise the fire service, to improve inspection and delivery of services and to set up a new central body to drive forward modernisation. Thirdly, I am committing the Government to produce a White Paper on the fire service in the spring in order to fulfil our part of the programme of modernisation. The White Paper will set out in detail the legislative and other changes required.

That is a clear programme of reform that will be taken forward immediately and will sustain the drive to modernise the framework in which the fire service operates. My guiding principle will be to transform the fire service into a modern emergency fire and rescue service focused on the safety of people and communities. That is what modernisation is about. Some of it will save money, but some of it will cost money, including, for example, training in basic life support skills and providing life-saving equipment for firefighters. The primary objective will be to improve the safety of the public and create a fire service that can deliver the highest standards.

The modernisation of the fire service forms part of the Government's broader agenda to reform, modernise and invest in Britain's public services. We must not lose sight of the fact that the fire service is a local authority service that is paid for out of local authority budgets. Schools, refuse collection and other local authority services are subject to review and audit through the new system of comprehensive performance assessments. The Bain report recommends further discussion on the introduction of a similar system for fire authorities that would ensure a comprehensive approach to audit for the milestones that it sets out.

With permission, I shall now turn to Sir George Bain's recommendations on pay and conditions. In May, the Fire Brigades Union tabled a claim for a 40 per cent. increase in firefighters' pay and a 50 per cent. increase in pay for control room staff. That remains its position today. That has to be seen against the background of the recent local authority pay award of 7.8 per cent. over two years and the 8 per cent. over two years accepted by the Transport and General Workers Union leadership for airport firefighters.

The Bain report commissioned two studies to compare pay for fire service roles with pay for jobs of similar weight elsewhere in the economy. The report concludes in paragraph 8.19 that there is no case for significant increases in pay based on the existing pay system. However, it calls for a new reward structure that is fit for a modernised fire service, following on from reforms. The Government's response to the FBU's claim has been guided by two clear principles: first, our hard-won economic stability should not be put at risk; and secondly, any pay award must be affordable within existing public expenditure provision. The Bain report's recommendations comply with those two principles and give a fair deal to the firefighters and the public who pay for them.

In line with the Bain review's interim position paper, the final report proposes an 11.3 per cent. pay increase over two years, subject to the implementation of the common-sense reforms that it sets out. The report does not rule out further pay increases in future, but as with the 11.3 per cent. increase, any increases would be subject to the implementation of the modernisation programme set out in the report.

The package proposed by Sir George could mean that an ordinary firefighter could earn around £23,900 a year by November 2003; that a leading firefighter could earn up to £26,700 a year; and that a leading firefighter in London could earn up to £29,300 a year by the same time. The Bain report makes it clear that a two-year pay deal of that order would not be self-financing over two years, but that if modernisation is fully implemented, it could be self-financing over a three-year period.

The local government employers have made it plain to me that they will find it difficult to fund any up-front investment to pay for future modernisation. In keeping with the proposals set out in the Bain report, the Government accept that it may be necessary to provide a small amount of transitional funding over the next two years in order to make it possible for a three-year self-financing deal to be agreed. That funding would be

within the existing departmental expenditure limits and would be subject to a satisfactory pay and modernisation agreement and adequate provision for implementing and auditing the modernisation process.

The new pay and career structure proposed in the Bain report will open up new opportunities for firefighters at all levels to develop their skills and increase their income. The report's modernisation agenda will provide a better, safer service to the public. Some brigades, such as the Devon and Mid and West Wales brigades, already carry defibrillators. Why should not others do so? In Warwickshire, ambulance and fire control room staff already share the same building. Why should not other brigades do the same? In some areas, local arrangements are in place for part-time and full-time firefighters to work together. Why should that not be more widespread? It does not mean compulsory redundancies. It does not mean tearing up the shift system. But it does mean a more efficient use of resources, more flexible terms and conditions for firefighters, and tackling the current inadequacies of management. It also means enabling better collaboration to take place between individual fire brigades and the Fire Service and other public services. Exactly how that will be achieved is a matter for negotiation between the employers and the FBU.

The FBU and the local government employers are now engaged in exploratory talks with ACAS. I am pleased that, in the light of those ongoing talks, the FBU has called off the eight-day strike that was scheduled to start today, but I regret the FBU's decision to call further strikes for the new year, which can only cause disruption and put people's lives at risk. The Government believe that the ACAS discussions should take the recommendations and proposals in the Bain report fully into account, as well as the principles set out in my letter to Sir Jeremy Beecham on 28 November. That will mean some tough talking; but further strikes will achieve nothing.

Throughout this dispute, I have urged the FBU to talk, not walk. I recognise that the union has set its face against the Bain changes, but change is on its way, and the FBU cannot set its face against that. It is now time for it to start talking seriously.

The Bain report says

"With clear vision, commitment and leadership, the programme of reform is achievable. The prizes are considerable, including a better service for the public and a more rewarding career for the men and women in the Service. Most of all, the package of reforms should save lives."

The report is a challenge to all of us—the Government, the fire authorities and fire service personnel—but it is a challenge that the Government are determined to meet. The report provides a fair deal for the firefighters, a fair deal for other workers and a fair deal for the economy. Above all, it will provide a better service for the people of this country. I commend it to the House.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement, and for giving me notice of it. I thank him particularly for making the Bain report available to the House well in advance. There is much to welcome in the report, and I join the right hon. Gentleman in congratulating the members of the review body. Subject, of course, to proper scrutiny in the House, we will do what we can to expedite the primary legislation that he mentioned.

An 11 per cent. rise in firefighters' pay over two years, coupled with radical modernisation of their working practices, is the main proposal in the Bain report. Will the Deputy Prime Minister say in more detail how he and the employers intend to pay for such a wage increase? He talked of a small amount of transitional funding, but back in November the Prime Minister insisted that any pay rise of more than 4 per cent. must be self-financing. Is that still the case?

Paragraph 8.22.ii of the report says

"We recommend that the paybill should increase from November 2003 by 7 per cent."

It is notable that Bain uses the word "paybill", by which we must assume he means total pay-related costs. That implies that little or no savings will be made by November 2003. Is my understanding correct? If so, this indicates a transitional cost of more than £60 million.

The Deputy Prime Minister said last time that the primary source of funding for a pay deal was likely to be manpower reduction based on the retirement of some 20 per cent. of firefighters in the next few years. He said, I think, that that amounted to 10,000 jobs. Unless early retirement is involved—which would cost money rather than releasing it—it will take some time for the manpower reduction to happen.

Professor Bain seems to assume that the arrangement will be introduced after 2003. That means a gap between any pay settlement and the work pattern changes needed to fund it. I understand that the professor largely confirmed that on the radio today. Transitional funding is, as the Deputy Prime Minister has effectively admitted, crucial to concluding the negotiation. The Chancellor, who is present, has said that absolutely no money will be available for the deal; the Prime Minister has said "nothing over 4 per cent."; the Deputy Prime Minister has been more conciliatory, saying "We are quite prepared to make an exceptional case". Now, he is set to provide a small amount of transitional funding. After waiting three months for the report, will he tell us how much the amount will be?

The report makes it clear that the fire service must take a radically different approach to ensure that fewer people die as a result of fire. The Deputy Prime Minister properly talked about that at some length. We all know the importance of the job that firefighters undertake, and we congratulate them on doing it. However, the report states that the overall strategic approach concentrates on firefighting, not on fire prevention, and it argues that that strategy should be reversed to concentrate on prevention. Indeed, the report is subtitled, "Reducing Risk, Saving Lives". In the light of that, will the Government, when assessing any changes in work practices in the settlement, try to achieve an improvement in cover, safety and service levels? Will they make public the improved safety levels that they seek?

Although it is difficult to make comparisons, other European countries with a similar climate and culture—the Netherlands, Germany, France, Switzerland and Austria—have much lower death rates than the United Kingdom. If we achieved the same rates as the Swiss or the Dutch, we would save about 300 lives a year. The report shows that New Zealand, which had the same level of fatalities as us four years ago, has halved the death rate from fires. Again, that is equivalent to 300 lives a year in the UK.

[David Davis]

Although hon. Members would understand the Deputy Prime Minister's discomfort in setting himself another five-year target, will he use the opportunity that the reorganisation of the fire service provides to commit the Government to saving 300 lives a year or an equivalent target?

The scope for cost savings in some fire brigades is much greater than in others, nevertheless, all brigades will have to meet the costs of the new pay structure. How will the Government equalise that disparity so that they do not penalise previously efficient fire brigades, especially those in rural areas with retained firefighters? Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that the scope for savings in rural areas that use retained firefighters is relatively small, and that the price of Bain should not be the closure of fire stations in rural areas?

In his interim report, Bain said that clearer national leadership must complement negotiation. One of the recurrent problems that worsened the dispute was the failure of communication between the Deputy Prime Minister's Office and the employers. Will the Deputy Prime Minister ensure that his office takes direct control of the negotiations so that the Government may exercise a veto over the financing of any deal and the acceptability of changes in work practices?

The report clearly states that the Government rather than the Bain review must decide whether to restrict the right to strike for such an important public service. Has the Deputy Prime Minister held any talks about that? What is his opinion and that of Downing street on the matter?

We have heard much in the past couple of weeks about talks at ACAS. We understand that no new offer is currently on the table, and the Bain report was not published until today. No hon. Members want any more fire strikes. Will the Deputy Prime Minister spell out the progress of the negotiations at ACAS and his expectations for a deal in the near future?

I hope that the publication of the Bain report means that the continuing talks can be conducted expeditiously. I also hope that the Deputy Prime Minister can get a grip on matters, take personal control of the negotiations and not lose an hour in pursuing a financially responsible outcome to the dispute.

What is the timetable for the negotiations in the next few critical weeks? The Bain report will be effected, the dispute ended and true reforms that reduce risk and save lives achieved only if the Deputy Prime Minister takes a grip on matters.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful for the comments of support, such as they were, at the beginning of the contribution of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). As for taking a grip, I remind him that Lord Belstead was the Home Office Minister in 1980 who made the same sort of recommendations to the Home Office review as those of the Bain report. The Tory Government did not take much of a grip to implement their review. Fifteen years later, in 1995, the Audit Commission report made the same points and again the Government failed to act. I shall therefore take no lectures from a Tory Member of Parliament when, in 18 years, the Tory Administration failed to do anything about the matter.

We are now trying to do what Sir George Bain is asking us to do, which is to make the commitment to implement, rather than making promises and doing nothing about them. I have already mentioned some important changes in regard to accepting the repeal of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947. Everybody knows that, for negotiations to take place, we have to make changes to some of the legislative requirements, and I have immediately given that commitment.

Many of the right hon. Gentleman's questions will be answered in our White Paper, but I shall address some of the points that he has raised. I have some sympathy with his point about the confusion over the figures, because I face some of that confusion myself. The problem here is that the financial year relating to the costs and savings that have been referred to runs from April to April, whereas the pay negotiations cover a period from November to November, part of which would therefore be in one financial year and part in another. I can send the right hon. Gentleman a more detailed statement of those figures, if he likes. The statement makes it clear, however, that the net cost savings mean that the proposed programme could fund itself over three years but not over two, in terms of the extra costs required, and in relation to the modernisation and the savings that can be made. That could be done in three years, but it is right to say that the recommended deal could not fund itself over a two-year period. There is no doubt about that, and I have made it clear to the employers.

It is not my intention to take over the negotiations. We are doing exactly what every other Government have done; they have pointed out what their public pay policy is. That policy applies to everyone in all the local authority sectors, as well as to all other public sector workers. In these circumstances, no extra payments over and above those that are catered for in the public pay policy—or indeed, the 4 per cent. that has been granted—will be paid without modernisation. The employers have to show me—I believe that they have already made a statement this morning—that they intend, in view of the Bain recommendations, to produce a robust business report, which will be given to us, detailing how they might achieve this. That is the best way of dealing with this issue. The employers can now take into account what Bain has said.

The ACAS discussions are welcome because, although one party has refused to co-operate on Bain, those discussions have brought the parties together to listen to the case and discuss its implications. If ACAS can provide us with an opportunity in which the parties are prepared to talk, I do not mind if the agenda for change is achieved under ACAS or Bain, so long as the same principles apply. As I said in my statement, I wish ACAS well in its endeavours to get people to agree to both the modernisation and the increase in pay that will be justified by the changes. Let me also make it clear that the moneys will not come from the reserves or from the Chancellor. I have been very clear that this is my responsibility; these are the moneys that I have within my Department, so anything that needs to be found will have to come from my budget and not from the Chancellor or from extra money from the reserves. That has always been clear, and I am glad to be able to confirm that.

I have already said that it is not my job to get involved in negotiating deal upon deal. If Governments attempted to negotiate pay agreements in every sector, it would create a highly centralised arrangement. In the main, most Governments have liked to leave the negotiations on local services to local people, and that has been the general principle that we have adopted. The right hon. Gentleman's suggestion comes from an Opposition who are constantly talking about giving power down to the local areas, rather than centralising it. So be it. This dispute illustrates their constant conflict of judgment in such matters.

On the White Paper, mention has been made of comparisons with other firefighting facilities—in New Zealand, for example—and the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Dutch and Swiss services. The inquiry has pointed out that there are differences, and that obviously has to be taken into account. The fire services that the right hon. Gentleman mentioned have shift systems. I want to make it clear that nothing in our proposals would abolish the shift system, or some of the other practices that have gone with it, in relation to second jobs, for example. Those conditions apply in most of the fire services throughout the world, but let me make it clear that we need some changes: changes are necessary and we intend to embark on them. The fire authorities in the different countries to which the right hon. Gentleman referred have modernised and changed. They accept overtime and also do some of the things that we have recommended. I do not think that it is too much to ask that the British firefighting service should face up to the same challenge, which we believe will provide a better service.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): What time frame is attached to the Fire Brigades Union's demand for 40 per cent? We heard the Opposition talking about five-year targets. It strikes me that it would be possible to engage in a long-term deal that moved the figure, perhaps not to 40 per cent., but to one that would satisfy the FBU, especially if the discussions took place around Bain, because a lot of complex matters have been put before us.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is quite right to say that there are many complex issues here, but I must say that the factual answer to his question is that the FBU wanted the 40 per cent. to be paid in one year, and no strings. That was totally unacceptable, although as I understand it that remains the claim before us. If there is an alternative, I hope that the FBU will take account of Bain. It can improve its wage scales, but that will happen through the negotiations with the local authorities.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement and join him in thanking Professor Sir George Bain and his colleagues for the excellent work in the report.

The Deputy Prime Minister is right to regret the fact that the FBU leadership appears to have set its face against change and appears to be planning to go ahead with strikes in the new year, but does he agree that the FBU's dismissive response to the publication of Bain today is as depressing as it is predictable? Does he also recognise that Bain's review is as challenging to the Government and fire authorities as it is to the FBU?

Specifically on funding the pay proposals, the Deputy Prime Minister says that he will provide a small amount of transitional funding. Will he say more about what figure he has in mind? Is it the £29 million that Bain identifies on page 119 in table 12.1 as the gap between costs and savings over the first three years or does the Deputy Prime Minister have another figure in mind? If he is prepared to provide about £29 million, will he tell the House exactly how and in what form he intends to supply that money? In particular, will he ensure that fire authorities that have already reaped cost savings are not penalised just because they have completed modernisation? Does he not agree that it would be wrong to burden modernising fire authorities and their taxpayers with all the extra costs when they have fewer opportunities to reap efficiencies? Will he therefore ensure that extra central Government cash is carefully distributed and targeted to reward the leaders of modernisation?

Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that Bain is good news for retained firefighters, just as it should be? Does he agree that one of the most welcome proposals in Bain is to give proper advocacy and representation to the Retained Firefighters Union, which, up to now, has been pushed out by the FBU? Does he agree that, if there is a weakness in the Bain review, it is the failure to recommend an even better pay deal for retained firefighters, as there is a serious 20 per cent. plus vacancy rate for retained positions?

Will the Deputy Prime Minister make it clear to those whose job it is to complete the negotiations that they should ensure that the retained firefighters are not betrayed simply because they have not been represented at the table and have been prepared to work and modernise?

Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House whether he disagrees with any of Bain's recommendations? Does he support, like us, the proposals to regionalise fire authorities and to back local pay top-ups? On Bain's observations on central Government's emergency planning role, does he accept Bain's statement that

"further substantial funds will be required"

and when can we expect an announcement on that?

Finally, what assurance can the Deputy Prime Minister give the House that this latest fire service review will be implemented?

The Deputy Prime Minister: If I may, I will take the hon. Gentleman's last question first. I thank him for his support, but let me make it clear that I do not want anybody to be under any misapprehension whatever—I intend to see the report implemented. It is a report to take into account in the negotiations.

The Bain report is not specific about every part of this deal; it says that its function is not to settle a dispute, but to give some guidance, an up-to-date position and recommendations on how modernisation and pay can be brought together. We fully accept that principle. I am sad that the FBU has said that the Bain report is irrelevant. I do not think it is; it is very relevant to the discussion.

As the FBU has made its position clear and as it is now in discussions at ACAS, it would be useful if it took into account, as the employers will surely point out to it, how modernisation is connected to pay. That, again,

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depends very much on how much money the Government are prepared to give. The hon. Gentleman referred to the table in the report, which shows that the deal can pay for itself, but in three years. Money can be gained in the third year. Therefore, a judgment would have to be made as to the transitional funds, but let me be absolutely clear: there will be no funds available at all if nobody undertakes any modernisation.

This is not a deal where people go ahead, as has happened every time in the past, even under the previous Administration, without doing anything about the recommendations. The FBU has to recognise that, in these circumstances, modernisation is connected to extra payments. That connection is relevant to the Government and relevant to everyone else. I hope that the fire brigade takes that on board. It is an important part of the deal, if the fire brigade is prepared to negotiate on those terms.

The Bain report makes it clear that a lot more should be done to give part-time or retained workers proper parity of pay and also, perhaps, that there should be a recognition of that when considering the pension fund. Bain makes special recommendations on that, which we will have to take on board, and we will give our responses in the White Paper.

Of course, that would mean having mixed crews, which was another recommendation, but the FBU has always set its face against it. I am told that it is against the idea because it offends against its overtime ban. The ban creates real problems in itself. It is there to prevent people from taking extra resources or gaining extra payment, whereas firefighters elsewhere in the world can earn overtime. The FBU is against second jobs, although a lot of its members have them. I find it odd that it denies firemen the opportunity to do a second job as a part-time fire worker. After all, that is what they are trained for. It is odd that a firefighter can have a second job as a taxi driver but cannot help to provide a decent fire service by working overtime. It is precisely such absurdities that we have to deal with.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Will my right hon. Friend join me in condemning the personal denigration of George Bain by the FBU? He is a committed public servant with whom I have worked, and a man of the utmost integrity. Will my right hon. Friend develop initiatives to engage the ordinary, decent firemen on the ground, so that the much-needed change to the fire service can be implemented, and we can help to find the £7 billion that it costs to save lives today—and save lives in the process, which we have not been too good at to date?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I agree strongly about the denigration of George Bain by the FBU, which has been quite powerful. It is totally unacceptable. He is a public servant who carried out the inquiry with great commitment. The denigration is not new—it has gone on constantly, and been directed not only at Sir George but at other members of his committee. I think that most of us in the House would agree that that is unacceptable.

My hon. Friend talks about persuading the decent firemen. I do not differentiate between decent and non-decent firemen—and I am sure that he does not either. All the firefighters are trying to do a job, and the union is trying, in many cases, to reflect its members views, but I hope that firefighters who are following our discussions and reading about what is going on will get involved, read the Bain report and come to a judgment on whether we need a better balance in the fire service, concentrating more on prevention rather than intervention. Sir George has done an excellent job in giving us the properly recorded argument on which to base the debate. Calling that irrelevant is not the way to get agreement, and I hope that the rest of the firemen will take that into account and start negotiations.

Mr. Francis Maude (Horsham): The Bain report contains some sensible recommendations, and I hope that they will be implemented. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree, however, that it fails to tackle the principle archaism that cries out for reform: the quaint idea that there is a single model of providing a fire service that is equally applicable in every part of the country, and the equally outdated notion that a single rate of pay is appropriate everywhere? If he really wants to be radical and to achieve modernisation, why does not he look for a way of seriously decentralising, so that local fire authorities can negotiate pay directly with their local employees, and get rid of the wholly outdated notion of a national pay structure?

The Deputy Prime Minister: When the right hon. Gentleman reads the Bain report in closer detail, he will see that it does talk of the need to have a decentralised service. Indeed, it goes further and says that in the fourth strand of change consideration should be given to the concept of regionalism. On different rates of pay, or different services in rural or urban areas, clearly one framework does not suit all. Indeed, Bain says that there could be differences in those different circumstances. I think that he is advocating not different wages in different places, but differences in allowances and agreements to reflect the differing demands. He certainly takes into account the high number of applications for jobs in the fire service.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): If Bain is implemented, what will be the estimated total number of firefighter posts in 2005–06, and what is the estimated cost of introducing the recommended reforms to the financial arrangements for the pension fund?

The Deputy Prime Minister: In all these cases, everything depends on the state of negotiations between the employers and the employees. On jobs, as Bain has constantly and rightly pointed out, there is no need for compulsory redundancies. Many mischievous statements have been made in this House, but it is quite wrong to suggest that the result will be a great deal of unemployment.

On costs, again, the issue is the negotiations between the employers and the employees. As the table to which we have been referring shows, what matters is just how much modernisation the Fire Brigades Union is prepared to undertake. I simply say to the FBU that it should get involved in those negotiations. Perhaps my hon. Friend has received a copy of the recent paper from the FBU, which puts forward some of its views on these matters. It deals with very serious issues, and I hope that

Members will read it. It is a pity that it did not give that evidence to the Bain inquiry, because it contains some very good arguments. I hope that it will give that information to ACAS, so that we can take it into account. However, at the end of the day the FBU must recognise that a connection will be made between modernisation and pay.

On the likely cost of pensions, again, that depends on exactly what happens and how many people take early retirement. As Bain points out, the cost of the pension system is leading to difficulties. If that system is to be extended to part-time fireworkers—that is one recommendation—a serious study needs to be undertaken. In 1995, the Audit Commission recommended that the true costs of the pension fund should be reassessed. We cannot make that estimate at the moment, but my hon. Friend is right to point out that such a survey will have to be undertaken. Work is under way in that regard.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): I wish the right hon. Gentleman success in implementing these reforms, but does he agree that any truly modern fire service should be unable to hold the nation to ransom, and would have a no-strike, binding arbitration agreement as part of such a settlement?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that this House would want industrial peace in all areas, and for matters to be settled by negotiation to the satisfaction of all parties. That is something that we would all strive to achieve. We have received some criticism for perhaps not being as tough as the Opposition would like, but I should point out that, of the 36 days of strikes that were planned, only 12 have taken place. We must wait and see what happens, but if we had rushed in by using legislation and taking the sort of action that is being talked about, we would have inflamed the situation, difficulties would have arisen and I doubt whether we would have reached the position that we have reached today. We have to make a balanced judgment about the use of legislation and getting the best out of negotiations; we have given our best judgment, and so far that has proved reasonably successful.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the Bain recommendations before the House today are not news to firefighters. From day one, they have regarded Bain as delivering nothing more than a long-standing firemaster's wish agenda. How optimistic, confident or otherwise is he that he will get the FBU to sit down and look at these proposals?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Bain's proposals constitute his independent judgment, having looked at the evidence over a number of years, of what he thinks is the best way to provide a modernised fire service. They are to the advantage of everyone—to the fireworkers, to the firefighters and, indeed, to the country at large—and they equate to the principles that we laid down. The proposals constitute a very important step towards trying to achieve change, but as my hon. Friend rightly points out, they are not new. Bain scoured the many directly relevant reports—there are some eight or 10—and pointed out that, although they rightly praise the FBU for the provision of a good service, they make the common claim that modernisation is still necessary because certain restrictions prevent the provision of a better service. That is the judgment that we use, and Bain makes an important contribution to it.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that specific issues arise in rural areas—particularly in Scotland and in Wales—and that there is little scope to renegotiate pay and conditions in those areas? Does he also accept that, as a result of the report, we still face strikes in the new year, at a time when there is real concern about the coverage provided by the green goddesses in those areas?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There is a distinct difference, which has already been recognised in the provision of fire services in rural and urban areas, and the targets reflect that. However, we recognise that in the main, particularly in the rural areas, cover is mainly carried out by part-time, not full-time workers, who believe it unjust that they do not get paid the same rate as full-time firefighters. The Bain report has said that that needs to be changed and that changes will also need to be made to the pension funds to reflect that. The Government will consider those recommendations and give their response in the White Paper to be published in the spring.

The union has made it clear that there will be another dispute. I am glad that it is a number of weeks away because it allows the armed forces to have a break, particularly during the festive season. The legal advice given to me is that it is not necessary to maintain the strike envelope; presumably it is there to add to the pressure. We are constantly under pressure, and those that apply it should bear it in mind that it is our intention to carry out modernisation; we will not avoid it as has happened in the past. We are committed to making the change.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): May I welcome the statement and my right hon. Friend's comments about transitional funding? Does he agree that there are varying practices up and down the country and that many brigades have implemented changes such as community fire safety? The Kent brigade has been in the vanguard of reducing the number of deaths and house fires. To assist with the negotiations, can I ask for clarification, because some of the language used has been misunderstood by FBU members? *[Interruption.]* This is a question. On paramedical training, for example, some people have asked me whether the Government believe that fire brigades should undertake ambulance training for four years or is my right hon. Friend talking more about defibrillators? I think that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I think that that will do.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am aware of the great improvements to the Kent fire brigade from talking to the leader of Kent's Tory authority, Sandy Bruce-Lockhart. He gave me some examples of co-operation between members and fire officers that has reduced the number of deaths and accidents quite considerably in the past three years. I would not want to give the House the impression that improvements are not being made to

[Mr. Deputy Speaker]

the system—clearly there are, with the co-operation of all parties. It shows how much can be achieved if people are prepared to do that, although it is a pity that it usually happens within the local brigade area, not nationally. Our point is that we need to raise national standards.

On the provision of defibrillators, that is a very important point. It takes five or six years to train people to become paramedics and it is an insult not to recognise their true skills. However, it is silly that we can have defibrillators in some areas but not in others. As I understand it, they are supposed to be there only to assist the firefighters themselves. It is nonsense that such a facility is not available to all areas of the community at all times. I know that the fire service finds this controversial, but I saw a study that said that if defibrillators were available and approved for the general public, the response time of the fire service could be increased so that it was better than that of the ambulance service, which is under pressure. If we had the same rate of response at the fire brigade level, it could save many thousands of lives. That is the sort of modernising proposal that will cost us money, but it is for the benefit of the community and I think that we should do it.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman seek to change the Fire Services Act 1947 by bringing forward amendments to the Local Government Bill which begins its passage in the House on 7 January?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. The legislation will be available to us; we will be looking at what we can do in regard to that and I shall be responding shortly.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): Does my right hon. Friend agree that ordinary firemen should not adopt a kneejerk response to statements about the Bain report but study it in the watches and at the stations, identify how they can make it work for them and their families and then instruct the negotiators to get them the best deal possible? In that context, will he continue to promote a calm and decent atmosphere that is conducive to sensible negotiations?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I think that the House will agree with everything that my hon. Friend said. The reaction of people in the fire service who listen to the debate or who watch it on television, where we have received so much publicity of late, is most important. We are not making a major attack and completely scrapping the shift system, as has been said. Of course, such reports cause great concern to fire brigades. What we are saying is that some changes are common sense and should be considered. Every fire brigade should have a 24-hour-a-day watch system and we want to keep such a system, but changes can be made. Some of them have been highlighted today and I hope that there can be a decent discussion of them among members of fire brigades.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): This afternoon, the Deputy Prime Minister made several references to the fact that many of the modernisation proposals in the Bain report have already been accepted—indeed, embraced—by fire brigades in different parts of the country, not least in Cornwall and Devon. Does he accept that it would be widely resented among firefighters in those more forward-thinking brigades if the new money is used as a bribe for the backward brigades rather than to recognise and reward those that have already taken steps to accept modernisation?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are concerned to ensure that the savings are of benefit everywhere. As I pointed out, advances have already been made in some aspects—for example, combined control rooms. We want those advances to take place throughout the system. Where modernisation proposals have been implemented, it will not be necessary to make changes, but we want to raise standards in the fire service nationally so that they are acceptable to everyone, in line with Bain, and so that they justify the payments. Areas where changes have already been made will receive the increased payments.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Is my right hon. Friend aware that the most interesting and important part of his statement was the new provision that referred to transitional funding, up-front, to resolve the modernisation question? Some of us raised that matter during a previous statement from my right hon. Friend; that is important in itself. I shall not ask—as the Tories did—how much money my right hon. Friend has in his budget although I hope that it is not a small amount. I hope the sum is big enough.

Whatever my right hon. Friend does, I ask him not to accept the proposal made earlier by the right hon. Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude) that we should introduce regional pay scales, which, by the way, was a Liberal proposition. If we accepted that proposal, the present dispute would look like a vicarage tea party.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I recognise the force of my hon. Friend's argument about regional pay scales, but there should be some discussion of it. There is a national wage for fire brigades, but allowances vary in different areas; for example, London weighting can add about £2,000 to the wage. We should have some discussion of that. The FBU should not say that such things are irrelevant; it should discuss matters that affect its members' wages.

On previous occasions, I could not be specific about transitional funding or the amounts involved because they depended on the costs and savings that could be made. Bain has now given some indication of those amounts. People accused me of sabotaging the agreement at 5 o'clock in the morning, even though I had made it clear at 3 o'clock to both the general secretary of the TUC and the employers' negotiators that I could not sign a blank cheque. However, one of the difficulties was that they did not know what savings could be made; in 25 years, the possible savings had never been worked out. Some joint work has now been carried out between Bain, ourselves and the local authority employers and I can now say how much we would save if the proposals were implemented.

An awful lot of work was needed but the principle is clear. Transitional payments will need to be agreed for a three-year period, but I cannot enter into any agreement

unless there is a modernisation agreement that will take us to year three. I am not prepared to make the same mistakes that were made time and again whereby there was agreement on pay first and then talk about modernisation. This time, the two must happen together.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): I welcome the particular recommendation in Bain that enhanced terms and conditions should be made available for our retained firefighters. We all want a successfully negotiated end to the dispute, but will the Deputy Prime Minister take this opportunity to pay a special tribute to our retained firefighters? They provide critically important cover in our rural areas and many of them continued to provide emergency cover during periods when the regulars were on strike.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I want to pay tribute to all those who have been involved in maintaining our services—whether the part-time firefighters, the Army or the police, all of whom have provided quite an effective service in the most difficult circumstances. Many part-timers are involved in the dispute and support the FBU case, but all the firefighters—part-time or full-time—need to get together and say, "Change is coming, and now is the time to take part in it." They should start talking, not walking, and let us get an agreement to this dispute.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that if there are flaws in the Bain report, they are largely caused by the FBU's decision not to participate in that report? Will he ensure that, as the negotiations progress, the real recruitment and retention difficulties faced by brigades on the borders of London, which do not benefit from the London allowance, are considered? That situation is practically unique in this country. If he is considering primary legislation, will he also consider whether it should extend to improving fire safety in new buildings, as well as modernising the fire service?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend refers to improving the fire regulations, and we certainly want to do that—indeed, legislation on improving building regulations in that way is already before the House—but we need to take a much more comprehensive approach. That is behind the concept of wanting more prevention rather than intervention. A point was made about Kent fire brigade being actively involved in fire prevention—something that the FBU has always supported, and we need to see more of it. That is the balance and change that we are trying to achieve.

As for whether there are flaws in the report, I shall listen to those views, but I think that it is a pretty comprehensive and good report. It is based on the many reports over the past 20 years that have not been acted upon, and it was wrong for the union not to participate and, indeed, to set its face against the report. The point now is whether the union representatives are sitting down, discussing with the employers and negotiating how to reach a settlement. That is still the case at the moment, and we should encourage that.

Points of Order

5.17 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I wonder whether you have had any indication today of whether the Secretary of State for Transport is willing to make a statement to the House on the shocking press reports on Friday and Sunday that he proposes to abandon the targets on reducing road congestion and increasing passenger numbers introduced by the Deputy Prime Minister and, furthermore, that he proposes to cut public subsidy in a way that will ensure fewer trains and higher fares. Is not such a statement important to put right the indication from the Downing street press office this morning that tomorrow's statement will be only a written statement, as I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House would expect such an important matter to discussed on the Floor of the House and dealt with properly?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I have no indication that a statement of the kind that the hon. Gentleman suggests is about to be made at the moment.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask you whether the Speaker would consider issuing a fatwa to Ministers who fail to answer their correspondence in a timely manner—a matter that I have raised with the occupant of the Chair on several occasions? This morning, I received a reply to a letter that I had addressed to the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety on 6 September. The letter has been chased up on any number of occasions, and I finally received a reply not from the Minister himself, but from a private secretary, four months late. That is not only impertinent to my constituents, but rude to Parliament. Will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, raise this matter with the Speaker and find out whether he will issue more general instructions to Ministers about the generally lamentable way in which they answer correspondence?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Speaker has made his views on that matter clear on a number of occasions. He agrees very much with the point that the hon. Gentleman makes and, no doubt, Ministers will have heard him put it on the record again.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. If Mr. Speaker is unable to get the response that my hon. Friend seeks, will he seek a concession from Ministers so that they issue a series of apology notices that Members of Parliament can send out to make it clear that, when constituents do not get a proper reply, it is because the Minister, not the Member of Parliament, has been dilatory?

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if you do make a ruling such as the right hon. Gentleman has just

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requested, will you make it retrospective to the last Conservative Government, including former Secretaries of State for the Environment in that Government?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: As I have said, Mr. Speaker has made his position clear on this matter. I am sure that he would not want to become involved with the specific details of ministerial replies.

BILL PRESENTED

PENSIONS (WINDING-UP)

Mr. Frank Field, supported by Mr. Derek Wyatt, Mr. Kevin Brennan, Vernon Coaker, David Wright and Mr. Andrew Miller, presented a Bill to provide for the distribution of the assets of pension schemes on winding-up and the duties of trustees in relation thereto; to make provision relating to the fees chargeable in relation to the process of winding-up a pension scheme; to establish arrangements for a compensation scheme for certain members of occupational schemes, including for the establishment of a levy on pension schemes; and to establish a review of the status of pensions-related liabilities in insolvency; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Friday 7 March, and to be printed. [Bill 36].

Orders of the Day

Hunting Bill

Order for Second Reading read.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. The House will be aware that Mr. Speaker has put a limit of eight minutes on Back-Bench speeches today, and it would be greatly appreciated by the House in general if Front-Bench spokesmen could also limit their contributions to a reasonable length to allow as many Back Benchers as possible to take part in today's very important debate.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker, would you remind the House what the rules are on interventions, and what is the impact of interventions on the eight-minute limit?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, I will again tell the House how this works. The first intervention that a Member accepts does not count against his time, and he is allowed an extra minute on the end of his speech. The same applies for a second intervention—the intervener's time does not apply, and the hon. Member is allowed a second minute on the end of his speech. After that, there are no allowances at all.

5.22 pm

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

The purpose of this Bill is to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the long-running and contentious issue of hunting with dogs. Some people have congratulated me on achieving the impossible: creating a sort of unity by getting both sides in the debate to express initial opposition to my Bill. I am told that I have demonstrated a special talent.

In fact, such opposition is almost inevitable when entering a debate that has been raging for decades, in which both sides have been in campaigning mode for years, and where hon. Members have made personal commitments to one side or the other. Each person is looking for a Bill that enshrines his or her beliefs in law, and will take some persuading that they should consider supporting anything that differs from the Bill for which they last voted.

I need say little about the Conservative amendment because it says little that is helpful or true. The Conservatives talk about the rights and legitimate interests of minorities, but have they forgotten how their party devastated the rights and interests of minorities and majorities alike, and how rural communities suffered as well as urban communities? That is why Labour now represents some 180 rural and semi-rural constituencies. The Conservatives claim to be concerned about restrictions on individual freedom. Do they really demand the freedom to be cruel to animals? Is that how low the Conservatives have sunk?

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I am most grateful to the Minister for giving way at such an early

stage. Ignoring for the moment the intellectually obtuse remark that he has just made about licensing cruelty, would he tell us, as he dismisses the amendment, which parts of it he considers to be true?

Alun Michael: The hon. and learned Gentleman will have to suggest to me something that might qualify. The amendment is barely reasoned, and certainly not reasonable.

Since I first took on this job, I have been clear with everyone that my task is to put before the House a proposal that deals with the issue in a way that is based on the right principles tested against evidence, that will make good law, that is enforceable and that will stand the test of time. The Bill is robust when tested against all four of those challenging criteria in a way that previous Bills were not.

Many right hon. and hon. Members and others who have taken the time to look carefully at my Bill have, without compromising their views, acknowledged that it is well crafted and will make effective and enforceable law. It will tackle cruelty, but it also recognises the need to deal with pests and to protect livestock and crops.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): How does the right hon. Gentleman's Bill deal with cruelty if it will allow rabbits but not hares to be hunted with dogs and if it will allow falconry and therefore animals to be torn apart by hawks? The Minister has introduced a Bill that is riddled with inconsistencies and that is totally unacceptable. It shows why he is reading from the "Yellow Pages".

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman has shown his prejudice, the fact that he has not read the Bill, and that he does not understand the concept of cruelty. He referred to suffering, which may be caused in a variety of ways. Cruelty is well defined in English law, and my Bill deals with the issue.

As well as being practical, the Bill deals clearly with the moral issue. At the Bill's heart is the key purpose of preventing the cruelty associated with hunting with dogs. That is why it is important to emphasise that the Bill, far from being a compromise, is uncompromising in seeking to root out cruelty. It will not allow cruelty through hunting in the way that the Protection of Animals Act 1911 did, it will not license cruelty in the way that the middle way group's proposals sought to do, and it will not just list the activities to be banned in the way that previous Bills have sought to do at the risk of creating a jamboree for lawyers in the courts. Instead, it goes straight to the heart of the matter by enshrining in law the principle of preventing cruelty as well as the principle of recognising utility. Those principles emerged from the Burns report.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the Minister explain why he has unfairly singled out hare coursing and stag hunting? Will he confirm that he has accepted that both stag hunting and hare coursing meet some of the tests of utility and cruelty? Will he also confirm what he said to stag hunters this morning, namely, that he had incontrovertible evidence that stag hunting is cruel?

Alun Michael: If the hon. Gentleman will contain himself, I shall cover those points in few moments—

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) *rose*—

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon) *rose*—

Alun Michael: I am prepared to give way as generously as Mr. Deputy Speaker will allow me to do. However, I would be grateful if hon. Members would allow me to finish the odd sentence before I do so.

Mr. Maples: The Minister said that, at heart, this was a moral question. Will he explain why it is moral to hunt a rabbit with a dog but immoral to hunt a fox with a dog?

Alun Michael: I shall explain those points in a moment, as I did in the statement that I made last week. The hon. Gentleman should have paid attention to the careful explanation that I gave on that occasion.

Lembit Öpik: Does the Minister accept that, far from trying to license cruelty, the middle way group was also seeking a formulation? I accept that it is slightly different from the one that the Minister has come up with, but the whole point behind our view was that we could reduce cruelty more effectively through regulation than through a ban.

Alun Michael: I accept that the hon. Gentleman and those involved with him sought to open up a debate that was not just part of the polarised yah-boo of much of the debate that had taken place. However, their formulation would have amounted to a licensing of cruelty and, as I have made clear to him on previous occasions, that would be unacceptable.

Mr. Hogg: Would the Minister be good enough to tell the House the difference in principle between hunting with hounds, angling and pheasant shooting?

Alun Michael: The right hon. and learned Gentleman has read with great care his brief from the Countryside Alliance. It is the only group that believes that there should be any read across from the issue of hunting. That has been made a major issue because Members on both sides—those for and against hunting—have turned up on many occasions to vote one way or another. I suggest that he does not allow the Countryside Alliance or anyone else to confuse the issue. The issue is hunting with dogs.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Will the Minister concede that, at no stage, did Lord Burns or any of the hearings in Portcullis House conclude that there was a proven link to show that hunting was in any way cruel?

Alun Michael: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman takes the trouble to read—or watch the video if he finds it difficult to deal with the print—the Burns report,

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the evidence provided to it and the transcripts of the proceedings. He should go through all the evidence and take the time that I have taken to engage with those who support hunting as well as with those who oppose it before he comes to the House with reasoned conclusions.

The principles that I explored with all the campaigning groups during the hearings in Portcullis House in September were those of cruelty and utility. The approach adopted in the Bill is challenging, but it is the way to make good law—law that is "tough and fair", as *The Guardian* said in a leader that called on MPs and peers to support the Bill. [*Interruption.*] Opposition Members seem to want to cheer me up with their entirely predictable response. If they do not like that quote, perhaps they should try *The Daily Telegraph* for size. It said:

"The Hunting Bill published yesterday represents the most serious attempt yet to resolve the issue."

Let us consider the Bill's practical effects. Hare coursing is indefensible. Bearing in mind the fact that the defenders of hunting have argued consistently that their activity is needed and necessary, we have to consider the utility aspect of hare coursing. As the objective is to test the speed and agility of the dogs not to catch the hare—the House should not take my word for it; that is what it says on the National Coursing Club's website—hare coursing has nothing to do with controlling pests, so it fails the test of utility.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): What estimate has the Minister's Department made of the number of hares that would survive modern intensive farming if it were not for a sport that has preserved their habitat, which is available to all wildlife?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman takes me into territory that is not covered by the Bill. I shall be happy to debate that with him another time. The question before us is whether coursing can meet the criteria laid down in clause 8, and it cannot. It may play well in tribal discussions for the Countryside Alliance to say that an attack on one form of hunting is an attack on all, but it does its case no favours. If it seeks to defend the indefensible, how can it be taken seriously when it argues for the utility of another form of hunting? I hope that it reconsiders the logic of its position.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): My right hon. Friend mentions the Countryside Alliance, which has circulated its brief extensively to its supporters in the Opposition. Will he join me and, hopefully, the rest of the House in condemning the act that took place only a few minutes ago when pro-hunt supporters threw a lighted flare at my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, South-West (Dr. Starkey)? Is that the Opposition's idea of free speech and a genuine expression of protest?

Alun Michael: Peaceful protest is the right of any citizen in this society, but protest that involves violence and a lack of reason has no place in it. It is hardly a persuasive way to approach the issue.

Having made the position on hare coursing clear, let me deal with the police. They will gain a real benefit from the powers that the Bill gives to them. As letters from a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House have made clear, the threats, intimidation and violence associated with illegal hare coursing cause fear in many rural areas, yet the only law broken is the law of trespass. The police have few teeth and little power to act. The Bill will give them the power to deal with that nuisance for the first time. The power of arrest, the £5,000 fine and the power of confiscation of animals and equipment will enable that rural nuisance to be tackled effectively with a minimum of fuss and evidence gathering.

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): Can the Minister give an idea of what extra resources will be committed to the police to deal with the thousands of people who will be criminalised by this absurd Bill?

Alun Michael: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not aware of the amount of police time that is taken up because they cannot deal effectively with illegal hare coursing. It is right to give them the powers to deal with it rather than simply letting it take up their time.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney) *rose—*

Alun Michael: I must make a little progress before giving way again.

Let us consider deer hunting, another activity that is dealt with in the Bill. I have already taken one intervention on that. It is necessary to control deer numbers and to disperse the herd to protect crops and growing trees. Although the test of utility may be passed, the test of cruelty—to inflict the least suffering—is not. Both the Bateson report and subsequent evidence to Burns show clear evidence of chased deer suffering even if they are not caught. In stag hunting, a particular stag is selected for pursuit a day before the hunt. Even on Exmoor, where there is a widespread belief in the value of hunting, the belief is passionate rather than grounded in reason and evidence. I have spent time meeting a variety of groups there to understand the situation, and I know something of the distinct local culture on Exmoor.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Minister will be aware from the report sent to him by the Exmoor national park authority, in response to his consultation, that it believes that a ban on deer hunting on Exmoor threatens the sustainability of the wild deer herd. In reaching his decision on deer hunting, what do his calculations suggest will be the long-term life of that wild deer herd if he bans hunting on Exmoor?

Alun Michael: I have taken account of those views; indeed, I have met representatives of the national park authority, local authority representatives and others, and as I said, I spent some time in Exmoor because it is clear that there is an unusual culture in respect of the deer herd. Even some of those who strongly oppose deer hunting acknowledge that powerful cultural attachment, while those who support it appear to be unable to see the weakness of their case. Having given

every opportunity to all sides, I have concluded on the evidence that deer hunting cannot satisfy the Bill's key principles and will therefore be banned outright.

Mr. Cameron: Before the right hon. Gentleman leaves his beloved principles, will he tell us what is the utility of coarse fishing?

Alun Michael: The Bill is about hunting, and I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that he leaves neither the important principles nor the topic of the debate.

There have been arguments in the past about the need to control or protect different species; for instance, about otters in the 1970s and more recently about mink, which has become a new quarry species. My point is that if the principles in the Bill are endorsed by the House, in future there will be good law in place to deal with each and every new element against clear principles and all the available evidence. The Bill will cover all mammals so that tests can be applied when circumstances arise, rather than us having to wait years for a legislative opportunity to clear up an anomaly.

Let us apply the principles to ratting. In this case, the alternatives to using dogs are poisoning or trapping, both involving a likelihood of prolonged suffering and both likely to cause suffering for other species. Similar exemptions on ratting and rabbitting were included in the Deadline 2000 Bill, but as a member of the Standing Committee that considered that Bill, I remind the House that those exceptions were concessions made in Committee, and therefore true compromises, whereas in this Bill they clearly come from applying the key principles set out in clause 8.

Is not that the logical outcome? Who can deny the need to eradicate rats to promote crops and animal health, and indeed human health? Who would wish to insist on the use of a more, rather than less, cruel method of doing so? Ratting is an example where hunting with dogs is necessary; undertaking such an activity just for fun is indefensible, and it will be banned, but there are circumstances in which the use of dogs is less cruel than the alternatives and in which there is a need to control pests, so the activity will survive.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I congratulate the Minister on his handling of the debate so far. If I take out my long dogs and deliberately course a small hare, I will be breaking the law, but if I take them out the following day and deliberately course a large rabbit, twice the size of a hare, I will not break the law. Is not that ridiculous? Why has the Minister got it in for large rabbits?

Alun Michael: No, there is a difference in the species. There is also the fact that hare coursing fails the test of utility. As I have said, it is also a pernicious activity in many parts of the countryside. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not aware of that.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Is not the logic of the argument that rabbits should not be hunted by dogs either?

Alun Michael: I shall leave my hon. Friend and the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) to continue that debate. I have put my conclusions before the House and I believe that they are sound.

The Bill deals with the fact that the 1911 Act specifically allows hunters to be cruel by releasing a captive animal in order to hunt it—a situation in which there could be no utility—so the Act remains explicitly a permission in law to hunt animals for the sheer fun of it. Few who defend hunting would argue for such an approach today. Indeed, the chairman of the Countryside Alliance, John Jackson, has said repeatedly that if an activity is cruel, we should not be doing it.

The principle of utility has also been acknowledged on the other side of the divide, not least in the exemptions included in the options Bill, which the House approved and which was introduced on behalf of Deadline 2000 in the last Parliament. I suggest to my right hon. and hon. friends that through those principles the Bill deals fairly and squarely with fox hunting too.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I am still having difficulty with the concept of balancing utility against cruelty. If, like me, one is against hanging humans for crimes, the Bill appears to be introducing in legislation the contradictory concept of, "We're against hanging, but we'll allow it on Sunday afternoons between 2 and 4 o'clock."

Alun Michael: That is the point of the two tests in the Bill. People first have to satisfy a test of genuine utility—a need for the activity to take place for the protection of livestock, crops and so on—that is clearly spelt out in clause 8. If the utility test is satisfied, we must find the method of dealing with that utility least likely to result in suffering—the definition of cruelty involves needless or avoidable suffering. If another way of pursuing a necessary activity involves less suffering, the proposed activity cannot be undertaken—that is why the issue of deer hunting has not survived the drafting of the Bill. In the case of ratting, however, both tests are satisfied, so the activity can be undertaken. Cruelty is a precisely defined term in law, and I have used it as tested over a period of years.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): What happened to mink? Was the Bill drafted by Baroness Golding?

Alun Michael: No. Any activity involving mink would have to survive the two tests to be undertaken in any particular circumstances.

I suggest to my right hon. and hon. Friends that in applying the principles I have just described, the Bill deals fairly and squarely with the issue of hunting foxes. Of course, on the hunting of foxes, the divisions to which I referred a few moments ago go even deeper. Indeed, they can be almost tribal on both sides. I suggest to the House that in those circumstances it is even more important to be clinical in applying principles and looking at the evidence. Any hon. Member who looks at the evidence in the light of the key principles may or may not reach the same conclusion as before. I simply remind

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all my colleagues that in free vote territory like this, there is always an uncomfortable personal responsibility to be open to new evidence and the power of argument.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood) *rose—*

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) *rose—*

Alun Michael: I shall give way to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman).

Mr. Kaufman: My right hon. Friend said that with regard to the Bill we are in free vote territory, and I am very pleased indeed to hear that. I know that he will understand that when we come to vote next year on amendments that could bring about a complete ban, if the bulk of Labour Back Benchers voted for a ban, and if the bulk of the payroll vote voted against the ban, that would arouse outrage in the Labour movement.

Alun Michael: I can assure my right hon. Friend that this is free vote territory for all members of the parliamentary Labour party. I was about to touch on colleagues' wish to amend the Bill to achieve what is described as a "total ban on hunting" and urge them to reflect. Of course, I understand their objection to the possibility of any form of fox hunting with dogs being allowed anywhere in any form. If my proposals are accepted as drafted, there will be the possibility of some use of dogs where the circumstances justify it. However, Members should consider the implications of a so-called blanket ban in certain circumstances. The Burns report says:

> "In areas where lamping is not feasible or safe, there would be a greater use of other methods. We are less confident that the use of shotguns, particularly in daylight, is preferable to hunting from a welfare perspective. We consider that the use of snaring is a particular cause for concern."

Lord Burns did not suggest open season for all forms of hunting, and neither do I, but only where concerns, to which he referred in a general sense, can be shown to apply—where the need for pest control has been demonstrated and where alternative means of pest control are demonstrably more likely to involve suffering. The provisions in my Bill deal with that situation.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I would like to clarify the position on registration. When someone applies for registration on the two tests of utility and least suffering, do they have to meet those tests only on application, or do they have to meet them throughout the whole period of registration? If the latter, how will that be supervised?

Alun Michael: Applicants would have to justify the period for which they were applying. The provisions in the Bill deal with that situation. The applicants would have to show that the activity that they wanted to undertake was necessary. Clause 8 sets out the tests of what is necessary for the protection of livestock, crops and so on. The evidence would have to satisfy the registrar or, on appeal, the tribunal. On both the cruelty and utility tests, a designated animal welfare organisation can also provide evidence to the registrar and to the tribunal about the activity. Furthermore, the applicants would have to show that they passed the cruelty test. They would have to show that the activity that they wished to undertake with dogs involved less likelihood of suffering than the alternatives that were practicable in their area.

The measure is tough but fair, and it will be simple to enforce. I ask colleagues to consider that when the criteria can be met, the effect of a blanket ban would be to require the use of a method that is more cruel—that is, a method more likely to cause suffering. I am sure that that is not intended by those who support the idea of a blanket ban in principle. I simply ask colleagues to join me in testing the practical implications of different approaches as we consider the Bill further, to ensure that together we get it right. Again, bear in mind that any decision is not a licence to be cruel. The automatic conditions set out in clauses 27 and 28 impose a duty for any activity to be carried out humanely so that suffering is kept to a minimum. The error of the 1911 Act is avoided.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Alun Michael: I have given way many times, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am conscious of your strictures about the number of Members wishing to speak. I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), who has tried several times to get in.

Paddy Tipping: My right hon. Friend has spoken of the practical consequences of the Bill. Has he seen the advice from Bill Swann, who used to work for the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, that in his opinion the Bill will bring an end to foxhunting as a sport, and an end to foxhunting in low country areas by mounted packs? Mr. Swann has read the Bill. Is he right?

Alun Michael: Mr. Swann has made an interpretation of the Bill. As the Minister responsible for making sure that these matters will go to the tribunal, it would not be right for me to anticipate, but it is right for hon. Members to study the Bill and ask themselves whether Mr. Swann's conclusions are right. I hope that both today, in Committee and on Report, we will examine the practical implementation of the Bill. I ask no more of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members than to consider how the Bill applies.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton) *rose—*

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex) *rose—*

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion) *rose—*

Alun Michael: The tests, as I have said, are tough but fair. Supporters of hunting say that it is necessary, but that cruelty should not be allowed, so they should be satisfied that necessary activity will be allowed where it is not cruel.

Mr. Soames: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Alun Michael: Those who oppose hunting should be satisfied that it will be allowed only where it is necessary

and that the alternative methods would be more cruel. Some colleagues have asked why Parliament should hand over its prerogative to an unelected—[HON. MEMBERS: "Give way."] I seek your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am happy to continue giving way, but I recognise that that will cut into the time of Back Benchers who wish to contribute. I am not sure whether I should continue to give way or not.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is entirely a matter for the Minister whether he gives way or not. The whole House will have heard the comments that I made earlier. I trust that he will bear those in mind, and so will all hon. Members who wish to contribute later to the debate.

Alun Michael: I shall therefore be constrained, but I ask hon. Members to note that I have given way 21 times, I think, so far. However, it is a pleasure to give way to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames).

Mr. Soames: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman. As the welfare of the quarry species will be seriously compromised if stag hunting is banned, and also in many cases if foxhunting is banned, where is the sense in that, from the cruelty point of view?

Alun Michael: I do not accept the hon. Gentleman's point. The aim of the Bill is to deal with the issue of cruelty associated with hunting with dogs. The questions of welfare—for instance, of the deer herd on Exmoor—is a serious consequential issue which, in view of the culture that I mentioned in reply to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), needs to be tackled sensibly. It is foolish for people simply to say that they will ignore other methods of deer management or ways in which the herd can be properly controlled.

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Will my right hon. Friend take an example from Scotland, where the Deer (Scotland) Act 1959 allows the culling of deer, so that we have proper control in dealing with pests? A foxes Act could be introduced to allow the culling of foxes while enabling those who wish to participate in foxhunting as a sport to practise drag hunting. We would then all be happy.

Alun Michael: I am delighted that my hon. Friend would be happy. I am not sure that the situation in Scotland precisely translates elsewhere, but there are lessons to be learned from the control of deer in other parts of the country.

Mr. George Osborne: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. He rests a great deal on the objective tests and tells us that he does not want to prejudge the tribunal's decision on whether lowland hunting meets them. In that case, why does he prejudge the tribunal on hare coursing, stag hunting, ratting and all the other activities about which he has spoken?

Alun Michael: For the simple reason that those activities fail to pass the test in general terms and that it would be a waste of time and a bureaucratic addition to the work of the registrar and the tribunal to allow that to happen.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. He provides in clause 10 for the Lord Chancellor's Department to make rules that the tribunal will abide by and in clause 48 for this House to annul those rules by resolution if it so wishes. Is it his intention thereby to enable the House to consider whether the rules genuinely allow for hunting only in very restricted and special circumstances and to reconsider and perhaps annul them if they do not?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend points to a way in which the opinions of this House are respected in the drafting of the Bill.

Some colleagues have asked why Parliament should hand over its prerogative to an unelected registrar or tribunal. The answer is that it will not do so. Parliament will make the law on this matter, as on every other. The registrar and tribunal—

Mr. Kaufman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am sorry to interrupt my right hon. Friend, but you will see on the Annunciator that there has been a serious disturbance at the Carriage Gates, which are now closed for exit and entry. In view of the fact that the Sessional Order that we passed on 13 November lays down that entry by Members of Parliament through New Palace Yard and in other ways should not be interfered with, if it has clearly been broken, can Mr. Speaker be notified so that action can be taken and those responsible detained not by the police, but by the authorities of this House—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure that the appropriate authorities will be investigating those matters even as we speak. I suggest that we now get on with the debate.

Alun Michael: I was explaining the situation regarding the tribunal and saying that Parliament would make the law on this as on every other matter. The registrar and tribunal will be required simply to interpret the legislation as similarly appointed tribunals do in other spheres, such as employment and housing. The tribunal will be a national body, not a local one. Colleagues who have worked in other spheres will know that simple cases can be dealt with quickly by a tribunal that has the capacity to focus on genuinely difficult cases whose circumstances could not have been anticipated in primary legislation.

The registrar will have to be an independent person. We demand such independence in all sorts of circumstances in our parliamentary system. The Charity Commission is a good example in that regard. The registrar will have to have regard to the decisions of the tribunal in reaching his or her decisions. The registrar and tribunal will be strictly non-partisan. They must operate within the terms of the Bill and will not be able to exercise a discretion that it does not allow. They will not start with a blank piece of paper.

The Bill clearly sets out two tests that must be met in order for any hunting with dogs to continue. Those tests must be the starting point for the registrar and the tribunal. It is highly likely that a body of case law will develop quickly, so that subsequent decisions can be made authoritatively and expeditiously. If hon. Members consider the challenges that any legislation has to face—we are now seeing such challenges in

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Scotland, more than a year after enactment—they will see the strength of the Bill. Instead of a variety of complex court challenges, we will have a Bill that is based on principle and tested against evidence, and legislation that can be enforced without creating a legal bureaucracy that is dependent on prosecution and complex legal interpretation after the event.

Those who say that the scheme is complicated should consider how it will work in practice. We will have simplicity in respect of enforcement that has not been offered by any previous Bill, and simplicity and clarity about who can and cannot do what. I have tested out the ideas with experienced senior police officers, who confirm that enforcement will be straightforward and involve a minimum of bureaucracy.

Some have wrongly suggested that the Bill is a compromise pulled out of thin air and others that it is a vindictive attack on a beleaguered minority. It is neither. It is based on clear principles and on evidence against which they have been tested in a uniquely open and transparent process over the past eight months.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay) *rose—*

Alun Michael: I have given way on numerous occasions and I must make progress.

Nothing better illustrates the tribal nature of this debate than the way in which those who support hunting have been encouraged to come to Parliament square today to make a great deal of noise. Given the time that I have taken to listen again and again to such groups, their representatives and groups of individuals who have been involved in protests of different sorts, some well mannered and others not, and also the way in which their genuine concerns have been taken into account, it is disappointing that they are not showing similar respect to the process and to Parliament. Of course, in a free society everyone has the right of peaceful protest, but I remind the Countryside Alliance and its supporters that the process that I have undertaken has involved them at every stage, has been every bit as open and transparent as they asked and has taken the Burns report as its starting point, as they asked.

Those on both sides of the argument should recognise that it is now for Parliament to look at the outcome of that work and take the decisions. I am sure that the vast majority of those involved in the protests today are law-abiding people who will respect the law as determined by Parliament and indeed may regret the behaviour that is taking place. I ask the Countryside Alliance and its supporters, including the more extreme wings, which include some Opposition Members, to show to Parliament the respect that I have shown to them in the past few months. I also ask those who want to return to a different sort of Bill to bear it in mind that the way in which we deal with the Bill will say a great deal about the capacity of both Houses of Parliament to deal with issues that are difficult and wildly contentious. It is Parliament that has to take the decision, but we should reflect that decisions taken through sensible debate frequently make better law than those designed in the heat of the moment.

Mr. O'Brien (Eddisbury): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I should be grateful for your guidance, as I could not help but notice that the Minister appeared to be reading about the blockage at the Carriage Gates as though he knew about it in advance. I dare say that he can clear up the matter by disclosing his text.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Alun Michael: It is clear that the hon. Gentleman does not understand that when one has carefully prepared a text and things change, one adds words. If he wishes to see my notes, he will see that they contain no reference to the events at the Carriage Gates. Obviously, he does not have the flexibility to speak in such a way.

I ask all hon. and right hon. Members objectively to examine the Bill, the clear principles on which it is based and—

Mr. O'Brien: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In the light of the Minister's response, I dare say that he would be willing to give you an undertaking to place his notes, as they are, in the Library.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: That is even less of a point of order for the Chair.

Alun Michael: If it is of any interest, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I shall be pleased to hand my notes to you immediately after I sit down, but I have to say that the hon. Gentleman demeans himself in his intervention.

I was asking in reasonable tones that all hon. and right hon. Members should objectively examine the Bill—something that Opposition Members seem unwilling to do—consider the clear principles on which it is based and the evidence-based process that led to its drafting, and ask whether it will achieve what they believe in while being seen by the public as tough and fair and being strong enough to withstand legal challenges.

Let us remember that while this is a difficult and contentious issue, it is not as important to the countryside generally as the issues with which my colleagues and I grapple day by day: the creation of jobs and opportunities in a strong rural economy, education, health, tourism, transport, post offices, services in rural areas and the future of farming and food—which was given a fresh lead and new hope by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs only last week.

Yesterday the *Sunday Express* also helped to make the case for the Bill, although I am not sure that that was its intention. Its headline claiming that hunting had so far cost Parliament some £30 million was based on extremely dodgy arithmetic, but its point about the cost in terms of parliamentary time and opportunities and the impact on far more important parliamentary business was right.

We cannot go on debating this subject year after year after year without a conclusion. That is why the Government gave a commitment to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion, and that is why I have fulfilled the

remit given to me by presenting a Bill that will prevent cruelty caused by hunting with dogs while dealing with the genuine needs of farmers, gamekeepers and land managers—a Bill that will stand the test of time and make good, effective law. I commend it to the House.

6.1 pm

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Hunting Bill because it seeks to impose unjustifiable restrictions on individual freedom, would increase the suffering of foxes and other animals that will be culled by less humane means, threatens the future of dogs and horses used in hunting and would rob British citizens of their livelihood; because it is intolerant of individuals who should be free to participate in hunting, which is not morally different from all other country sports and should not be singled out for discriminatory treatment; and because the Bill fails to uphold the duty of Parliament to defend the rights and legitimate interests of minorities.

First, let me make it clear that there will be a free vote for Conservative Members on both Front and Back Benches.

The Bill will turn into a criminal offence an activity now lawfully enjoyed by a small but significant minority of our fellow citizens. I agree with one thing the Minister said. He said that at the heart of the Bill lay a moral question, which, to my mind, is this: do the claimed benefits in terms of enhanced animal welfare justify the restrictions on individual liberty that the Bill, even in its current form, seeks to impose? I shall argue that the Bill will impose unnecessary and unjustifiable restrictions on individual freedom, that it will rob some of our fellow citizens of their livelihood and take homes from a number of families, and that, far from enhancing animal welfare, it will do that cause considerable harm.

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): The hon. Gentleman's arguments about the removal of the rights of a minority to pursue a particular activity are precisely the arguments that were used when bull-baiting, bear-baiting, cockfighting and otter-hunting were banned. Obviously, when we pass laws in this country people must obey them. If they do not, they criminalise themselves.

Mr. Lidington: To be fair to the hon. Gentleman, he has taken a long and consistent stand in favour of an outright ban on all forms of hunting with hounds. What he does not take into account, however, is that when the aim is, through legislation and as a matter of public policy, to outlaw a recreation that has been lawful and enjoyed by a large number of people—albeit a minority—for many years and many generations, the burden of proof should rest with those who wish to restrict individual liberty. I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman or others on his side of the argument have proved their case.

Mr. Hogg: My hon. Friend could develop his argument further by pointing out the necessity of measuring what is to be banned against what is to be allowed. If there is no distinction in principle between foxhunting and angling—which the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) enjoys so much—what possible case is there for banning foxhunting?

Mr. Banks: You put the fish back.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. and learned Friend has made an important point. It is clear to those who examine the details of the Bill that it is based on no consistent ethical principle.

I was rather pleased when the hon. Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) teased out from the Minister something of what I believe to be the intention behind the Bill, suggesting that if it were enacted in its present form it might lead to the banning of hunting in most of lowland England and Wales while, perhaps, leaving it to survive in a few parts of upland areas. Certainly, it is clear that the Bill is very far from constituting any sort of compromise. The Minister would be horrified if he believed for a moment that as a result of his legislation the registrar would grant a licence to all or even most of the 300 or so hunts currently operating in England and Wales.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): A number of Conservative constituents have told me that they will never vote Conservative again if the party maintains its commitment to reintroducing hunting if elected. Will the hon. Gentleman maintain that commitment?

Mr. Lidington: I certainly repeat the commitment given by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition that were a ban on hunting to be enacted, we would, on our return to government, make time available for Parliament to reverse it. My right hon. Friend has made that perfectly clear, and we stand by it.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): I would not like my hon. Friend to leave the morality question without thinking a little about the rather curious fact—if this is indeed a moral issue—that no known Church leader of any kind has ever said that hunting is immoral.

Mr. Lidington: I bow to my right hon. Friend's superior theological and ecclesiastical knowledge. He has made an important point about the assessment of a moral debate.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): Labour Members have suggested that hunting is akin to bear-baiting. Such sports, which were banned a long time ago, were intended to enable spectators to enjoy seeing an animal being tortured. Will my hon. Friend confirm that that simply does not happen in hunting? Most people who follow the hunt never see the kill. They are not doing it because they want to enjoy the kill; they are doing it as part of country life, and to control the fox population.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend is right—and, according to my understanding of the present law, if a fox were baited as bears and other wildlife were centuries ago, that would indeed constitute a criminal offence.

[Mr. Lidington]

The Bill would make hunting a criminal offence unless it fell within the narrow range of exemptions defined in schedule 1 or, alternatively, had been registered under the system described in part 2. Much of the debate has centred on the registration scheme. I find it objectionable that the burden of proof in that scheme rests so clearly with the applicant for a licence—which is stated clearly on page 6 of the Government's regulatory impact assessment. It will not be for the authorities to prove that cruelty takes place; if the Bill is enacted, hunting will be unlawful unless those who hunt can meet the tests of cruelty and utility described by the Minister. Those tests are defined in the Bill in such a way as to weaken the chances of a successful application.

Let us first examine the utility test. The definition in clause 8 is extraordinarily narrow: it is, in effect, restricted to the work of pest control. That is the case despite all the discussion involved in the Burns inquiry, and all the evidence heard then about the relationship between hunting and conservation, the role of hunting in species management and its role in providing employment, especially in remote rural areas.

Sir Patrick Cormack: If the Minister were to be truly fair, would not he allow the tests to be applied to the rural community, and to the hounds and the horses?

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend is right. It is striking that the Bill's definition of utility is narrower than that of the Minister in a letter to various interested organisations in April. The letter stated:

"'Utility' addresses the need for particular activities, particularly in the work of land and wildlife managers. It might be described as the need or usefulness of an activity for vermin control, wildlife management, habitat protection or land management and conservation."

Even that list was inadequate because it failed to take account either of the point of my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) or of the importance of hunting as a direct and indirect provider of employment in rural areas where other employment is not easy to find. Yet the Minister's description of only a few months ago was winnowed significantly before it reached the Bill.

Dr. Whitehead: Is the hon. Gentleman making a case against a specific tribunal or tribunals in general? Surely the principle behind any tribunal is the need to make a positive case before it on the basis of law. The hon. Gentleman appears to suggest that the tribunal, if established, would be different from any other in the land and should therefore be opposed.

Mr. Lidington: My argument is that if the Government want to criminalise people, they should define in law the activity that they believe should be outlawed. The burden of proof should rest with the prosecution. It should have to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt in court, as happens with other criminal offences.

Lembit Öpik: Does the hon. Gentleman recall that at the hearings in September, witnesses for all sides accepted that recreational activity should be considered a utility? Indeed, that is the only way one can make a consistent case for maintaining fishing and shooting.

Mr. Lidington: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point. As he said, all sides, not only the Countryside Alliance, accepted that in the hearings in Westminster Hall over which the Minister presided.

Rob Marris: The hon. Gentleman referred to employment earlier. I have never understood why people cannot go drag hunting and thus provide employment.

Mr. Lidington: If the hon. Gentleman has not yet done so, he should study the detailed analysis of the Burns report, because it concluded that the impact on employment of banning hunting would be especially severe in remote rural areas, where it remains an important generator of work. I ask the hon. Gentleman to take it into account that drag hunting cannot easily substitute for foxhunting or mink hunting, and that it is not easy for people who are employed directly by hunts in specific specialist roles to transfer to other forms of employment, even if they can find them in areas such as Exmoor.

Clause 8 tilts the balance still further against hunting. The applicant has to prove to the registrar not only that hunting would help in controlling vermin, but that it would

"make a significant contribution to the prevention or reduction of serious damage".

Those words will further weight the scales against those who wish to apply for registration under the Minister's scheme.

The cruelty test shows that the definitions have again been rigged to place applicants for hunting registration at a disadvantage. The normal requirement in animal welfare law is for the prosecution to prove that a defendant has caused unnecessary suffering to an animal. However, under the Bill, the applicant must prove his case, and that no other method of pest control would have caused "significantly" less pain, suffering or distress. Again, the qualifying adverb is important.

If one relies on common sense or the evidence of the Burns report, all methods of killing a wild animal will involve some risk of causing pain, suffering or distress. As Lord Burns said in the House of Lords debate in March last year:

"There was not sufficient verifiable evidence or data safely to reach views about cruelty."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 March 2001; Vol. 623, c. 533.]

He argued that the scientific evidence that would justify firm conclusions about the cruelty of hunting was not available. Yet the Bill provides that the applicant has to prove his case that hunting is not cruel.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): I am sure that my hon. Friend knows that the Minister believes that the welfare evidence against stag hunting is incontrovertible. However, does he know that, according to the evidence of Professor R. C. Harris and Dr. Douglas Wise on the second day of the September hearings, such an interpretation cannot be justified? Does he agree that several vets, such as Douglas Wise and R. C. Harris,

say that the Government should not dismantle one of "the few and best" existing systems for looking after the deer on Exmoor?

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes the point well. When one considers stag hunting, the veterinary evidence about the experience of the deer is divided. The evidence that Professor Bateson originally presented has been challenged by other veterinary surgeons. There is also a powerful argument, which was most notably made by my constituent Baroness Mallalieu, that deer hunting on Exmoor contributes to the overall health and conservation of the red deer herd in that part of the country.

The Bill provides plenty of further examples of the way in which the terms of trade are systematically rigged against the continuation of hunting, especially in lowland regions. The Minister will have the power to designate animal welfare groups. Those prescribed groups will have the right to make representations to the registrar about any application. No equivalent right is granted to farmers, land managers or national park authorities, despite the strong views that they hold, as shown by the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning).

Under the Bill, the taxpayer will reimburse the animal welfare groups for their costs in making representations. We could therefore be in a position whereby the hunt has to pay for legal advice and any other expenses to do with its application and giving evidence to the registrar, whereas the animal welfare groups—one must assume that they are designated to present the case against an application—will stand to have their legal fees or other expenses reimbursed from taxpayers' money. That is indefensible.

Let me give a further example. The Minister said that someone whose application for a licence was rejected by the registrar or tribunal must wait a minimum of six months before making a fresh application. However, no such limit applies to an application from one of the prescribed animal welfare bodies or anyone else to deregister a hunt that has been registered. So even if the hunts overcome the hurdles that the Minister is seeking to place in their way, they could be subjected to a continuous campaign of applications for deregistration, subsidised by the taxpayer, without any certainty that their registration, once granted, would be allowed to continue.

Mr. Garnier: At the front of the Bill, the Secretary of State has made the declaration in relation to section 19(1)(a) of the Human Rights Act 1998. As my hon. Friend proceeds with his speech, however, he exposes breaches of human rights line by line. Has he been advised by the Minister of how the Secretary of State came to issue that declaration?

Mr. Lidington: I hope that this matter can be explored in Committee in due course. The Minister will have to explain whether that certification can stand up, in the light of the criticisms that my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) advances.

The central argument of those who support the Bill and those who have long campaigned for a ban on hunting is that a ban is necessary on the ground of animal welfare, yet it is clear that the Bill is based on no consistent ethical principle whatever. Foxhunting, beagling and mink hunting are to be subject to a registration scheme. Stag hunting and hare coursing are to be outlawed completely. If the Minister has the confidence that he expressed today in the principles of utility and cruelty, he should leave it to the registrar and the tribunal to decide the fate of those activities as well. Falconry is explicitly protected under the terms of the Bill. Shooting and angling are, at least for the time being, not mentioned. The argument that the killing of a wild animal should be prohibited unless someone can prove that the Minister's two tests can be passed could logically apply as much to those two sports as to hunting with hounds.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): My hon. Friend is making a most important point. In one of the weakest speeches that I have ever heard from the Government Front Bench, the Minister founded his argument on the principles of utility and least suffering, but if those principles are applied to other sports, notably coarse fishing, those sports will obviously and inevitably be banned in turn. Does my hon. Friend agree that we are, therefore, opposing the Bill on behalf of millions of other sportsmen whose activities are condemned by Ministers, even if they are not outlawed by the Bill?

Mr. Lidington: I agree with my right hon. Friend. It is no secret that some of the animal rights groups that have been to the fore in campaigning for a ban on hunting will want to move on, once that goal has been achieved, to campaign against shooting and fishing.

Mr. Hogg: I would like to reinforce the point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory). The whole House has heard the definition of cruelty, as given by the Minister, relating to needless or avoidable suffering. All of us who practise country sports, such as the shooting of game birds and angling, know that those phrases can be used just as properly in the context of those activities as in the context of foxhunting. If that be the case, it is clear that game shooting and angling are next.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. and learned Friend is right. If we listen to comments from organisations such as the League Against Cruel Sports, we learn that they are quite open about that being their ambition.

Mr. Peter Atkinson (Hexham): I should like to reinforce what my right hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Mr. Heathcoat-Amory) and my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) have just said. Match angling, in which the fish is kept in a keep-net and subsequently released, is specifically outlawed in Germany and Belgium.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes his point clearly.

Mr. Banks: Perversely, the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) is making a very good case for the Bill from an anti-hunting point view. I am sure that that is not what he wants to do. Because he is being diverted away from the Bill by interventions about game

[Mr. Banks]

shooting and angling, will he make it quite clear that, although there will be some people—including, probably, some in this House—who would like to ban angling and game shooting, there is not a majority in the House to get such a provision through? There are probably some people who would like to ban the Tory party as well, but there—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Mr. Lidington: The difference between what the hon. Member for Newham has just said and what the Minister has said is that the hon. Member for Newham made his point about angling by saying that there was no majority in the House of Commons to carry a motion to outlaw the practice. The Minister, however, was not arguing on pragmatic grounds. He said that there were consistent ethical principles at work here. It is quite obvious from the intervention of the hon. Member for Newham that there is a complete absence of consistent ethical principles in the contents of the Bill.

Mr. Soames: Will my hon. Friend tell me where he thinks that halal slaughter lies in the great sweep of the argument on principles and ethics?

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) knows that there are a number of people in this country, as well as some of the animal welfare organisations, who object strongly to the practices of slaughter involved in the preparation of both halal and kosher meat. I remember from previous debates that my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) had to wrestle with precisely this issue when he had responsibility for it as a Minister. The argument that persuades me is that, whatever view I or anyone else may have on the slaughter practices involved in the preparation of these kinds of meat, the religious liberty of the Jewish and Muslim minorities in the United Kingdom is of much greater importance when we take that moral decision.

Mr. George Osborne: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for breaking from his excellent speech to give way to me. I would like to return to the intervention by the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks)—I think that is his proper title—who gave the clearest possible indication that fishing and shooting would be next in line if the Bill went through, when he said that all that it would take would be to get a majority in favour of such measures in the House.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne) sees the reality of what many of the animal rights groups actually intend.

Mr. Gummer: Will my hon. Friend return to the matter of principle? The Minister has raised the matter of principle, but if it is to be anything other than a convenient phrase, it must be able to be applied everywhere else. My hon. Friend has listed a whole series of areas in which, if that principle were applied, people's normal activities would have to be banned. As the Minister has no intention of banning those activities, this is not a principle but a convenient series of phrases to be applied to the Bill to carry through what was the prejudiced view of the Minister before the Bill was introduced.

Mr. Lidington: My right hon. Friend is right. The sad truth about the Bill is that the Government—certainly the Prime Minister—accept that a ban on hunting is undesirable and, in practice, likely to be ineffective, but the Government do not collectively have the courage to face up to their Back Benchers who have been campaigning for a ban for many years. So we end up with this shabby, unhappy Bill as an attempted compromise.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): In responding to these points, could my hon. Friend also carry West Ham with us in considering the issue of point-to-point racing, and its connection not only with the hunt but with national hunt racing? If there were dramatically few exempt hunts available, what would the future of national hunt racing be?

Mr. Lidington: Precisely. That is a further example of why the utility test needs to be tightly drawn if the Bill is to apply much more widely than the Government propose. The irony is that it will do nothing to improve animal welfare. It does not propose to protect foxes, mink or hares. In fact, more animals will probably die if it becomes law. The reality is that a lot of farmers and land managers tolerate deer, foxes and hares because they support hunting as a sport.

Mrs. Browning: Is not that exactly why the farmers on Exmoor provide not only fodder, but cover, from which the wild deer benefit? If that all disappears, the wild deer herd will disappear too. My hon. Friend will have noticed that the Minister did not answer my question. Either he has the information as to how long he anticipates there being a wild deer herd on Exmoor or he has not. Would it not be wrong if he has not made that calculation?

Mr. Lidington: It would be quite wrong, but I do not have great confidence that the Government have done it.

Mr. Swayne: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Lidington: I shall give way to my hon. Friend, but then I want to move on to allow time for the many other Members who wish to take part in the debate.

Mr. Swayne: The experience of the New Forest is instructive in this respect. Now that the Buck hounds have disappeared, the forest supports vastly fewer deer, but the Forestry Commission is required to cull them in much larger numbers, as the previous regime merely dispersed the population throughout the forest. It did not kill very many at all.

Mr. Lidington: My hon. Friend makes a powerful point. The truth is that if hunting is ending, there will be little incentive for anyone who farms or owns land to conserve wild mammal populations that prey on their

crops or livestock. Many of those animals that the Bill purports to help will almost certainly die more painfully if killed by methods other than hunting with hounds.

One thing that came out again and again from the Burns report and all the debates around it is that shooting and snaring are indiscriminate—more animals are left to die a lingering death. I refer briefly to a letter describing the impact of the ban on hunting in Scotland and what it means in terms of animal welfare:

"Recently a fox was seen to run within 50 yards of a Gun. A shot was fired head-on and the animal somersaulted. A second shot was fired as the fox ran away. He spun round then went to ground in a badger sett. It would be difficult to believe that this fox had not been hit at least once, probably twice. The Guns, all experienced shots, were making a sincere effort to kill the fox cleanly, but they failed. By law, we were then forced to leave this fox to live with his wounds, or die from them. In all my hunting life, I have never been party to causing suffering. In conventional foxhunting, it could never happen."

If the Bill proceeds into law, more wild mammals will die the lingering, painful death that that correspondent describes.

It is almost surreal that we are spending parliamentary and Government time debating the future of foxhunting when our country is on the brink of possible war in the middle east and we have major crises in our public services, but the Government have chosen to introduce the Bill. If they had wanted, as the Minister said, to spare Parliament that time, they need only have ignored their Back Benchers' campaign for yet another go at legislating on this topic.

The Bill is intolerant, illiberal and arbitrary. It will restrict freedom and do nothing to help animal welfare. The House should reject it.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I have a point of order from Mr. Flynn.

Paul Flynn: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I raise a point of order on the Sessional Orders? I walked across from Waterloo at quarter past 5 with extreme difficulty. May I say a word of thanks to the police? I quoted the Sessional Orders to them and they led me through a crowd of loutish people whose behaviour was very threatening. I witnessed at least one act of violence, which I am sure will be on the television tomorrow. What on earth are those people doing in believing that by holding up the London traffic and causing unnecessary disruption they can persuade anyone—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, but that is not a point of order for the Chair. I call Mr. Banks.

6.35 pm

Mr. Tony Banks (West Ham): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Bellingham: Nice tie, Tony.

Mr. Banks: Thank you. Perhaps I ought to explain that this rather garish necktie, which has been pointed out by the hon. Gentleman, was presented to me at a dinner in Scarborough on Friday night. I said that I would wear it for the debate on Second Reading, but it is not an attempt, as it were, to emulate the shadow leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), whose sartorial taste defies adequate description. I shall not bother to press the button on the tie, as the House will get a rather tinny version of "Jingle Bells". If the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham) wants to borrow it while he makes his speech, I shall give it to him afterwards. The hon. Gentleman has diverted me totally from what I was going to say, but what the hell.

The Scarborough and Whitby constituency has about six hunts, and what bothers people there is the fact that if the Bill is unamended they will still have six. They were certainly not happy about that. I do not altogether agree with them, however, as the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) inadvertently made a rather good speech from an anti-hunt point of view. He said why the Bill should be given a Second Reading and why it should be unamended. I do not happen to agree with him, but he made a good case suggesting that the Bill could—just could—end hunting altogether. *[Interruption.]* We do not have to bother to amend it if it will, but I have to disappoint hon. Members, because that is exactly what we intend to do.

The hon. Member for Aylesbury concluded by saying that surely we have more important things to do. I can assure him that many people on both sides of the House who are bored with the issue would like to resolve it, which is why the Government have made it clear that the two Houses of Parliament will be given the opportunity to do so. Let us do that. We will never agree on the issue, but at least we can agree that we need to resolve it.

Interestingly, the hon. Gentleman used exactly the same argument when my right hon. Friend the Minister made his statement on the Bill on 3 December. The hon. Gentleman said, "What are the Government's priorities when we end up with this statement before the one on A-levels?" What happened when we reached the end of my right hon. Friend's statement and moved on to the statement on A-levels? Everyone got up and went out—on both sides of the House, I might add.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Banks: I will not give way. The issue might not be the most important facing the country—it most certainly is not—but it is not unimportant and we have to resolve it.

I do not intend to speak at length on the arguments over the Bill—certainly not after the diversion caused by my tie—but I must make a few points on the issue. Parliament has been debating the matter of hunting wild mammals with dogs since 1893. There have been dozens of attempts to take Bills through the House. Most failed as they were voted down, talked out or abandoned, but the arguments simply do not go away, and they will not until we have resolved the issue. It is a moral issue about cruelty to animals. I take a straightforward view: it is wrong to take pleasure from the killing of animals. Indeed, it is as wrong to take pleasure from the killing of animals as it is to take pleasure from the killing of human beings.

[Mr. Banks]

All the points that have been made about halal meat and so on are not the issue. There is a lot of cruelty in intensive farming, for example, and I deplore it, but no one can say that anyone takes pleasure from it, or from the halal process, although I would be in favour of stopping both.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that it is very welcome that the Minister with responsibility for animal welfare, in negotiations with the Muslim community, has greatly reduced the suffering involved in the preparation of halal meat?

Mr. Banks: Yes, indeed, I think that 90 or 95 per cent. of the animals killed using the halal process are now pre-stunned, and there is nothing in the Koran to prevent that. I hope that we will make it 100 per cent.

This is not a class issue. If all those who went out hunting were registered members of new Labour, I would still oppose hunting. It is not a town versus country issue. Dozens and dozens of Members of Parliament with rural constituencies will be voting with me tonight—more, I suspect, than will be voting the other way. It is a moral issue and one on which we cannot compromise.

Conservative Members have talked about hunting and tradition, but exactly the same argument was used about bull baiting, otter hunting—only recently—dog fighting, cock fighting, pig sticking, and so on and on. Some say that this is a matter of human rights, but we do not have rights as humans to torture and kill animals for pleasure. There cannot be any human rights involved in that.

By definition, the animals cannot speak for themselves, so we will speak for them here in Parliament. I must say to my right hon. Friend the Minister that, in my humble opinion, we cannot accept a licensing regime. We must support the Bill, because we need a Bill to amend. Some people on our side of the argument say that they will oppose it, but that is crass. Frankly, if it is defeated, hunting will continue. That is precisely why Conservative Members want to vote it down. There will not be another opportunity in this Parliament to end the hunting of wild mammals with dogs, so we must vote for the Bill on Second Reading and seek to amend it in Committee and on Report.

Miss McIntosh: I am happy to give West Ham a penalty point—I fear they may need it at the moment.

Did I carry the hon. Gentleman with me on my remark about the contribution that horses that participate in hunting make to the future of the national hunt? Does he agree that if the number of exempt hunts was reduced to such a low level that the national hunt was jeopardised, this would indeed be a very bad Bill?

Mr. Banks: It would be, if that was the conclusion, but the fact is that drag hunting provides precisely the same opportunities as foxhunting, so the hon. Lady's argument is not especially strong.

The Bill is good in that it takes us a step further. I say that as one who has been consistent in opposing all forms of hunting wild mammals with dogs. The Bill bans hare coursing and deer hunting, which is good. The hon. Member for Aylesbury may have a point: it could end up with all hunting being finished through the licensing system or the failure to get a licence under the Bill. However, there is no guarantee. I commend the Minister for his valiant effort, as it takes quite a lot to unite—almost—the Conservative party and bring out its true face. So much for caring, compassionate conservatism, and welcome back to evil, nasty, vicious conservatism, which gives us back our compass so that we know what is really going on.

The Bill is a good try, and if we did not have it we would have nothing to amend, but because it does not give a guarantee I cannot entirely support it as published, although I will certainly vote for it tonight. I look forward to seeing an end to hunting at long last. I hope that, by the end of next year, hunting will be finished. Then, of course, John Peel will have to find something else to do with his horn in the morning.

6.45 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), whose knowledge, commitment and passion on this issue are widely recognised.

As I represent a rural constituency with two hunts in it, I know that the issue generates high emotions and indignation on all sides—certainly to the extent that it creates serious disturbance outside the House, which none of us would endorse. The hon. Member for West Ham is right to say that the belief that it is a question of townies versus the countryside is misplaced. As a countryman, I do not feel that I am represented by some of the lobby groups who claim that country people should be pro-hunting. Many of my family are engaged in farming, and they have a variety of views on hunting, but I do not think that any of them will allow the hunt over their land, often for good, practical reasons. For example, livestock farmers at Mullion will not allow the hunt on their land because the participants are so inept that they worry the livestock, destroy the hedgerows and disturb the farmland.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman is making a sensible point. Farmers and landowners who do not want the hunt to go across their land have only to say so, but plenty of them see the utility of having the hunt there, and they should not be prevented from exercising their free choice to allow it.

Andrew George: I appreciate that point, and no doubt the civil liberties theme will run through this debate, as it has through all our earlier debates on the subject. Many have said that this is a matter of principle and consistency, but I challenge anyone in the House to claim that they have been consistent throughout on all policies.

Dr. Palmer: While we are talking about consistency, if a future Conservative Government proposed to take parliamentary time to reverse a ban, what would be the Liberal Democrats' position?

Andrew George: That is a matter for the Conservatives, but the hon. Gentleman knows that

there is a range of views within all the parties, and we will cherish them all, as he will no doubt cherish all the views on the Labour Benches. The Liberal Democrats have been consistently in favour of a ban, and that will remain the case. Personally, I think that any review of that position is unlikely. However, I must say that this issue is monumentally less important than all the other country issues that concern me, such as rural housing, the future of farming, rural services and the potential devastation of the fishing industry, which may be literally only days away. Many hon. Members recognise that a disproportionate amount of parliamentary time has already been spent on this issue. Of course, it was not my decision to introduce this Bill, but now that that has happened, it is clearly important to deal with this issue properly and to get it right once and for all, rather than having it come back again.

My concern is that the Bill compromises perhaps a little too much. I agree with the Minister when he says that one of its great strengths is that it is enforceable, unlike the previous failed Bill, which would not have passed the enforceability test for legislation. However, although the current Bill is strong in that respect, it does not set the thresholds for utility and cruelty sufficiently high to make it worth pushing such a Bill through Parliament. It compromises so much that it compromises the welfare of the Bill itself.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman enlighten the House by telling us whether it is still official Liberal Democrat party policy to ban hunting, and if it is not, is there a free vote on the issue?

Andrew George: I thought that I had already answered that question, but for the benefit of the hon. Gentleman—who perhaps was not listening or was not present at the time—I shall repeat that the party policy is clearly in favour of a ban on hunting, and there is a free vote for Liberal Democrat MPs on that issue.

Lembit Öpik: Does my hon. Friend agree that this issue is so tribal—a point that the Minister has already made—that the last thing that we want to do is to add party political tribalism to it? It must be regarded as a matter of conscience.

Andrew George: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend, and as Conservative Members know, a range of views exists among them—[*Interruption.*] Well, they may be embarrassed about that, but such a range does exist among them, just as it exists among Labour Members in this House, among Labour peers in the other place, and among Liberal Democrats. If we see this as a moral issue, it is right that we have a free vote on it.

We will doubtless rehearse many of the arguments that we have had many times before, but I am looking forward to getting down to the nitty-gritty of the Bill itself. I hope that the hon. Member for West Ham is right in saying that amendments will be tabled to it. [*Interruption.*] As a Front-Bench spokesman, I shall ensure that I cover all of the issues that I want to cover in this speech. We must get down to the nitty-gritty of the Bill in Committee, because it is important to do so.

I realise that there are Conservative Members who perhaps do not want to hear about these matters, but I was surprised at their failure to mention the importance of the future of farming. In fact, there are important farming matters that relate directly to the Bill. I hope that the Minister can clarify in his winding-up speech—or in Committee, at least—that the Bill does not unreasonably or inadvertently limit practical pest control measures on farms. I foresee that in a number of respects—I shall not detain the House by discussing them now—the Bill may affect farmers' ability to implement effective, humane and efficient pest control measures.

No mention has so far been made of the issue of fallen stock, which I questioned the Minister about when he made his initial statement. When the Bill is considered in Committee, it is important that the Minister reassure livestock farmers that cast-iron proposals are in place to assist them, should they lose a convenient outlet for fallen stock. It is clear that animal by-product regulations will ban on-farm burial from May next year. The Minister's Department is responsible for such matters, so it is important that he bring forward suitable measures. There is a greater likelihood of support in this House, and in another place, if we are reassured on that issue.

Alun Michael: I can reassure the hon. Gentleman and others who may be concerned about this issue that we are indeed addressing it vigorously; however, the Bill is not the legislation to deal with it. I am entirely happy to discuss how the Bill relates to that issue, but it does not refer to it directly.

Andrew George: I appreciate that the matter may not relate specifically to the Bill, but the Minister will understand that it directly affects the likelihood of the Bill winning the level of support that he would like.

I am also concerned that in certain circumstances, the utility argument may set—

Mr. Bellingham: My sister recently had to have her pony put down, and it was the west Norfolk hunt that did so and removed the carcass to its kennels. Who would have taken that carcass away had the hunt not been there? The council would not have done it, and it certainly could not have been buried.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman is simply assisting me in making the point that such arrangements need to be in place. As I have already said, it is clear that on-farm burial will be banned from May next year. This is an important matter.

Mr. Swire: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: Well, in doing so I am taking up the hon. Gentleman's own time.

Mr. Swire: The hon. Gentleman is on to a good thing here, and I support what he is doing in calling for compensation—if that is what he is doing—or for alternative arrangements to hunts for farmers who wish to dispose of their stock. However, nowhere in this tawdry Bill does it remotely address the question of compensation for those whose livelihoods depend on the hunt.

Andrew George: I appreciate that a compensation culture exists in certain circles; perhaps it now exists

[Andrew George]

among Conservative Back Benchers, rather than among Conservative Front Benchers. I have made the point about fallen stock, and I want to move on to another farming-related matter.

I am concerned that the utility argument may set farmer against farmer. As I have said, many of the farmers in my family will not allow the hunt across their land, often for good practical reasons. However, in constructing a utility argument, we may find that one farmer argues that hunting is necessary in a certain area, but that a number of other farmers and landowners argue that they do not want hunting there. It is important that the Minister recognises that the measure may lead to an unwelcome conflict in rural areas, simply in order to enable an application for a hunting licence to be pursued.

On clause 7, I further caution the Minister that he should not inadvertently criminalise the landowner who permits hare coursing on his or her land. Sometimes, such activity has taken place against the will of the landowner or farmer, has been enforced by a gang of thugs, and has resulted in serious physical assault on the landowner or farmer. The Bill needs amending in that regard. The Minister needs to recognise that the issue is the giving of permission, rather than where hare coursing happens to take place. On first looking at the Bill—and as my initial response to the recent statement made clear—I felt that it constituted a de facto, workable ban on recreational hunting that none the less permitted efficient and humane pest control where necessary. However, I am not sure that it will actually achieve that; it needs strengthening in a number of respects.

Mr. Sanders: The Minister also used the word "humane", but to me "humane" means by or of the human being. I cannot understand how, in any circumstances, a trained dog tearing another animal apart could be described as humane. Surely this Bill ought therefore de facto to outlaw all hunting.

Andrew George: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We will have an opportunity to probe the boundaries of where permitted pest control should take place.

Mr. Peter Atkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: I will not give way any more. I am concerned that other right hon. and hon. Members will not be able to speak, so I will bring my comments to a close.

The Bill will need strengthening in Committee. I will support amendments brought forward by others—and, if necessary, by me—to strengthen the Bill so that there is a presumption that hunting is banned and applications are made for lawful, effective and efficient pest control.

Mr. Atkinson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Andrew George: I will not give way any more.

Clause 48 provides an opportunity for future Secretaries of State to introduce regulations—not primary legislation—that would substantially amend the legislation. The Minister and the Government should consider the clause carefully and amend it so that primary legislation will be required for any such changes.

The Bill sets a number of challenges. The Minister has put himself in the political equivalent of a leper colony and seems to have alienated many of his Back Benchers as well as Opposition Members. However, I take my hat off to him for his bravery and commitment, not to mention the time that he has put into this. I hope that he will be as receptive in Committee as he has already shown himself to be and that he will accept reasoned and reasonable amendments that would strengthen the Bill in the manner that I have described.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that Mr. Speaker has imposed an eight-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

7.2 pm

Mr. Michael Foster (Worcester): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on his speech and the position that he has adopted. I look forward to the contribution that he will make in Committee.

I welcome the opportunity that the Bill provides to bring this matter to a conclusion—provided, of course, it is the conclusion that I and the majority of Labour Members want. I will be supporting the Bill's Second Reading—it is not perfect but it is the vehicle that will deliver what I think the House and the country want. The Minister has made a brave attempt to find common ground on both sides of the argument—sufficient to let it pass through both Houses of Parliament. I fear, however, that he will find very little accommodation to this approach in the other place.

I intend to let my right hon. Friend know of my concerns about the approach that he has taken and suggest three ways in which the Bill could be amended to keep it within its existing form and structure. However, I warn him that if these amendments were not to be made, there is a serious risk that more substantial amendments will be tabled.

The Minister outlined two tests—to prove the utility of hunting and that the alternative methods of culling are less humane. I am confident that in all probability, from what I have seen, read and experienced, the hunting of fox, deer, hare and mink would fail both tests. This is where I disagree with my right hon. Friend. His approach risks becoming a lottery for cruelty. We will not know which hunts can carry on and which cannot. This is a matter of conscience. Right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House hold very strong views, and it is no secret that I want hunting to be banned. I believe that it is my duty to vote accordingly, and to vote to make it happen, not to pass the buck to an unelected body to make that decision. Parliament is elected to make the difficult decisions—the tough choices. I do not want the House to be undermined in this matter of conscience.

Using the Burns report, as my right hon. Friend did for the basis of the Bill, I suggest that the following three areas should be amended. First, the Burns report concluded on hare hunting:

"There is little or no need to control overall hare numbers and, indeed, they are a Biodiversity Action Plan species. However, the distribution of hares is uneven: they are abundant in some areas, mainly in the east of England, and scarce in much of Wales and the West Country. Hare hunting and coursing are essentially carried out for recreational purposes and have a relatively small direct impact on hare numbers. A ban would therefore have little effect in practice on agriculture or other interests."

Notice how Lord Burns put hare coursing and hare hunting together, as he did when he considered the manner of the hunt and the kill. He said later in the report:

"There is a lack of firm scientific evidence about the effect on the welfare of a hare being closely pursued, caught and killed by hounds during hunting. We are satisfied, nevertheless, that . . . this experience seriously compromises the welfare of the hare."

He said in the following paragraph:

"We are similarly satisfied that being pursued, caught and killed by dogs during coursing seriously compromises the welfare of the hare."

Lord Burns reached exactly the same conclusion for hare hunting and hare coursing. I suggest that hare hunting should be included in the Bill and banned outright.

Gregory Barker: Does the hon. Gentleman think that shooting, poisoning, gassing or snaring any quarry would seriously compromise their welfare?

Mr. Foster: That is self-evident. I assume that the hon. Gentleman knows that gassing and poisoning foxes would be illegal. As for shooting, Burns makes it clear that lamping has fewer adverse welfare implications than hunting with dogs.

I would also like my right hon. Friend to consider the activity known as cub hunting. The Countryside Alliance gives three reasons for the existence of cub hunting. It says that some 40 per cent. of foxes killed by registered packs are killed during cub hunting, it disperses the fox population and introduces young hounds to hunting. Burns concludes:

"It does not seem to us, from the evidence we received, that these arguments are wholly persuasive."

The report continues:

"In the absence of a ban"—

that is, assuming the status quo prevails—

"consideration could be given to a number of options for responding to the concerns about . . . cub hunting. These options include: prohibiting the practice entirely; introducing a closed season for hunting foxes, so that hunting would start at a later date than it does at present".

I would like to pursue that issue at a later stage in the Bill.

The third issue that I wish to consider is the practice of lowland foxhunting. The overall contribution to traditional foxhunting is relatively insignificant in terms of the number of foxes killed. Burns makes the distinction between lowland and upland hunting:

"In lowland areas hunting by the registered packs makes only a minor contribution to the management of the fox population, and terrierwork, especially by gamekeepers, may be more important."

I would like to explore the distinction between lowland and upland hunting later in the Bill's passage. However, I warn my right hon. Friend of the inconsistency that terrierwork will be included in the Bill but lowland hunting will not. That issue needs to be addressed.

Lembit Öpik: Am I right in understanding that, on the basis of the evidence that we have both seen, the hon. Gentleman accepts that in some upland areas hunting with dogs may not be the most cruel way in which to control the fox population? I am not trying to trick him into saying anything about lowland foxes.

Mr. Foster: I am always wary of the tricks that the hon. Gentleman might play. When I introduced my private Member's Bill in 1997, I exempted the flushing out of foxes to be shot in upland areas because of the distinction between the pest control method used in upland areas, such as in parts of Wales, compared with lowland hunting.

I have been involved in both the hunting Bills since 1997 that have had their Second Reading. Both were full of promise but also full of uncertainty because of the time and the opposition that they faced. The Minister can do the House a great favour by clarifying that the Bill will be brought to a conclusion and that the other place should take heed of that. Members of this House were elected and our views should ultimately prevail. In the words of the odd poster or two that I have seen today—listen to us.

7.9 pm

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): In my 20 years as a Member of Parliament, it has been my privilege to speak in every debate on hunting. However, I do so today with a genuinely heavy heart as, despite all the Government's protestations to the contrary, it is clear that they are determined to destroy hunting and following that, both shooting and fishing—*[Interruption.]* Noises from the Government Back Benches show that my assertion is correct.

It shows a perverted and grotesque sense of the ordering of the Government's priorities that, at a time when the British economy is reeling from the worst trade deficit in goods since 1697, when the pensions of millions of our fellow citizens are affected by a deeply serious crisis from which the Government appear to want to run away, when, after all the Government's fine and wholly unbelievable talk, the public transport situation is catastrophic, and when they have lost their way in dealing with immigration, health, drugs and crime, they seek to introduce such a draconian Bill. It shows a want and a lack of proportion, and a misunderstanding of the feelings of ordinary people that is wholly astonishing.

Gregory Barker: Is my hon. Friend aware that the latest polling evidence shows that only a minority of the public support a ban and that even that support has fallen to a 10-year low?

Mr. Soames: That is indeed wholly correct and offers further evidence of the foolishness of the Bill.

I want to make it plain that, without question, most people who oppose hunting are largely fuelled by a cocktail of ignorance, spite and vindictiveness. Their

[Mr. Soames]

case is made the more irrelevant for that. Of course, I accept that some of our fellow citizens genuinely disapprove of hunting with hounds and that some of them feel so strongly about it that they would support a ban criminalising the activity. My response, however, is that those reasons do not even begin to justify depriving the individual citizen of the right to take part in a lawful activity and that it would be a deeply damaging day for all our freedoms if ever they were held to do so.

Hunting with hounds is a lawful activity in which ordinary men and women in the United Kingdom have engaged for centuries. Most of the hunts in existence in Britain today are well over 100 years old. They have a tremendous pride in their traditions and in their contribution to the life of the countryside and to its conservation. Many of them play a vital role in the life of hard-pressed rural communities.

I want to make it plain to the Minister that, having hunted all my life and having listened with the greatest care for many years to all the arguments, I truly believe that a ban on hunting would not only have a profoundly adverse impact on the welfare and, in some areas—for example, the west country—the very survival of the quarry and other species, but would also be a gross abuse of human rights and individual freedoms, and would thus be open to legal challenge. Furthermore, it would continue to be a cause of deep-seated contempt and resentment throughout rural communities.

With a large number of my family and 407,000 of my fellow citizens, I took part in the march for liberty and livelihood. As we marched past the Cenotaph, I was deeply moved at the solemnity with which people removed their headdress as a mark of respect and gratitude to those who died in two world wars for the cause of freedom.

Although I do not expect Labour Members to understand the concept, it must be true that all those people who gave their lives would wonder today whether the pursuit of liberty and their final sacrifice for the defence of freedom against tyranny was worth dying for—*[Interruption.]*

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order.

Mr. Soames: When one contemplates Labour Members, one realises that all those people who gave their lives would be deeply and rightly horrified, and above all mystified, that a land that used to cherish the cause of freedom above all else could have sunk so low.

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that freedom is about allowing other people to do things of which one profoundly disapproves? It is not merely about allowing people to do things with which one agrees.

Mr. Soames: Indeed. My right hon. Friend is correct. More should be made of that point.

In fairness to the Minister, he conducted an even-handed consultation process. I am glad that he took trouble over it, but his conclusions are plain wrong. The National Gamekeepers Organisation took a huge amount of trouble to brief the Minister and his officials on the various uses that keepers need to make of their dogs. In fact, the organisation was the only shooting body invited to give evidence to the public hearing, but its views were almost wholly ignored. That is one by-product of an ill-judged proposal.

However, neither in the excellent Burns report nor in any of the consultations was there any proven evidence of cruelty. For example, no evidence was produced in DEFRA's hunting consultation that would necessitate a ban on either deer hunting or coursing. Indeed, the proposed exemption for ratting and rabbitting shows a complete lack of consistency. If it is acceptable, in moral and animal welfare terms, to use a dog to hunt a rabbit or a rat, why is it not acceptable to use a greyhound to hunt a hare? Indeed, I assert that both deer hunting and coursing, as evidenced by independent observers, have strong utilitarian value and are conducted to the highest standards.

The truth is that no case has been made to justify a ban on any form of hunting. There should thus be a presumption in favour of issuing hunting licences; when turning down an application, the burden of proof should be with the licensor rather than that hunting people should have to justify why they require a licence. Those matters will have to be dealt with comprehensively in Committee.

It is surely not the role of Parliament to initiate the passage of bad law to the statute book. Its role should be rather that the love of liberty and the tolerance of the views of others—especially views of which one disapproves, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said—should be made the cornerstones of our parliamentary democracy.

Members on the Labour Back Benches—the Government's Lobby fodder—must be clear that the real issue in this debate is whether it is right for the continuing advance of the power of the state to encroach on our liberties as citizens. Members on the Conservative Benches wholly oppose this rotten Bill.

7.16 pm

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) talked of what we fought for during the last war but I do not remember that very great man, his grandfather, saying, "We will fight them on the hunting fields".

The hon. Gentleman said that he took part in the march of the Countryside Alliance. It was appropriate that he should do so because the march was overwhelmingly Conservative. A MORI poll of people on the march found that 82 per cent. of them were Conservative voters and that 9 per cent. were Liberal Democrat and 4 per cent. Labour voters.

The hon. Gentleman supports an amendment tabled by his Front-Bench colleagues that includes the incredible hypocrisy that the Bill

"would rob British citizens of their livelihood".

The Burns report, which the hon. Gentleman described as "excellent"—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman said that the report was excellent, so his hon. Friends should argue the point with him. The report states that 700 jobs are directly connected with hunting, yet the Conservatives believe that at a time of ultra-full employment those jobs should be sacrosanct.

Between 1979 and 1987, the Conservative Government reduced the number of coal miners from—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] Yes, coal mining is a countryside industry; it is a rural industry. The Conservatives reduced the number of coal miners from 232,000 to 17,000, but the Countryside Alliance did not march for the coal miners; it marched for cruelty—*[Interruption.]* That is what the Tory party is about. It is a satisfaction for me to see how the Tories conduct themselves because they remind me of why I am a socialist.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) referred to what the Bill is about. It is important that he did so, because although we shall vote for the Bill's Second Reading, we do so in order for it to become the vehicle for a complete ban.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worcester talks about the ban on stag hunting. The Burns report says that 160 stags are killed each year. I am glad that will save them. My hon. Friend rightly distinguishes between hare coursing, which the Bill will ban, and hare hunting, which it will not necessarily ban. The Burns report says that 250 hares a year are killed by hare coursing, but 1,650 hares are killed by hare hunting, so the Bill will allow most hare killing to continue. However—this is why my right hon. Friend the Minister has introduced a Bill, the quickness of whose words could deceive the eye, but should not—the Burns report points out that between 21,000 and 25,000 foxes are killed every year, so the Bill will make about 95 per cent. of present hunting licensable. That is why it is utterly unacceptable to a large majority of Labour Members, and it is why we will vote to ban it.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) said that we need to deal with this issue once and for all, so that it does not come back again, and he is absolutely right. The only way that we can do that is by enacting a complete ban. This issue will come back to the House time and again until we get a complete ban.

One of the first Bills that I supported when I was elected to the House of Commons more than 32 years ago, with my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara), was intended to ban hare coursing. After nearly 33 years, we still have not got that ban. I will remain in the House, if necessary, for another 33 years to get it, but I have got other things to do in the second half of my parliamentary service. I want to get this done in this Session.

The key thing is that, by Thursday, we had 192 signatures for a complete ban. We can get more; we will get more. If we have a free vote, we will ban hunting. I want my right hon. Friend to clarify when he replies to the debate tonight that, if the House votes for a ban, that is what Parliament will enact.

I was a Minister when we used the Parliament Acts to put aircraft and shipbuilding into public ownership. The parliamentary process is simple and clear. When my right hon. Friend the Minister responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Vauxhall (Kate Hoey) during his statement, he promised that, if the House of Lords blocks whatever the House of Commons decides, the Government will reintroduce the Bill at the beginning of the next Session. I trust him; I believe him. We have to do our part by amending the Bill to bring about a ban. I will then rely on my right hon. Friend and the Government to ensure that the ban becomes law so that, in the words of the hon. Member for St. Ives, we do not have to deal with this issue again because, if we do, we will and will and will.

7.23 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames), I wish to express my total opposition to this Bill. I do so on the ground that it is a profoundly illiberal Bill—the kind of legislation that brings a democracy into disrepute. The plain and simple fact that one part of society may disapprove of the activities of another part of society is not a good or sufficient reason to ban those activities.

Many activities cause death or injury to animals. Some of them are justified in terms of medical research; others are justified in terms of religious belief—halal meat, for example—and others in terms of sport. The House is addressing the issues involved in the latter category tonight. Most notable among those activities, of course, are angling, shooting and fishing. The central question that the House ought to ask itself is whether there is a substantial and significant difference between angling, shooting and hunting with hounds. If the answer is that there is no such difference, surely there are only two conclusions to which an honest person can come: either all those activities should be subject to the Bill, or none of them should be subject to it, and I happen to believe that none should be.

Lembit Öpik: Is not the other possibility that, if that issue were not addressed, a so-called total ban would create an inconsistency? Surely it would imply that shooting, fishing and angling might indeed be next.

Mr. Hogg: Yes, indeed, that is precisely the case.

I bring some modest experience to this matter; it is perhaps not so considerable as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex. I am a modest angler. I have practised beagling and I support the local hunt, and I have shot game birds all my life. My considered view is that there is absolutely no difference of principle between any of those activities.

Let us first take angling. For coarse fishing, there are no arguments of utility—such fish are not pests and they are generally not eaten. The justification for fishing lies in the pleasure of the sport. That is a perfectly genuine and proper justification, but let us be clear that, to use the words of Lord Burns, the welfare of the fish is seriously compromised because many are killed and all are injured.

The Minister used the phrase "needless or avoidable suffering" when defining cruelty. The phrase "playing the fish" is no euphemism. Most honourable people would accept that fish feel pain or, at least, that that should be the working assumption. The fact that fish are scaly, not furry, and cold-blooded, not warm-blooded are, of course, differences—but they are not distinctions that go to root of the argument.

I want to say something about shooting, which I know a lot about; I have shot all my life. I am talking about game shooting—shooting pheasants and partridges. Again, we are not talking about arguments of utility because pheasants and partridges are not pests.

[Mr. Hogg]

Of course they can be eaten, but that is not the primary reason why people shoot; they go shooting for the sport and to exercise their skill, to be in the countryside, to meet their friends and to see the dogs work. That is a perfectly proper thing to do, but the welfare of the bird is seriously compromised, to use Lord Burns's phrase. The lucky ones are shot dead. The less lucky ones are wounded and picked up later. The very unlucky ones fly away with buckshot in them and die later, slowly through starvation or because they are eaten by foxes.

The truth is that there is no difference between those activities; they are all acceptable or they are all unacceptable, and I happen to believe that they are all acceptable. In any event, they are surely moral and ethical issues to be considered by individuals, not by Parliament.

I know that I have only a few minutes more, so I shall be very brief. The second point that I want to make is that hon. Members should be very chary about imposing on others their own view of what is right and wrong, especially when the criminal law is involved. I deem many activities to be wrong, but I do not wish to ban them.

Mr. Gummer: Will my right hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Hogg: I am afraid that I will not give way.

I am very concerned about religious slaughter, but I would not ban it; nor did I when I was Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. I do not like boxing, but I would not seek to ban it. I find obscenity and pornography deeply degrading, but I am not in favour of censorship, and I would not intervene through the criminal law. I accept that abortion raises moral issues of major importance, but those are matters for the individual, not for Parliament.

That brings me to my final point. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Sussex, I joined the two countryside marches. I was at the demonstration in Hyde park. I look forward to welcoming my local hunt at my house in Lincolnshire in February. They are a cross-section of society: honourable, respectable, law-abiding and decent, and the very bedrock of the society that I recognise and for which my hon. Friend's grandfather fought. If we strain their loyalty by doing things in this Bill that are so manifestly wrong, we diminish ourselves and cut at the very foundations of a democratic society.

7.30 pm

Dr. Desmond Turner (Brighton, Kemptown): I have not seen such passion from the Opposition Benches for a long time. That passion is not directed in defence of the freedom of individuals to have jobs or not to be poor; it is the kind of passion that their forebears probably exercised, 150 years ago, when Parliament was debating banning bear baiting or public executions—it is not very different.

The right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) defended his sporting interests by saying that we should allow people to do things of which we disapprove. I am happy for him and the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) to dress up in ridiculous coats, get up on their horses and gallop around the country—even with dogs—as much as they want, as long as they do not hunt and kill foxes. They can have drag hunts—if they want to break their necks by jumping over ditches, that is fine. That is an individual liberty that I will defend on their behalf. What I find repugnant is the inevitable cruelty and the sport based on ritual killing.

Lembit Öpik *rose—*

Mr. Swire *rose—*

Dr. Turner: I shall not give way as I do not wish to detain the House for long. I want to present some of the evidence that was submitted to the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs inquiry, which is relevant to the issues in the Bill of utility and cruelty.

On the question of utility, much of the defence that has been put up for hunting has concerned controlling the numbers of foxes. A fairly definitive piece of work by Baker and Harris was published in *Nature*, the most reputable journal in its field, which studied the fox populations. Basically, they divided the country up into kilometre squares and went around counting the fox droppings—that is the way to assess animal populations. One of the blessings of foot and mouth was that, for a long time, hunting could not take place, so it was possible to examine the effect of hunting on the fox population. If anything, the fox population decreased during the period when hunting was banned. There was no difference between areas that were normally hunted and those where there had not been hunting. The argument about utility, therefore, does not stand up in relation to lowland hunting.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Does not the hon. Gentleman realise the speciousness of his argument? First, all his argument proves is that foxes were being killed, albeit in perhaps more cruel ways than hunting. Secondly, does he realise that reports in Wales found clearly that, on the 118 farms surveyed, there were 1,600 extra killings of lambs during the year of foot and mouth? There is a cost attached to not controlling the fox population in this country.

Dr. Turner: I am afraid that those who have undertaken systematic studies would disagree with the hon. Gentleman. They would conclude that the most potent factor in controlling numbers of foxes is neither hunting nor lamping but availability of food. Whatever control methods are used, the effect on the fox population is minimal—it can only account for a small percentage of it.

I seem to remember reading newspaper reports, which were fairly convincing, that in the area of the Beaufort hunt, foxes were being fed to make sure that there were enough of them to hunt. I therefore do not think that controlling fox numbers is an argument that can be used to support hunting, even in upland areas. If one believes that controlling fox numbers is a necessity—I do not—other, more humane, methods can be used. Those methods, of course, are not so much fun. They do not involve dressing up in fancy clothes, galloping around and blowing horns.

Mr. Banks: When the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) was telling the House that my father,

among others, was fighting at El Alamein to defend fox hunting, fox hunting was banned in this country, although, of course, there was no alteration in fox numbers. If they were fighting for fox hunting, it was a funny old war, as it was banned in this country at the time.

Dr. Turner: My hon. Friend makes a totally supportive point.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Turner: No, I have given way enough.

On the issue of cruelty, I shall quote what some people said to the DEFRA inquiry. One of the most telling quotations was from Huntsman Jones of the David Davies foxhounds, an upland hunt in Wales. Mr. Jones was asked the following question by a representative of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals:

"what modifications of activity are possible that would eliminate the unnecessary suffering, the cruelty, that would be involved from the chase and unpredictabilities of the kill?"

He replied:

"I do not think there is any way you can".

Huntsmen were in agreement that there was no difference in terms of cruelty between upland or lowland hunting. One said:

"It is no more cruel at 3,000 feet than at 1,000 feet."

I shall follow the same course of action as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman). I shall vote for the Second Reading of the Bill, not because I think that my right hon. Friend the Minister has got the approach right—he has made a noble effort, but he is doomed with that approach—but because we must have a vehicle that can be amended to produce a total, outright ban on hunting with dogs.

7.39 pm

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): The Minister introduced his speech by saying that this was not a compromise but a matter of principle, that he would adduce certain principles that he would apply, and that that would give us an objective way of handling this matter. He proceeded to say that he would not apply those principles to stag hunting or hare coursing. That was evidently because he had already applied them and decided that they did not meet the facts. He then said that he would not apply them to rabbitting and ratting. The principles are very difficult to understand. He could have said, "I am going to do my best to get everyone together, and I will do that by satisfying my Back Benchers by banning a bit, by making a bit difficult and by allowing another bit." We could have understood that, and that is what he has done. However, to suggest that such proposals are based on principles is manifestly untrue.

I do not believe that the rabbit would understand the principles, nor, indeed, would the rat, but what is the reason for the distinction between the two animals? The distinction has come about for the reasons that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) gave. Certain animals—fish and other beings—are less cuddly than others. That is a sentimental reason, but not one of principle. People feel more sentimental about some animals than others.

We should approach the issue by using principles. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, either it is wrong to hunt, fish or shoot in any form or it is not. The fact that a distinction has been made shows that the proposals have been introduced not for reason of principle or animal welfare, but, as we have heard again and again from Labour Members, because they are intended to get at a particular section of the population. It was a matter for great sadness for those Labour Members when they discovered that that section is not made up of a lot of toffs, as they thought, but of a widespread group of people from the countryside.

The Bill's supporters then said that it is a matter of morality. My right hon. and learned Friend pointed out that it might be more sensible to allow people to make up their own minds about morality. One of the issues that I dealt with as a young politician resulted from the Wolfenden report. We argued that what was sinful in some people's minds should not be made illegal. Many of those who fought against us said simply, "I find this repugnant and, therefore, I do not believe that it should be legal." That is precisely the argument that the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) used. He finds something repugnant, so everyone must accept his view. When my right hon. and learned Friend said that we should be careful about imposing our morality on other people, someone on the Labour Back Benches shouted, "That is what we are here for."

The position has wholly changed. The Labour party used to be about the enlargement of freedom and the provision of wider choice on issues on which many people, including many on this side of the House, wished to enforce their own sense of repugnance. I find it repugnant that people voted in favour of saving foxes when, only a few days earlier, they voted on killing babies. Although I find that repugnant, I accept that, in this topsy-turvy world, it is possible to kill babies and call that moral and yet call the killing of foxes immoral. [*Interruption.*] Some of us stand up for morality across the board and not just for what happens to suit our particular voters in particular circumstances.

Dr. Desmond Turner: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No; I will continue with my speech.

We also have to deal with the issue of sustainability. I notice that the Labour party says that sustainability should be at the heart of government. Therefore, when the national park authority in Exmoor says that the only way to keep the stag population sustainable is by continuing with the system that has achieved that goal for generations, the Labour party and the Minister cast that view aside and say that they will find another way. This Minister has not shown a huge ability to find another way on rural matters up to now. I suspect that he will not on this issue.

The final issue is practicality. The Minister refers to a practical system. However, all the legal advice that we have already received shows that the Bill—under a good number of headings—will find itself in the courts again and again. It makes distinctions between people in

[Mr. Gummer]

similar situations, it makes distinctions that have no moral or principled base, and it makes distinctions that could not pass any test in the European Court of Human Rights.

The Bill is also not practical in its suggestion that the police will enforce it. That suggestion comes from a Government who only last week showed that they give even less money to rural police forces than they give to other police forces. Police forces are stretched all over the country, but they are supposed to enforce a Bill that goes wholly against the views of a majority of people in the country. The situation will be so unfair that while the opponents of hunting will be able to seek deregistration again and again at the taxpayers' expense, those who wish to continue with what has been a legal activity for generations will have to pay all their expenses themselves.

The Bill is not about hunting—it is about prejudice, class hatred and all those things that new Labour was supposed no longer to believe in. We have seen precisely what we knew we would see—antagonism for the countryside, for anybody who has a different way of life and for anyone that Labour Members feel they have a need to attack. They have nothing else to offer the people of Britain, and the people of Britain are beginning to catch on.

7.47 pm

David Winnick (Walsall, North): The debate has demonstrated that there is no meeting point between those who want the existing situation to continue and those of us who are determined that there must be change and a total ban on hunting with dogs. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said that we were class motivated. He may believe that, and he is entitled to that view. However, like my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks), I believe that, even if a different social group were involved, my opposition to hunting with dogs would remain as firm as it is. The right hon. Gentleman said that hunting is not carried out by toffs any longer, but by a wider social group. That fact has not changed my mind or the opinion of my hon. Friends.

The argument has been used that debating hunting is a waste of parliamentary time. If that were so, we would never be able to debate the subject or any issue concerning animals because there is never a shortage of other foreign and domestic issues to debate. That would be very odd. If there were a total ban—as I hope there will be—and Conservative Members tried to reverse it in future Parliaments, would they then argue that debating the issue was a waste of parliamentary time? I very much doubt it.

Lembit Öpik: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Winnick: No, I wish to continue my speech.

The official Opposition's spokesman made the position clear. If there is a ban on hunting, it is our duty to warn the country during the general election that, if there is a Tory majority in the House of Commons—we should not forget the words that have been uttered today—it is likely that the ban imposed by this Parliament would go in a Parliament dominated by Tory Members.

Bull baiting was mentioned. It is such an obvious subject for a ban that perhaps the issue should not even have been raised. When, however, the first attempt was made to prohibit bull baiting in April 1800, the Bill did not make much progress. It was defeated and its opponents said that it was

"petty, meddling, to gratify petty personal motives . . . would only give additional means of vexing and harassing one another".

Such was the opposition to an activity that even Conservative Members would agree is totally unacceptable.

Those are much the same words as we hear used today against a ban on hunting with dogs. As for wasting parliamentary time, in 1800 they debated that issue when this country was involved in a major war with France and there was a fear of invasion.

I have no sentimental illusions about foxes. They are a danger and measures are necessary to cope with them. I recognise the arguments; it is merely a matter of what method should be used to control and contain them. The two sides are divided on what constitutes the least cruel way of dealing with them, and that sharp divide cannot be met.

Mr. Hogg: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

David Winnick: No. I want to continue.

Our view, which is supported by a clear majority in the country, is that it is unacceptable that animals, including foxes, should be hunted down with dogs with a scent for blood. They are often torn to pieces when still alive. There can be no possible justification for that.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on making progress on the subject. As hon. Members said, he has devoted a great deal of time to finding a solution to the problem, and has been conscientious. However, it is simply not possible to compromise on hunting with dogs. We must go further and have a total ban.

In the other place, Lord Ferrers said that fox hunting is a sport that has been going on for hundreds of years. He said nothing about controlling foxes; he merely said that it is a sport. Future generations will find it very difficult to understand how such activity has continued into the 21st century. Minorities have rights—I have often spoken in favour of minorities and no doubt will continue to do so—but majorities have rights as well. If there is a clear, sharp difference of opinion between the minority and the majority in the House on an issue such as hunting, the majority must prevail.

Obviously I will vote for Second Reading, for all the reasons explained by my hon. Friends. The Bill needs to receive a Second Reading and I hope that that will be by a large majority. However, it also needs to be amended in Committee. If it is not, the argument will go on in this and future Parliaments. My argument with the Government is that the problem should have been resolved in the last Parliament. We had the majority to do so and we should have taken advantage of it. Like anyone who is in favour of a total ban, I am not going to be intimidated by the Countryside Alliance or the hooliganism and occasional violence with which that cause is associated, including as it has been today.

If the Bill is amended and it is clear that a large—indeed, overwhelming—majority of Labour MPs want a total ban, we know that the Lords will throw it out. I hope that in those circumstances the Government will have the courage to use the Parliament Act. The issue must be resolved at long last and the way to do that is with a total ban. That is what the majority of hon. Members and, I believe, the majority of people in the country want.

7.53 pm

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): The hon. Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) says that a clear majority in the country favour a ban. That is plainly wrong. Eight out of the nine last polls between July 1999 and October 2002 clearly show that only a minority support a ban. When I was first elected, the League Against Cruel Sports told me that the majority in my constituency supported a ban. I am sure that that was the case in many constituencies. However, people have started to think about the issue and that has changed the way in which they vote on it. It is the Chamber that is out of kilter with public opinion. For that reason, it is dangerous to invoke an argument about a majority when one does not have one. Incidentally, it is worth pointing out that the Government were elected with 42 per cent. of the vote. Some 58 per cent. of people voted against the Labour party. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is not suggesting that the tyranny of the minority is a justification to ban hunting with dogs.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): When did the hon. Gentleman change his mind? When I was a member of Newcastle city council, he was a member of the Liberal Democrat group in the city. I do not remember him having strong views on the subject. He certainly did not support the line that he takes now.

Lembit Öpik: In 1992 I actively supported a ban on hunting with dogs. Like many people in this country, despite being told that a majority in my constituency wanted a ban, I considered the issue and was not able morally to support a position that seemed incorrect. As a very educated politician from Newcastle upon Tyne, sooner or later the hon. Gentleman will see the light. In the meantime, I shall pray for his soul.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lembit Öpik: No. I need to make progress.

Hon. Members talked about principles. Let us consider the principles that came out of the three-day hearing—the seminal debate—in September 2002. Lamentably, many of the hon. Members who oppose hunting and support a ban did not bother to attend. All three key organisations accepted that foxes need to be controlled. It is not a question of whether we kill foxes, but of how. Sadly, those who keep talking of a total ban focus entirely on one single process to kill foxes rather than looking at the whole picture.

Lord Burns, in his important inquiry, said that killing a fox with dogs is not necessarily the most cruel way to do it. The Minister has accepted that in certain circumstances and, in fairness, so have the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) and others. Crucially, there was some consensus among all groups on that and other issues. Various key points arose, including that the prevention of undue suffering is a prime concern. It was also clear that the motive behind the use of a particular activity was not a consideration in banning it. If that were the case, angling and other sports would have to be banned because they are enjoyed and involve harm to animals. Another important principle was recreational use. All sides accepted that that was a utility that should not be discounted to zero. The use of dogs to hunt animals is acceptable in certain circumstances. Once again, there is nothing in principle that is wrong with using dogs to kill animals.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Did any evidence to the three-day hearing include, as part of the utility argument, the principle of sustaining a living and viable countryside from the aspect not only of people working in the countryside, but of biodiversity too?

Lembit Öpik: The discussion on that was equivocal because there was no consensus around a particular principle. However, hon. Members will have noted the hon. Gentleman's point.

The principle that suffering can be reduced by modifying practices was accepted. Scientific opinion was clearly divided on the degree of suffering caused by the chase of an animal. No one came up with unequivocal proof that it was cruel to chase the animals and that they felt suffering. However, we did accept that there is a problem with wounding when an animal is shot. In other words, while the kill is almost always instantaneous with dogs, killing a fox with guns is sometimes a messy business that can be drawn out, which causes a lot of suffering.

Another crucial principle was that specific activities within the range of methods involving the hunting of wild animals with dogs can be regulated and controlled. The point was also made that regulation can work because hunts have the capacity to modify their actions. We know that because one of the witnesses who monitored hunts, who was an anti-hunt protester, said that the behaviour of hunts often changed when he observed it. So hunts can regulate and control their behaviour, and inspection works.

David Taylor: As someone who represents a constituency in which fox hunting takes place on a reasonable scale, can the hon. Gentleman tell me whether regulation and registration can work? How can hunts control that small but dark underbelly of people who are involved in some of the cruellest practices of all, such as terrier cubbing and so on?

Lembit Öpik: That is why I support licensing and regulation. It was a hunt monitor himself who said that hunts behaved differently when he watched them.

It is sad that the hon. Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) did not have time to hear the rest of the debate, because I want to deal with the weakness of calling for a total ban. The right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the hon. Member for Walsall, North also called for that, but no one has explained what a total ban means.

[Lembit Öpik]

If we look at Scotland we see the mess that is created when we try to ban hunting with dogs, because all that has changed is the fact that instead of riding horses to hounds, people ride horses while carrying guns. It is impossible not to have exemptions if one wants to be fair to the public, and once there are exemptions, there is no question but that the activity will continue. Regulation can be achieved, but we see in Scotland that the most intensive effort to ban hunting with dogs simply failed.

The amazing comments by the hon. Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) included a description of the clothing of people who hunt, which has nothing to do with the moral issues here. The hon. Gentleman also made the point that he is happy to allow individuals to hunt on horseback with dogs as long as they do not kill any animals. Let us be clear: dogs are genetically programmed to kill animals from time to time, so even the hon. Gentleman must accept that there must be exemptions.

The middle way group is is concerned about the over-strict definition of utility. We think that recreational activity should be included because that seemed to be a point of consensus in the three-day hearing in September. If the concept of utility is too limited, an inconsistency is introduced, which must mean that shooters, fishers and anglers will be concerned about the potential extension of the ban to their activities. I make no bones about it: if I were a member of an animal welfare organisation and I achieved a ban on hunting with dogs, I would naturally try to go further. There will be a momentum in those organisations to try to achieve more.

Rats and rabbits are exempted, but should not there be provision for mice, voles, shrews and squirrels? Dogs do not distinguish between hares and rabbits, so we may make criminals of people who go out with good intentions of killing rats and rabbits but end up killing mice or voles. We need to consider exemptions in Committee.

There is very little scientific evidence to show that killing a fox with dogs is better or worse than using another method. The middle way group will seek to initiate research in the months ahead which may be useful in Committee. We are also concerned about what may be an arbitrary distinction between the forms of hunting that will be allowed and stag hunting and hare coursing. Why not allow those questions to be determined by the registrar according to the same criteria?

The Bill provides a serious opportunity for us to have a rational debate, leading to a sensible and sustainable outcome, but only if we have an informed debate. It is not good enough to sit here for two hours, make a speech and walk out. If Members are serious about the matter, they will study the findings of the Burns inquiry and the three-day hearing, which was a seminal achievement by the Minister in obtaining information on the matter, and, in a cool, collective and, so far as possible, non-tribal manner, come to a lasting solution. If we achieve that, we will be a credit to a democratic institution; if we do not, it will be to our shame that we sought to regulate on the basis of emotion rather than on the basis of the facts, which are there for all to read.

8.3 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Tonight we have seen the anger of the Tory grandees and the violence out in Parliament square, and the reason is obvious—they know that the game is up. The Bill will be passed. We have a commitment from the Minister, with which I am sure the Prime Minister agrees, that there will be a free vote for Labour Members and Ministers. We also have a commitment from the Government that if the Bill is thrown out by the other place, we will use the Parliament Act. That is why there is real anger among the Opposition, in the House and on the streets outside. Tonight is the beginning of the end for hunting as we have known it in this country.

My right hon. Friend is a very clever Minister. He has worked hard for many hours, consulted everybody and introduced a Bill that hardly anybody agrees with, but nobody blames him. That is the art of being a great politician. I welcome the Bill because it does two things: it bans hare coursing and it bans stag hunting, and I have for a long time been part of attempts to get those measures passed. The Bill will be much better when we have amended it, and I am sure that it will be amended so that it bans much more hunting.

I want to concentrate on upland hunting. I know what the Burns report said about upland hunting, which in my area is run by the fell packs. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) mentioned John Peel, who, like me, was a Cumbrian. John Peel is part of our history; he is not part of our future. There can be no difference between fell packs and mounted packs, whether in Cumbria or Leicestershire. If an activity is cruel, it is cruel, and I find it difficult to believe that there is utility in it.

If we consider the fell packs—the Ullswater, the Melbreak and the Blencathra are those nearest me—we find that they use artificial earths. They dig a hole and put in a pipe so that the foxes will be nice and warm and able to breed. The local hunt's code of practice says that foxhunting is a sport.

Miss McIntosh: I have been out with the Blencathra hunt. Has the hon. Gentleman? If so, is he aware that one reason it goes to such lengths is to ensure a balance in the countryside for future generations of foxes? My problem with the Bill is that it would lead to the eradication of all foxes, which is not what the Opposition want.

Mr. Martlew: When the Blencathra gets back home to Cumbria, it says that hunting is necessary for pest control; the hon. Lady says that it is not necessary for pest control and that the hunt needs extra foxes for its sport. I do not think that it will be pleased with the hon. Lady's intervention.

There is no doubt that in the Lake district, hunts use artificial earths. Not only that, but it is recorded that they put sheep carcases inside to make sure that the foxes have enough to eat. The idea that hunting is pest control is wrong. I hope that the Minister is aware of that. I am sure that he is taking notes.

Hunting also causes problems of disturbance, disruption and trespassing in the Lake district, as it does everywhere else. It can be argued that because the roads are busy in the Lake district the hounds are in greater

danger there than in many other parts of the country. There are other dangers in the fells. There are many records of hounds being killed by falling off a crag. In the 1990s, the Ullswater mountain rescue team was called out to rescue hounds that were fell-bound.

A hunt follower of 30 years' experience came to see me. He was not in favour of banning hunting, but he said that hounds were cruelly treated. He told me of a hound with a broken leg which was made to go out on the chase and of hounds that were kept half-starved so that they would run better. He also said that a hound's life is brutal and short because when it is too old to follow the hunt, it is not retired; it gets a bullet in the back of the head.

David Taylor: Is it not also the case that apart from shooting hounds that are too old, hunts shoot at an early age hounds that do not show a great inclination to hunt?

Mr. Martlew: That is the case, and it is another reason for cub hunting. It not only trains hounds to kill foxes; it allows the hunt to find out which hounds do not have the killing instinct. Young hounds without that instinct are destroyed—there is no argument about that.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Is the hon. Gentleman seriously arguing that shooting or poisoning foxes—many of them suffer a lingering, evil death for many hours if not days—is better than dispatching them with hounds which, by instinct, must kill the fox quickly so that it does not nip them?

Mr. Martlew: I was arguing strongly that it was bad not only for the foxes but for the hounds as well.

I believe that there is a need for fox control by lamping on the high ground of the Lake district. The idea that we can control foxes with hounds is rubbish. A BBC video called "Cumbrian Tales" featured a local landowner who was a member of the mounted hunt and a local shepherd who supported foxhunting. When the shepherd had a problem with a fox, he did not tell the local hunt, but got a couple of his mates to flush out the fox and shoot it. I asked a shepherd friend of mine what he does if he has a problem with foxes. He told me, "I get the men with the lamps."

Some will argue that we cannot have people with guns on the fells, as there are too many tourists. However, lamping happens at night in remote areas, and there has never been an accident or incident with anybody lamping or killing foxes—to argue otherwise is to argue from a false premise. Finally, I welcome the opportunity to vote for the Bill. However, it is nonsense to ban foxhunting in Leicestershire but leave it in Cumbria.

8.11 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): I agree with the hon. Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) that it would be nonsense to ban fox hunting in Leicestershire. Apart from that, however, I fear that we disagree.

I have attended or participated in every debate on hunting since I was elected to the House in April 1992. Each of those debates has been fuelled by a mixture of personal experience, knowledge, prejudice, ignorance, enthusiasm and an unwillingness to appreciate the other side's argument. Every hon. Member has come to this and previous debates with a firm and fixed opinion. He or she has left the Chamber and gone into the Lobby with that opinion unchanged by any of the arguments deployed during the course of debate. Tonight will be no exception—the issue that we are addressing will leave us as divided tonight as it has in the past.

That does not give me great confidence in the Chamber's ability to reach a rational and sensible conclusion on what to do about hunting, not least because I am as guilty as every other Member here—I passionately support the continuance of hunting in Leicestershire and Cumberland and passionately reject the arguments of all hon. Members who have spoken against its continuance. If I feel sorry for anybody, however, it is for the Minister. When the options Bill was in Committee during the last Parliament, he spoke with considerable force in favour of a total ban on hunting, but he has now been forced to come to the Chamber to represent the Government and make an argument in which he clearly does not believe. That is one of the professional problems that goes with being a Minister—sometimes Ministers have to advance Government policy contrary to their personal opinion. The Minister has done so, and no doubt he will now tell me why.

Alun Michael: I have introduced a Bill based on the principles that I believe are right after looking at all the arguments and available evidence. I should be grateful if the hon. and learned Gentleman would accept that from me.

Mr. Garnier: If that is what the right hon. Gentleman says, of course I believe him—he is an hon. Member of the House. However, it is interesting that the views that he expressed in Committee on the last occasion are poles apart from the views that he purports to express on this occasion, but let us leave it there.

Lembit Öpik: As was said in an intervention during my speech, does the hon. and learned Gentleman accept that some of us have changed our views, as the Minister also suggested? I happily admit to having done so, not least because of the three-day hearing that delivered more consensus than those who did not attend it may accept. In addition, the public themselves have changed—a majority supporting a ban has been replaced by a majority not supporting a ban, so there has been movement.

Mr. Garnier: The hon. Gentleman's opinion may have changed since he became an adult and served on Newcastle city council, but I do not believe that his opinion has been changed by any of the debates in the House since he became a Member. However, I have made my point, and people may consider it.

I shall comment briefly on the Bill, and shall do so in headlines because we have only a short time available and plenty of other Members wish to contribute to our debate. It is intellectually confused, and is a muddle that has been exposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) and other hon. Members who have spoken on both sides of the argument. For the hon. Members for West Ham (Mr. Banks) and perhaps for Walsall, North (David Winnick) the Bill is not consistent. They and many Conservative Members

[Mr. Garnier]

believe that cruelty cannot be licensed in one place and banned in another—that is what the Bill attempts to do. Furthermore, it makes an improper distinction between the welfare of rabbits, rats and deer; it takes another view of foxes and, most incomprehensibly of all, seems to permit falconry.

The Bill's muddled status is also demonstrated by the Minister's inability—he faced this problem on 3 December when he made his statement—to explain what he had learned from the three-day hearing that he could not have learned from the Burns inquiry. The evidence presented by Burns is no different in essence from the evidence given in the Portcullis House hearings, yet the Minister proclaims those hearings as a new advance.

The Bill is economically illiterate. Banning hunting in my county will have a serious and immediate financial and economic effect. Although the figures are pooh-poohed by those who disagree with me, there will be a 100 per cent. hit for people who will lose their jobs and individuals whose businesses and livelihoods will be damaged. I have heard the arguments about what the Conservatives did when we faced the coal-mining problem, but if two wrongs can be said to have existed, they do not make a right. That argument is of no assistance to people in my constituency, the county of Leicestershire and elsewhere who are to lose their jobs. Furthermore, the registration and tribunal system introduced by the Bill is uncosted, and I am surprised that the Minister did not think it appropriate to tell us how much that great bureaucratic system will cost.

The Bill is politically inept, as is amply demonstrated by arguments deployed tonight. It is a Bill that pleases nobody and annoys everybody. That may be a wonderful trick to pull off, but it does not go down well with my constituents or Members on both sides of the argument. To return to a point made by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George)—I urge people who did not hear his speech to read it tomorrow—the Bill will be socially divisive. It is also morally unjustifiable—I merely refer hon. Members to the speeches of my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). Indeed, some of their remarks were underlined by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik). There is no moral justification for the Government's position or that of people who are introducing the Bill on their behalf that I have been able to appreciate or understand. Nor do I believe that the arguments for the Bill are coherent or cogent.

Finally, the Bill is legally unacceptable. Extraordinarily, its superstructure rests on two highly subjective tests that are to be adjudicated by a registrar and, if necessary, on appeal to tribunal—they may be presented with different evidence of fact and opinion to justify arguments which, if applied to another part of the county or country, may not be successful. The fact that the burden of proof rests upon those who wish to continue hunting seems to me inimical to natural justice. It is of some interest that the Bill is silent about the standard of proof to which the applicants will have to conform.

The tests set out in clause 8 are, as my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury pointed out, so vague as to be almost indefinable in anticipation. How can any person who wishes to practise hunting, anyone who wishes to represent those who wish to appear in front of the registrar—I understand that there will be a number of registrars—or any member of an appeal tribunal come to a considered view about expressions such as "significant contribution", "serious damage", "a contribution equivalent to" or "significantly less pain", and do so on a consistent basis right across the country?

Mr. Swire: Will my hon. and learned Friend give way?

Mr. Garnier: I will not, if my hon. Friend does not mind. I see that I have 48 seconds left.

I must also express concern about the fact that, unfairly, animal welfare groups, whose identity has yet to be specified, are to be provided with Government finance, whereas those who wish to apply to hunt are to be given no Government financial assistance at all.

There is so much wrong with the Bill that to give it a Second Reading would be an abuse, and to prevent it from having a Second Reading would be to do it a kindness. I trust that those who are persuaded to give it a Second Reading and permit it to go to Committee will listen carefully to the arguments deployed in Committee and not allow the Bill to be a disguised ban Bill, when that is not what the public want or require.

8.21 pm

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the debate, which I hope will finally bring a conclusion to the matter, although perhaps not the conclusion envisaged in the current wording of the Bill.

When previous Governments have legislated to ban cruel and barbaric sports, if one can call them sports, such as foxhunting, bear baiting and badger digging, they have done so on a moral basis. The strength of public opinion opposed to such bloodthirsty activities has promoted bans to stop them, so society has long accepted the principle of banning activities that are cruel to animals. A Bill to ban bull baiting was passed by Parliament some 200 years ago, and bans on bear baiting, cock fighting and dog fighting have followed since. When these issues were discussed in Parliament, as my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (David Winnick) made clear, many of the arguments that we hear today in support of hunting with dogs were made at that time, but to my knowledge there has never been a suggestion that those activities should be licensed.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): Will my hon. Friend note that, contrary to the statements made twice by the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), there is support for a ban on hunting, as evidenced in appendix 1 to the research paper in the House of Commons Library?

Mark Tami: I thank my hon. Friend for that point. There was a Sky poll today which showed that nearly two thirds of people are against foxhunting. That figure is consistently thrown up by surveys. I do not know

where the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) gets his figures, but they are somewhat different from the facts.

As I said, other so-called sports were banned because people found such activities abhorrent. Most people view hunting with dogs with the same abhorrence. In England and Wales, hunting with dogs is the only activity where animal is set upon animal for so-called sport, and has not yet been outlawed. The idea that there is some middle way whereby animal cruelty can be licensed is nonsense.

Mr. Swire: I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would clarify one point. He said that England and Wales were the only two places where animal was set upon animal. He represents a Scottish seat. In some circumstances, that happens in Scotland, does it not?

Mark Tami: Unfortunately, I do not represent a Scottish seat. The hon. Gentleman has made his point, but perhaps he should get his facts right to begin with.

We cannot justify compromising the welfare of foxes or any other animal just because a small minority of people enjoy hounding them to their deaths.

Mr. Roger Williams: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mark Tami: I will not. I have given way twice, and we are eating into other hon. Members' time for speaking.

If there is a proven need for an individual animal to be controlled, that should be done swiftly and humanely. If it can be shown that an activity is cruel and unnecessary, and that there is a more practical and humane alternative, the only justifiable outcome is that that activity should be banned. I can understand those who argue that hunting is not cruel—not that I agree with them or accept their contention—more than those who say that hunting is cruel, but it is okay to license it.

The test that the Government propose in relation to hunting with dogs is based on utility and cruelty. As a result of that test, the Government rightly propose to ban hare coursing and deer hunting outright—hon. Members clearly welcome that—but to introduce a licensing system for foxhunting, which the majority of hon. Members probably do not welcome.

The concept of utility is open to broad interpretation, but I believe there are two aspects of it: the extent to which it is necessary to kill certain animals, and when that is the case, the most appropriate method of carrying out that task. Whether or not an individual animal is designated a pest has no bearing on whether it should experience pain or suffering. Any pest control method should pass three tests: it should be necessary, effective and humane.

Is it even necessary to control foxes? The Burns inquiry found that there was a general perception among farmers, landowners and gamekeepers that that was indeed the case. Individual foxes can undeniably cause local difficulties, but there is little evidence to support the view that the fox is a significant agricultural pest nationally. The Burns Committee stated:

"It is clear that only a small proportion of foxes kill lambs; otherwise lamb losses would be much higher".

In addition, a study published in September showed that the number of attacks by foxes on lambs and other livestock is low, and that in some circumstances such attacks can be controlled by better husbandry and fencing.

The next test is whether fox hunting with dogs is effective. Research has shown that fox populations are resistant to culling. As regards the effectiveness of foxhunting, the Burns inquiry concluded that

"the overall contribution of traditional fox hunting, within the overall total of control techniques involving dogs, is almost certainly insignificant in terms of the management of the fox population as a whole".

Research published in September in the science journal *Nature* found that a ban on hunting would not have a dramatic impact on fox numbers. Even the Countryside Alliance used to claim that hunting was effective in controlling only 5 per cent. of the fox population, but seems to have dropped that argument now as it contradicts its case that hunting is an effective means of controlling fox numbers.

The final test is whether foxhunting with dogs is humane. The Burns committee concluded that hunting with dogs

"seriously compromises the welfare of the fox".

If that is not an understatement, God knows what is. The results of the four post-mortems commissioned by the Burns committee on foxes hunted above and below ground showed that all had suffered multiple injuries caused by dogs before being killed. In summary, it is clear that there are no circumstances in which the continuation of traditional foxhunting with dogs can be justified.

The introduction of a licensing system would send out a message saying that foxhunting is less cruel than hare coursing or deer hunting with dogs, but that argument cannot be sustained by any of the available evidence. Licence or no licence, foxhunting is cruel, barbaric, unnecessary and very ineffective. I for one would find it extremely difficult to go back to my constituency and say that I had voted for legalised cruelty, and I will not do it. We need a total ban and we need it now.

8.29 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Since coming to the House, I have consistently opposed any attempt to ban hunting. I have done so on two premises. First, hunting, certainly as it is practised in my constituency, goes with the grain of country practice and of maintaining a sustainable, lively and viable countryside. Secondly, I have not seen any evidence to date to suggest that hunting with hounds is any more cruel than any other method of disposing of foxes.

One of the key issues that we must understand in this debate is that those on every side of the argument have agreed to a greater or lesser extent that we must control fox numbers. The variation relates to where those numbers need to be controlled. The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) spoke about individual foxes as if they could be taken to a cashpoint and fined for antisocial behaviour because they had attacked a lamb in certain circumstances or whatever else. He must understand the wider context. He spoke about better husbandry and fencing, but fences cannot be erected along miles of open countryside. Indeed, his

[Mr. Simon Thomas]

Government want to turn that countryside into a right-to-roam area. Surely, they do not want it to be electrified as part of stock husbandry.

We need to work with the grain of sustainable and forward-thinking country practices and to try to support farmers in maintaining a biodiverse countryside while recognising that the fox is the top predator there, so it is down to us as human beings—after all, we created the situation—to try to do the best that we can for the whole biodiverse countryside with the minimum of cruelty to foxes and other species.

Mr. Roger Williams: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the right to roam. How can that right be reconciled with lamping, which requires the use of rifles in the dark on open land to which legislation gives a public right of access?

Mr. Simon Thomas: I recognise the problem to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I believe that lamping has a future in controlling fox populations. We will have to address that issue in dealing with the Bill.

I accept that there is a large body of public opinion outside the House—it varies and can represent a majority or a slight minority, but it is always at about 40 per cent.—saying that foxhunting should be banned, as well as hare coursing and stag hunting by association. As legislators, we cannot ignore that. There may be inconsistencies in the arguments. Indeed, the opinions advanced by the right hon. and learned Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) have great validity in philosophical terms. The fox is sometimes seen as much more worthy of protection than other species simply because it is furry. None the less, as legislators, we cannot ignore what people are telling us, so it is important that we bring some conclusion to the process.

That is why I think that the Minister has worked hard on the Bill and give him credit for having undertaken the three-day hearings, listened to hon. Members and tried to introduce a Bill that can work in practice. The one thing that I recognise in the Bill is that it has underpinning principles. This is the first time that we have debated a Bill on hunting that is based on principles, rather than prejudices. The principles go wrong in some of the workings. On stag hunting, for example, a fair question has been raised as to whether we should prejudge its banning and whether it would be better to apply the principles in individual cases, as it may be possible to convince an independent authority or even animal welfare groups that a stag hunt is better in the wider context in some circumstances.

The two clear underlying principles are cruelty and utility. Cruelty to animals is defined and established in law, and I do not see a problem in making the Bill work in that context. Utility is a bit more difficult. The Bill demands that those of us who support a more integrated, holistic and traditional way of maintaining the countryside show how hunting with hounds, whether of foxes, stags or whatever, works for the greater good. It requires us to show that the individual evil of killing a fox in a particular way is offset by the greater good or utility of maintaining the countryside. The Burns report said that it was not clear in upland regions in Wales, Cumbria and other areas whether killing the fox by hunting with hounds was necessarily more cruel than doing so by any other method, and that that was a moot point. We must bring together the two principles to which I have referred and make them work in practice.

Let me tell a story relating to my constituency. This did much to persuade me that the Bill is the only realistic way of proceeding, although it would have to be amended in Committee to accord with my expectations.

In 2001, during the foot-and-mouth outbreak, hunting with hounds was of course banned throughout my constituency, although we did not suffer from foot and mouth as such. The constituency contains a site of special scientific interest called Cors Fochno in one of the low-lying bog areas north of Aberystwyth and along the Dyfi estuary. Under the European habitats directive, it is now a special area of conservation as well as an SSI. I told the Minister that when he was kind enough to meet me in the summer.

When foxhunting was banned in that area, the Countryside Council for Wales decided to control the fox population in the bog in a different way. It called in shooters and tried to introduce lamping, for instance. The move was a complete failure, resulting in enormous predation of ground-nesting birds by an over-expanding fox population.

The whole area is a bird nature reserve, abutting the RSPB, called Ynyshir. If its carefully established ecosystem was to be maintained—it being both an SSSI and a home for waders and visiting winter birds—the fox population had to be controlled. As soon as it was physically possible, the hunt was invited back in. It was the only sustainable option. I would expect the Bill to give the go-ahead to such measures, and I would like Labour Members in particular to apply them to their own circumstances.

By now, surely, we should have moved away from circumstances in which any form of foxhunting is seen as an issue on which to raise the class standard. There are more important issues on which to raise it. I agree with some of the criticisms of Conservative policy, but I think that—not just in Wales, but in many parts of England—principles relating to cruelty and utility can be made to apply at grass-roots level, and in a way that supports a more sustainable countryside. I want that to happen in co-operation with people on the ground, which means not penalising them or making criminals of them but asking them to join us in trying to accommodate the significant number of people who want foxhunting to be banned. I believe that a complete ban would be an ecological disaster in many parts of both England and Wales.

Many people are now isolated from the countryside. They immediately perceive country practices as cruel, because they involve killing and because they involve control. Most people, having visited an abattoir, would be turned off the meat industry, yet, thankfully, most people continue to support the industry by purchasing meat, and there is no reason to suppose that they will turn away from it.

We must bridge the gap. The Minister has tried to do that, and at this stage I support him. I want to see whether he can make the Bill work in favour of the reality of the countryside rather than the prejudices that we have heard tonight.

8.38 pm

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): I have opposed foxhunting on cruelty grounds for the last 20 years, and I have not changed my mind. It was cruel 20 years ago, and it is cruel today. I will vote for Second Reading, but only because the Bill can be amended in Committee.

I despair when I consider the situation in which the Government have landed us because they did not have the guts to ban hunting when we were elected five years ago, and now have not the guts to introduce a Bill to ban hunting with dogs outright. I am very disappointed with the Bill, and with the way in which the Government have handled things since 1997. During the last five years they have lost a huge amount of reputation and trust over this issue—especially among members of the Labour party, and particularly among people who voted Labour on two occasions because banning hunting was a manifesto commitment—which has been very damaging.

Dr. Palmer: Does my hon. Friend agree that we should not look a gift fox in the mouth? If we succeed in banning hunting through the Bill, hon. Members who have been disappointed will forgive us.

Mr. Steinberg: I am not sure whether we shall be forgiven, but my hon. Friend is right that the Bill is the only way in which we can ban foxhunting. I shall therefore vote for it tonight.

There has been an inexcusable delay in resolving the issue, and more than 100 hours of parliamentary time have been spent in wasted, repetitive debate, when the arguments were clearly won by hon. Members who wanted to ban hunting. More important, thousands of animals have continued to suffer and die unnecessarily in the past six years. That includes the hounds and other dogs that are used in fox, deer, hare and mink hunting.

The Burns inquiry and the public hearing have demonstrated that hunting with hounds causes immense suffering to wild animals. They are chased to exhaustion, brutally savaged by the pack of hounds or forced to fight underground with terriers. However, what about the tools of all that cruelty, the hounds and the terriers?

The foxhound has a short and harsh life. Puppies that do not show aptitude for hunting or fail to meet the requirements are normally shot by the kennel man. Those that are fortunate enough to make the grade are trained to chase and kill foxes during the cub-hunting season. That unpleasant side of hunting involves chasing and killing fox cubs to teach young hounds how to kill. One does not often hear hunters discussing the merits of cub hunting; they prefer to keep quiet about it.

Hounds will follow wherever the scent of their quarry takes them. That makes the route for hunting live quarry unpredictable and much more exciting for the mounted field. The price of that "fun" is that many hounds are run over on roads or even hit by speeding trains after straying on to railway lines. Others become injured on barbed wire fencing or get lost from the pack for days.

There are numerous reports of hounds being electrocuted and killed. In one case, the New Forest Foxhounds trespassed on a railway line, resulting in the death of six hounds. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members do not like to hear such information because they enjoy seeing the killing and the cruelty to animals. They will vote for that this evening. Passengers on a train from London to Bournemouth witnessed the train running over the bodies of the hounds.

If the hounds survive all that, we would expect them, like most working dogs, to be retired to live a comfortable life in the country. Sadly, we would be wrong. When the hounds reach the age of approximately six or seven—half their normal life expectancy—they are simply shot. They are taken around the back of the kennels, where a bullet is put in the back of their heads. That makes a mockery of the hunts' claims that, in the event of a ban on hunting with dogs, they will have no alternative but to shoot their hounds; they shoot them anyway. It is estimated that hunts around the country kill between 3,000 and 5,000 hounds every year.

I support the RSPCA's view that a mass slaughter of hounds in the event of a ban would be irresponsible and unnecessary. I am pleased that the RSPCA has pledged to do all it can to prevent such needless destruction at the hands of the hunts. The Burns inquiry into hunting with dogs found that

"any need to put down hounds or horses, in the event of a ban, could be minimised if there was a suitable lead-in time before it was implemented".

The previous Government hunting measure, which fell in March 2001, contained such a lead-in period. The RSPCA believes that responsible hunts should start to wind down their breeding programmes immediately to reduce the number left in the case of a ban. I call on responsible hunts to start to wind down their breeding programmes now.

I am sure that the Bill will be amended to reflect the will of the public and Parliament. I hope that there is no pressure on the payroll vote, although it is normally applied in the case of a Government Bill. If, through such pressure, the measure is passed in its current form, hunts will be left with uncertainty that may cause further suffering to hounds. It may take years for some licence applications to be resolved. In the meantime, hunts would be left with packs of redundant hounds, with no subscriptions to cover the cost of their care.

If foxhunting, hare coursing and deer hunting were banned outright through the Bill, at least hunts would have time to consider three options properly. First, they could disband and give their hounds a different home. Secondly, they could disband the hunt but keep the hounds. Thirdly, they could convert to drag hunting. I believe that a switch to drag hunting would be the preferable option, as it would allow members of the hunt to continue to enjoy the sport, the pageantry that they like, and the social side of hunting, while allowing the hounds to continue to be kept in packs.

The cruelty that these so-called sports inflict on dogs and wildlife is totally unjustifiable. The only way to prevent it is to introduce a ban on these barbaric and

[Mr. Steinberg]

bloodthirsty forms of hunting with dogs. My hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) has called the Bill a fudge, and I absolutely agree with him. As we have seen this evening, it causes confusion and uncertainty, and creates the possibility that the cruelty of foxhunting could continue. I must ask the Minister why it stops short of a complete ban. In reality, he has chosen a Bill that appeases absolutely no one. It does not appease the Countryside Alliance, the Campaign for the Protection of Hunted Animals, or the public, and it certainly has not appeased Members of Parliament. I can only imagine that it has been devised in an attempt to appease both sides in this long-running debate. Perhaps the Government were frightened by the pro-hunting lobby's ability to get large numbers of people to take to the streets by wrapping the issue up in a number of genuine rural concerns.

Alun Michael: While I accept my hon. Friend's views on the Bill, I would ask him to accept that the way in which the process has been undertaken and the way in which the Bill has been drafted have been based entirely on trying to get the right principles into place and to deal with the issue so as to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on it. I ask him at least to accept the integrity with which I have attempted to bring the Bill before Parliament.

Mr. Steinberg: I certainly accept that; I am not questioning the Minister's integrity at all. I think that he has been misguided in bringing us a Bill that appeases nobody, but I would certainly not accuse him of doing anything that was not proper.

Having said that, however, I would say to the Minister that if the Bill was introduced to appease the Countryside Alliance, whose actions we have seen outside the House today, let us consider the reasons that its members took to the streets for a so-called liberty and livelihood march. In my view, that march had nothing to do with foxhunting at all. Only 47 per cent. of the marchers lived in the middle of the countryside. A quarter of them lived in towns, and 52 per cent. were affluent people from social categories A and B. Eighty-two per cent. of the marchers voted Conservative. The Countryside Alliance march was a political rally. It was an anti-Government march, not a pro-countryside march. Recent military-style action and the threat of civil disobedience and law breaking are indicative of a growing desperation among the pro-hunt lobby that simply goes to show that its members have lost the arguments on hunting. Attempts by a small minority to block the wishes of the majority of people in this country and cause significant disruption to commuters, businesses and families travelling away for the weekend show scant regard for the democratic process.

I would have liked to go on speaking. I acknowledge the effort that the Minister has put into the Bill, but he could have saved himself a lot of time and a great deal of hard work by producing a Bill that reflected the will of the House. I suggest that he removes part 2 and allows the democratic process to stop this cruelty once and for all. It is time that the democratic will of Parliament and of the majority of people in this country was listened to, and time that hunting with hounds was finally abolished.

8.48 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to have caught your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have a great respect for the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg), but I have to say that I think that that was the most prejudiced and ignorant speech I have heard in my 10 years as a Member of Parliament. The House is at its worst when we debate this subject. I have been involved in hunting all my life, and I have heard so much ignorance this evening that it is unbelievable.

I feel sorry for the Minister. Whatever his personal views, he has approached the subject with integrity. The hearings that he conducted in Portcullis House were fair, and he relied on the evidence of the Burns inquiry. If we study the evidence fairly and objectively, however, it would be difficult to introduce this Bill. I hope that some of its deficiencies will be dealt with in Committee, because we all want to see hunting regulated and managed properly, if it is to continue, with the least cruelty attached to it. I would maintain that the Independent Supervisory Authority on Hunting, which few people know anything about, is extremely tough and should be used as the model for the Bill, but that is an argument for another day.

One main weakness of the Bill is that it does not rely on proper scientific and objective evidence, as I said in an intervention on the Minister. I cannot understand why hare coursing and deer hunting have been specially ruled out with an automatic ban, especially in view of the objective evidence of Wise, Bateson and Harris, who

"concluded that all of the changes observed are the normal psychological expression of arousal and exercise. All are reversible and none are of clinical significance to the hunted deer."

It is probable that similar reversible processes would be found in hunted foxes, hares and mink. So, if one takes the expert scientific opinion, no incontrovertible evidence exists, as the Minister said this morning to a stag hunting delegation, to show that stag hunting is cruel. If we are to legislate, we should do so on proper objective, scientific principles.

If paragraph 5.26 of the Burns report is to be believed, hunts cull 21,000 to 25,000 foxes each year; if the 2010 biodiversity regime is to be applied, farm animals are to be protected. Presumably, that same number of foxes will still need to be culled. How will they be culled? There are a number of alternatives. The first is using a high-powered rifle. That might be safe in vast areas of Wales, but it would not be safe at night in vast areas of the south of England due to people wandering on footpaths, the right to roam and so on. Even if it were safe, I can tell Members, as I have done it, that using a high-powered rifle and killing the fox with the first shot requires a degree of expertise.

The second method that could be used is shooting foxes with a shotgun. I can tell Members that the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ran a trial, which found that 46 per cent. of foxes that are shot with a shotgun go away wounded. Anybody who knows anything about shooting foxes with a shotgun knows that when they go away wounded, they suffer a long, lingering death. Mostly they go to ground, unfound and unseen, but they live in their earth for a long time before they die, and very painful it is too.

The third alternative is some form of running snare that is legal. Again, however, unless the running snare is inspected every day— *[Interruption.]* I wish that the

Minister would listen, because he might learn something from somebody who knows about the subject. One could use a running snare, which is perfectly legal, but the issue of cruelty would become immense if it were not inspected every day. Members should imagine being caught by the leg in a snare and desperately trying to get away.

Mr. Banks: Those snares should be illegal.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If a fox is caught by the leg by a snare, it will bite its leg off to try to get away. That is how cruel running snares are.

Mr. Banks: They should be banned.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I would maintain that all the alternatives are crueller—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. There are far too many sedentary interventions.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful, Mr. Deputy Speaker. All the alternatives are crueller, but let us be under no illusion—the Bill will license cruelty.

I refer to the business of the tribunals, which is unfair. Under the tribunal process, the opponents of the licence for an individual hunt will be allowed to appeal and re-appeal, yet the applicant for a licence may not reapply on the same grounds until at least six months have passed. I would maintain that that is unfair and disproportionate. Also, given the acknowledged absence of any scientific evidence, applicants for registration face an impossible task, as the burden of proof will be on them to show that they can pass the least-suffering test. To quote clause 8 in part 2, applicants will have to prove that an equivalent to the utility contribution

"could not reasonably be expected to be made . . . in a manner likely to cause significantly less pain, suffering or distress to the wild mammals to be hunted."

As Lord Burns said, there is

not sufficient verifiable evidence or data safely to reach views about cruelty.—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 12 March 2001; Vol. 623, c. 533.]

In other words, it is impossible to pass the test to get a licence. The Bill will certainly mean that a significant number of hunts will not continue—otherwise, what is the point of it?

Along with many of my colleagues, I took part in the March for liberty and livelihood, as did 407,000 other people: honest, law-abiding citizens, the bedrock of this country. The Bill will impose all sorts of sanctions on them, including forfeiture of vehicles and animals. How on earth is a police constable at the scene of a suspected breach to compel a person to give up his animals? We are introducing powers to search property, and criminal sanctions on people who breach the provisions: ordinary, honest, law-abiding citizens such as many of my constituents. I represent more hunts, I suspect, than any other Member of Parliament: 10 at the last count. Large numbers of people will be subject to fines and possibly criminal sanctions. Is that what we really want? Do we want to send people to jail? I wonder whether the House is really cognisant of what it is taking on. As Churchill said, we must not underestimate the power of minorities.

I urge the House to think very carefully about how it legislates on this subject. This is a bad Bill, and one that the House will come to regret.

8.56 pm

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): To clarify one point, the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) accused me and others who oppose hunting of class envy. I do not know which class he believes himself to belong to, but I have no wish to join it.

I welcome the Government's consistency and courage in delivering a conclusion to a debate that has been running for more than 100 years. I especially welcome the personal dedication of the Minister, who is informally becoming known as the Minister for heroic efforts. We look forward to his being asked to solve the fire dispute, abolish the common agricultural policy and disarm Saddam Hussein.

The Bill is an honourable attempt to find a logical common ground, but both the riot outside this place earlier today and the blatant hostility of Conservative Members show that most hunt supporters are not interested. It has been informally suggested that, unlike a total ban, the Bill has a chance of getting through the other place, so that we could complete the business this year. God loves optimists, but after what we have seen today that appears very unlikely.

I accept and welcome the Bill's basic philosophy. It is right and logical to consider utility and cruelty in each case. I will support the Bill tonight. There are two central problems, however. The first is that there is nothing to stop thousands of people clogging up the machinery with individual applications. Applications are not limited to existing hunts, so every individual member of a hunt could propose to set up a new one. I see no logical end point to the process. Six months after an application is rejected, the individual will be back to apply again.

The second problem is that the Bill, as it stands, delegates the decision on the utility or cruelty of the hunting of foxes, hare and mink to a tribunal. The Minister has made great efforts to ensure that the tribunal is fair and representative. As many of us have speculated and as Opposition Members have suggested, it may well be that the tribunals will find that the majority of hunts do not satisfy the criteria; however, we do not know. A glance at legal processes in Britain over the years shows that one cannot sensibly and firmly predict how tribunals and courts will behave. In practice, we are taking a gamble if we take this option.

What do the public expect? I believe that they—by which I mean a majority—expect Parliament to reach a conclusion on this matter, and they will be surprised if the one that we reach is that we should delegate the decision to a tribunal. Most people simply do not want us to do that. They want us to come to a view, and as has been said, about 50 per cent. want us to conclude that hunting with hounds should be banned.

Lembit Öpik: If we accept that the outcome that we want is an improvement in animal welfare, and that in some circumstances—as the Minister has suggested and

[Lembit Öpik]

the hearings have proved—killing a fox with dogs is not necessarily the most cruel approach, it surely makes sense in the interests of animal welfare to allow a registrar to look at the specific circumstances and to judge whether a particular hunt application is justifiable within the very terms that the hon. Gentleman is discussing.

Dr. Palmer: I understand the consistent position that the hon. Gentleman has taken for some years now, but I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner) that the primary determinant of fox numbers is the availability of food. Although there are regional variations, nationally the number of foxes that die due to hunting is just over 5 per cent. That means that hunting's contribution to the control of fox numbers is actually insignificant. We spend a great deal of time debating whether alternatives are less cruel or more cruel, but the reality is that replacing hunting in most areas with nothing will make no more of a difference to fox numbers than did the absence of hunting during last year's foot and mouth outbreak.

Mr. Roger Williams: The hon. Gentleman's point is that the major constraint on fox numbers is the amount of food available, but what sort of pain and cruelty do foxes experience if they die from lack of food?

Dr. Palmer: The hon. Gentleman makes a valid point, except that it is well established that animals breed in greater numbers if plentiful food is available. We could discuss that issue at greater length than the time available to me allows; indeed, perhaps we could do so outside the Lobby.

Most Members, as well as most of our supporters, will want the House to decide on these matters. Ultimately, the question of whether to allow foxhunting, mink hunting or hare hunting is a very simple one. Given that only 5 per cent. of foxes are killed by hunts, it is clear that the objective is primarily recreational. Do we want a sport that involves the suffering and death of animals to be regarded as legal and recreational? When confronted with that basic issue, the great majority of people say, "No, I don't think that that should be legal."

This is an issue for debate only because it is so familiar. Let us transpose it to a different environment. Let us consider the example of children chasing a stray dog across a council estate. Stray dogs are a pest and they need to be controlled. The children chase the dog across the estate and stone it to death; they are stopped, and people are horrified. What is the difference? It is only the existence of tradition and a long-standing habit. Our society is so rich that we do not need to depend on suffering and killing for our entertainment. I will vote for the Bill, regardless of the social composition of the group and the state of the opinion polls. I have said that for many years. In the last election, one of my Conservative opponents said that I put vermin before constituents. I quoted him in my election address, and I was returned with an increased majority.

We should support the Bill with enthusiasm, and I urge all Members whose sympathies lie primarily with the hunted to join me in voting for the Bill tonight.

9.6 pm

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): This Bill is duplicitous and malicious. The hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) ranted about it being an appeasement of the Countryside Alliance. He, at least, can rest assured—wherever he is—that this is a total ban in all but name. The Government have struggled to cobble together an intellectual or rational basis for imposing this unwarranted and draconian regulation on foxhunting, but have singularly failed to make a coherent or logical case. The Bill, as has been demonstrated this evening, is shot through with intellectual inconsistency.

I have no doubt that for a minority of Members, a ban on foxhunting will be a logical extension of a principled, personal concern for animals, which no doubt includes vegetarianism and a determination to ban all forms of pest control. However, for the majority of Members who seek a ban, their motivation is fuelled by ignorance, prejudice and spite. As we prepare to launch a highly controversial war in the middle east that is so unpopular with the Labour Back Benches, is it not transparent that the Bill is a bit of red meat to be chucked to the troublemakers on the Back Benches in an effort to buy them off and appeal to the basest instincts of the Labour party?

Mr. Salter: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Gregory Barker: I am afraid not.

This measure has nothing to do with animal welfare. Deliberate cruelty to animals is, quite rightly, already a criminal act. The arbitrary application of the tests of cruelty and utility to foxhunting is illogical when it excludes rats, rabbits, birds and other animals, to say nothing of fish.

The Bill requires no amendment to exterminate foxhunting as we know it across rural England. It is no more than a cunning device by the Government to ban the sport under the cloak of regulation. The effect on my constituents, who stand to lose their jobs, their livelihoods, their homes and their community will be exactly the same as that of the most blatant ban. The Government have chosen to discard the Burns report, which was commissioned at great expense to allow impartial, educated scientific men and women to find out what many of us knew already—that hunting is no more cruel or inhumane than any other form of vermin control. What is more, according to Burns, not only would a ban have a catastrophic effect on thousands of rural families but thousands of hounds would have to be shot. The fox population would be left to be indiscriminately gassed, trapped or maimed. There is no Walt Disney solution to the problem of fox control.

The likely consequence of a ban on hunting will be that farmers will take greater responsibility for controlling predators. Those predators will drag an unborn lamb from a ewe or slaughter every bird in a hen house and not take a single carcase. Faced with indiscriminate pest control carried out by farmers, many foxes will disappear completely from many parts of our countryside.

It is not only foxes that will disappear from our landscape if hunting is banned. Those of us who care about the environment know that if a ban is forced

through Parliament, the well-kept hedgerows, the coppices, the covers and the ditches that attend an active foxhunt also face extinction. No thought or consideration has been given in the Bill to the important contribution that foxhunting makes to the preservation of the biodiversity of the English countryside. It is no wonder that so many committed and well-respected environmentalists oppose a ban. It was no surprise to hear the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), who is a particularly assiduous member of the Environmental Audit Committee, speak so powerfully in favour of foxhunting as a method of preserving the biodiversity of the British countryside.

Coppicing, hedge-laying, dry-stone walling and woodland maintenance would all be hammered by a ban, or by a regulatory framework that squeezed the life out of the country sports industry. A ban on hunting in the present climate of low incomes for farmers would make it likely that, owing to the cost, necessary conservation work would disappear altogether.

It has become more and more apparent that the debate is about neither cruelty nor care for the countryside. If Members were so concerned about cruelty, where is the vote in Government time to ban halal meat? Where is the vote in Government time to ban kosher meat? Where is the vote in Government time to ban the importing of meat from animals reared in obscene conditions that really warrant the description "cruel"? Where is the vote in Government time to reverse legislation that has closed slaughterhouses the length and breadth of Britain, thus requiring livestock to travel hundreds of miles on motorways rather than being dealt with humanely in their own locality?

The debate has exposed some of the worst double standards in public life and I hope that Members will reflect on that the next time that they tuck into a factory-farmed roast. The debate has not shown a rational analysis of the facts: misplaced concern for animals may inform some voices in the argument, but it is self-evident that what drives most Members who are baying for a ban is old-fashioned spite, prejudice and bigotry. This profoundly illiberal Bill, which should concern everyone who holds dear civil liberties, sets a dangerously worrying precedent. It is liberty, not foxhunting, that is really at stake.

Singling out rural communities in such a measure is akin to the Government's repealing race relations laws to allow the persecution of a single ethnic minority. Thankfully, that may not happen, but the effect on our small rural communities is exactly the same. It is no historical coincidence that the first European ban on hunting was enacted by Adolf Hitler. Despite the Minister's pretence at compromise, the Bill owes nothing to the third way but everything to the Third Reich.

Down the ages, we in Britain have fought against the persecution of minorities. For hundreds of years, the defence of civil liberty has been cherished at Westminster—something that may be a laughing matter for Labour Members. Although many people may not approve of hunting as a sport, or may question its relevance to a largely urban nation, millions of people recognise that to criminalise at a stroke a large section of rural Britain would be a monstrous misuse of the power of Parliament.

The Prime Minister will have to build new jails if he sets his face against reason and tolerance. In my constituency, fine upstanding members of the community, who have never received so much as a parking ticket, are ready to go to prison for their beliefs.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Is the hon. Gentleman inciting his constituents to break the law?

Gregory Barker: No, I am trying to explain the anger and disillusionment that they feel owing to the intolerance and arrogance that is being exhibited in this place. Is that really how Labour Members want to be remembered? Does the Prime Minister want to be remembered as the man who ripped apart the fabric of rural Britain and passed the most illiberal and divisive piece of legislation for 200 years?

I ask every Member of the House to examine their conscience and to vote tonight not because they hate hunting, but because they love liberty.

9.14 pm

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn): I begin by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister for Rural Affairs on his hard work and patience and on the wide consultations that he held before introducing the Bill.

My right hon. Friend knows my views on hunting, especially on hunting with dogs. He is also familiar with the terrain of my constituency so he knows—literally—where I am coming from.

I agree that it is in everyone's interest that the issue of hunting with dogs should be brought to a conclusion. No one has benefited from the protracted debates without decision. Parliament and the House of Commons have certainly not benefited from the inability to take a decision on this matter. As a Member who represents a predominantly rural constituency, I can tell the House that it is the will of my constituents to bring this matter to a conclusion. Since my election in 2001, I have received a vast amount of correspondence on this subject, the overwhelming majority of which has come from people in rural areas who support my stand for a ban on hunting.

Hunting is a sport. I have always recognised the need to flush foxes out to the gun where necessary. As the Burns report emphasises, that practice is widespread in Wales. Indeed, such a practice would have been permitted under the Deadline 2000 option that many of my hon. Friends supported. Although I support the principle of the Bill to outlaw the cruelty associated with hunting, I am unhappy with part 2, which deals with registration, as are many other hon. Members. Part 2 will be unworkable because, for example, it will be impossible for a tribunal to be certain whether the losses cited are accurate. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster), for whom I have enormous respect on this subject, that that will create a lottery for cruelty.

Mr. Salter: Would my hon. Friend echo my concerns about the possible lack of impartiality of a tribunal that includes a vet and a land manager, especially as a notable vet in my constituency has put a sign on his

[Mr. Salter]

surgery today that says, "Anyone who opposes hunting is no longer welcome at this veterinary practice"? How impartial would that system be?

Albert Owen: I am concerned about the tribunal process for the very reason that there may be inconsistency across the country.

Part 2 is unnecessary because, if there were a complete ban option and we allowed foxes to be flushed out to the gun, as in schedule 1, and stalking and flushing remained part of the Bill, there would be no need for any traditional hunt and this matter could be solved.

The reason for the so-called traditional hunts is the enjoyment of the chase and the kill as pure sporting activity. Yes, a prolonged chase of a fox across open countryside is cruel; it is needless and avoidable. The very dogs used for that function prolong the chase so that those who partake can extend their pleasure—the thrill of the chase. That aspect of hunting has nothing to do with utility, but everything to do with entertainment and sport.

Many pro-hunting sportsmen, some of whom reside in my constituency, have asked me whether I would take part in one of those hunts. "Come along," they say. Well, I have declined that offer. I am mindful of the last vote that we had on this subject. I voted in the same Lobby as the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), who is not in his place at the moment. I can assure hon. Members that that does not happen on many occasions, but I asked him whether he had always been against hunting. He responded, "No, not until I accepted an invitation to go on a hunt." I believe that I would have found the experience exactly the same as he did and that it would have consolidated and reinforced my opposition to hunting.

I have some experience of hunting. I, too, was born and raised in a rural constituency. As a young boy, I went shooting and rabbiting frequently. I like to think that I never performed too much cruelty because I was trained to do so, but I was young then and I also believed in Father Christmas. I have grown up and matured since then.

I am very pleased that the Bill will not outlaw shooting, as that makes nonsense of the argument used by the pro-sport and pro-foxhunters that this is the thin end of the wedge. I am grateful to the Minister for reaffirming in his statement to the House on 3 December, as reported in column 757 of *Hansard*, our manifesto commitment that we have no intention of restricting angling or shooting. The provision to outlaw hare coursing shows that the Government intend to address the cruelty issue. The hare coursing event, as described in the Bill, is not unlike the traditional foxhunting event. It has little to do with liberty and everything to do with cruelty.

I started by congratulating my right hon. Friend the Minister on all his hard work in bringing this measure to Parliament and on providing the opportunity to reach a conclusion on the issue of hunting with dogs. The Bill will assist in that process, but unless it outlaws foxhunting, with exemptions for flushing out, I am not confident that it will achieve its aim. I will support the Bill's Second Reading tonight, but I fear that I will not be able to support it at a later date unless it is amended accordingly.

Mr. Russell Brown: With regard to flushing out, does my hon. Friend agree that flushing out should involve no more than two dogs and two guns?

Albert Owen: Yes, I agree with that. That is the normal practice in the area that I represent.

Lembit Öpik: I am surprised by the discovery that Santa Claus may not exist, and I am even more stunned by what the hon. Gentleman says about flushing out. Is he aware that a flushing out team needs to surround an entire wood? How does one do that with two dogs?

Albert Owen: That is not the case in every circumstance. In the terrain in my constituency, two dogs are used, the animal comes to the point of the gun, and it is shot cleanly.

I was pleased to take that intervention from the hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik), as I do not support the middle way; I believe in the right way forward. In terms of outlawing foxhunting as a sport, the Bill has a number of pitfalls. It has several good clauses, too, and, importantly, good intent. I accept that there is no such thing as perfect drafting. I am certain that the opportunity will present itself at a later stage to amend this Bill. Failure to do so will allow the muddled way to continue, satisfying nobody and wasting more important parliamentary time. Let us focus attention on rural depopulation, rural housing and rural regeneration, but let us deal with the unfinished business of hunting with dogs, too, and let us do it in a mature fashion. Let us legislate to end cruelty, to end hunting with dogs as a sport, and to restore the credibility of this House of Commons.

9.22 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): Before I briefly address the substance of today's debate, I wish to make an apology to the House. I included remarks about hunting and farming in my contribution to the debate on the Queen's Speech on 19 November. In the past, I have had a financial relationship with the Countryside Alliance through my company, David Burnside Associates Ltd. That relationship was included in the Register of Members' Interests when I came to the House, but it ceased in March 2002, so no such entry appears in the current register. I now understand that I should have declared that past relationship when I spoke on 19 November, as it appeared in the printed version of the register current at the time, and I apologise for not doing so.

As I have not been able to take part in the main debate, I shall comment on one piece of work that I did for the Countryside Alliance when I was previously retained by the alliance as a consultant. I carried out research in 20 constituencies in England and Wales, and listed 20 subject matters of importance to those constituencies. Hunting was one of them, and it came 20th—it was at the bottom of the list. We are insulting the countryside, the interests of the farming industry and all the problems that we face in the countryside by

even having this debate tonight. I will oppose the Second Reading of the Bill because it does not reflect what the countryside really wants.

9.24 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I appreciate that time is moving on, but I first wish to congratulate my right hon. Friend the Minister on introducing the Bill and, as we have already heard, on the excellent work that he did in the three-day hearings. He has done his level best to deal with the issue, but I think that he would accept that, if he has had a rough ride at all today, he has had a rough ride from the Conservative Members who clearly do not accept anything that he has said. In fact, the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) said that we were doing nothing more than licensing cruelty. Although I hope that many Labour Members will go into the Lobby with my right hon. Friend, we expect amendments to be tabled in Committee. If he sees defeats staring him in the face, I hope that he will accept the will of the House of the Commons and accept such amendments.

I want to mention briefly the effects of the hunting ban in Scotland. The Scottish Parliament has been in being for just three years, but it has pushed through a Bill on hunting. Although I agree with those who have said that it is not an ideal Bill, it shows the Parliament's boldness to do something about the issue. It has not been caught up in what this House has been caught up in for a century. The Bill contained loopholes and those who want hunting to continue are determined and have gone to the extreme of almost breaking the law.

The only hunt that has been disbanded in Scotland is in my constituency—the Dumfrieshire hunt. That happened only because the landowner was not prepared to let the hunt carry out its activities on his land. I sincerely hope that this Bill, as it goes through Committee, will place much more emphasis on the responsibilities of landowners and on what will happen if they are caught allowing something illegal to take place on their land.

It has been claimed that hunting still continues in Scotland. Lothian and Borders police had to investigate a hunt that openly boasted about the killing of eight foxes by its hounds. We could expect flushing out to lead to the killing of one or two foxes, but the fact that as many as eight were killed shows that either illegal activity took place or that the pack of hounds was totally out of control.

My Conservative opponent at the last general election has now become a rural rebel. He has boasted in the local press about having hunted on several occasions and, in more than one outburst, he has admitted that, whereas he previously hunted on his land, he now brings in guns to take out the foxes. In effect, he is openly admitting that he allowed foxes to breed on his land for nothing more than the sport of hunting. That takes us to the crux of the matter. The Bill that my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) introduced in 1997 was all about the argument that controlling fox numbers was the main reason for hunting. Controlling their numbers by hunting has been an unmitigated failure and it is now admitted in several places that hunting is all about sport and cruelty.

My right hon. Friend the Minister's arguments about utility and cruelty are admirable. However, the Bill's proposals are a gamble that many Labour Members are not prepared to take. I again thank him for his efforts, but I hope that he will be prepared to accept amendments in Committee.

9.29 pm

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Although I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), it is a parliamentary absurdity that I cannot go to Edinburgh to pontificate on foxhunting in Scotland, but he can come down here and squeeze out—

Mr. Russell Brown *rose—*

Mr. Gray: No, I will not give way.

It is absurd that the hon. Gentleman can come down here and squeeze out Welsh and English Members of Parliament who have not been able to speak about foxhunting in their countries because they have had to listen to him. In particular, it is absurd because the regime introduced in Scotland is a shambles by any standard. It is nonsense to think that we would listen to anything that he has to say on hunting.

The debate has been disappointing in many respects. As the hon. Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) reminded us, something like 100 hours of parliamentary time have been spent on the subject in recent years. I have been involved in all of them, and here we all are again: the same old speeches, the same old faces and the same old arguments—pretty tired old arguments they are, too. The fact is that hunting of all kinds is a minority and peripheral interest. Most people do not understand why we spend hours and hours of parliamentary time discussing it because it is not important to most people. However, it is of huge importance to the 407,000 decent country folk who came to London early this year. For each of them, 10 people who agreed with them stayed at home. It is also of huge importance for a small number of animal rights activists, on whose behalf most Labour Members speak, but for most of the 55 million people in England it is of peripheral interest.

Mr. Banks: Is it true that the hon. Gentleman sponsored 1,000 people to come to the House to demonstrate and that he put them into Room W1 tonight? That is outrageous. Frankly, his mathematics must be appalling. Will he condemn, without reservation, the fact that some of those people whom he supports have thrown firecrackers at police horses outside the House?

Mr. Gray: The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I have sponsored no one to come here today, but the fact so many people are so angry that they have come here should demonstrate to Labour Members how very important the issues are to people in the countryside.

Mr. Kaufman: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The House will recollect that earlier today I brought to the attention of the Chair the fact that the Sessional Order on access to the House of Commons, which we passed on 13 November, was violated and that action needed to be taken. We now hear from my hon.

[Mr. Kaufman]

Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) that a Member of the House was involved in organising the demonstration that violated—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I dealt with the gist of that earlier this evening. We are taking time unnecessarily from the end of the debate.

Mr. Gray: For the sake of good order, perhaps I can make it plain that I played no part whatsoever in organising the disturbance earlier today. I took no part in it. Of course, I would be the first to decry any illegal activity. That sort of thing should not take place around the Palace. However, the fact that tens of thousands of people are here this evening, making such a noise, shows how important the matter is to them.

The arguments advanced by most Labour Members are the same tired old arguments. They were exploded by Lord Burns and in the three days of hearings in Portcullis House. They largely ignore the real evidence as inconvenient to their in-built prejudices. The truth is that almost every Labour Member ignored the Bill's content.

David Taylor: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gray: No. I do not have much time.

This is the first time that I remember every Labour Member, with the sole exception of the hon. Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer), speaking against the principle of a Government Bill on Second Reading. The purpose of a Second Reading debate is to agree with the principle of a Bill, but the Opposition and Labour Members do not. I hope that they have the power of their convictions and join us in the No Lobby.

Like the hon. Member for West Ham, from whom we heard much, the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) and the hon. Members for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) and for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) concentrated entirely on what they believe to be unacceptable human behaviour. They do not like it. One hon. Member talked about funny coats. Others talked about people with horns. They talked about all kinds of funny behaviour and whether people enjoy hunting, but ignored what is central to the debate—namely, animal welfare. That, and not all those aspects of human behaviour, is what the Bill should be about. The National Farmers Union, which we must believe to have some knowledge of these matters, made its views plain in its briefing, when it said that the Bill

"in practice would prove to be a disservice to the cause of animal welfare."

That is because the central question should be that of comparative cruelty.

The Bill does not seek to define cruelty, so we do not know what cruelty is. We have only the concept of comparative cruelty. When the Minister winds up the debate, will he tell us which method of killing a fox is least cruel? Should one use hounds? Should one shoot it at night at a range of 300 yd, using a shotgun or—the Minister must be clear about this—a rifle, and watch it limp off to die of gangrene? That has been the experience in Scotland, as the hon. Member for Dumfries should know. Should one snare it, which is perfectly legal, or poison it or gas it, both of which are illegal? We need to know which of those practices are more, and which less, cruel, and the Bill must take steps to ensure that only the less cruel are allowed. Conservative Members would argue that a swift death after being hunted with hounds is the least cruel.

The onus should be on the objectors to prove that the practice in question is more cruel than some others. Lord Burns, to name but one, certainly did not do so in the case of hunting. He went to great lengths to say that he did not believe that hunting with hounds was cruel, and the scientists giving evidence in Portcullis House did not say that it was cruel. Cruelty is subjective and comparative, and the Bill entirely fails adequately to define cruelty or utility.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) pointed out in a fine opening speech, the Minister's definition of utility has significantly changed since he wrote us a letter on 10 April. It has become much narrower and harder to achieve. I wonder why that should be. Perhaps the Minister will tell us why he has changed his definition.

My suspicion is that utility, as defined in the Bill rather than in the letter of 10 April, will prove extremely difficult for most hunts to achieve. Labour Members may well welcome that, but the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) should be aware that if the test of utility is applied according to the strict definition in the Bill, coarse fishing will be outlawed and shooting will be called into question. Coarse fishing has no utility and must, because it involves hooking a fish by its mouth, involve cruelty. Most modern livestock practices would not pass the Minister's test of comparative cruelty and utility, and nor, as several hon. Members have said, would halal butchery, boxing, cigarette smoking and a variety of other activities. Why is the test applied only to hunting with hounds?

Mr. Gummer: Does my hon. Friend agree that given the Bill's importance to the country people of Britain, it would be reasonable for the Cabinet Minister responsible to be here and to take part in the debate? Is not it unacceptable that the responsibility for both introducing and responding to the debate should be shovelled off on to somebody who has been given that role because no one else wants it? Why is not the Secretary of State here?

Mr. Gray: My right hon. Friend is right—*[Interruption.]* The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs makes a dramatic appearance in the Chamber. She has missed the best bits, but at least she is here now to hear her Front-Bench colleague.

My right hon. Friend makes a good point in that the Bill is being shuffled off into the background and given to a Minister of State to handle, presumably so that he can try to recover his political career, which was so damaged previously. The Secretary of State is a crafty enough politician to have absolutely nothing to do with the Bill; the reaction from her Back-Bench colleagues confirms what a sound decision that was.

The definition of utility is extremely bad, and as the RSPCA has made plain on several occasions, most recently in an interview in *The Daily Telegraph*, it would

seek to extend the ban to both fishing and shooting. If there is to be any usefulness at all in the Minister's golden thread of utility weighed against cruelty, it must be defined much more widely to include species management and habitat improvement, which were both included in April, and should also include economic livelihood, sport and recreation. Some believe that sport and recreation should not be included, but the Bill allows hounds to be used to preserve birds that are being bred for shooting, and the only reason to do so is for sport and recreation. The utility of sport and recreation is therefore recognised in one part of the Bill, and should also be recognised in the parts dealing with hunting with hounds. Comparative cruelty must also be defined much more carefully.

Conservative Members wish to make it plain that we have no objection at all to the principle of licensing as long as it is a reasonable and liberal regime. After all, 40 hunts use the Ministry of Defence and Forestry Commission land and have been licensed by the Government at least since the last war. Every year, MOD Ministers sign a licence allowing foxhunting on MOD land. We in the hunting world do not like some aspects of those licences, but if vets and scientists oppose certain aspects of hunting, it would be perfectly reasonable to license those aspects to make the rest of it legal.

The Bill does not begin to address that issue. There ought to be a presumption of innocent until proved guilty. The Government should set out in the Bill the way in which they want hunting of all kinds to be practised, and allow hunts conforming to that code of conduct to continue to hunt. The onus of proof should be on people seeking to end hunting, rather than on people seeking to preserve it. That applies particularly to stag hunting and coursing—why should they be singled out for an outright ban? Why should the Minister's golden thread of balancing cruelty against utility not apply equally to them? If there is what the Minister described as incontrovertible evidence of the cruelty of deer hunting, he must tell us what it is. Why are rats and rabbits exempt? Surely, the golden thread should apply to them just as much as anything else. After all, how will hounds differentiate between rabbits and hares, the killing of which will be illegal? The only thing on which scientists on both sides of the argument agreed on in Portcullis House was that all mammals should be treated equally under the Bill. The Minister has not made such a provision, and has not listened to scientific advice. There is no justification whatsoever for outlawing coursing and stag hunting, and we shall seek to reverse that in Committee.

The Bill fails to provide a liberal and practical licensing regime, and fails to limit cruelty. Indeed, those of us who know something about these issues, unlike many Government Members, know that it would increase cruelty because of the inherent cruelty of shooting. It fails to allow utility, and achieves the worst of all possible worlds. Like the Bills that went before it, it seeks to impose unjustifiable restrictions on individual freedom, trying to justify itself, but failing, in the name of animal welfare. It is a bad Bill, and we will oppose it on principle.

Andrew George: As the hon. Gentleman and Conservative Members go on about individual freedom, may I ask who has the greatest civil liberty or individual freedom—the person born and brought up in the country, managing the countryside without hunting who is offended by hunting, or the person who arrives from town one day, buys up the land, and declares that he will get pleasure from hunting? Who has the pre-eminent freedom—the townie or the countryman?

Mr. Gray: I always thought that the Liberal Democrat party was interested in individual freedom. Apparently, its Front-Bench Members are opposed to the Bill, but its Back-Bench Members are all in favour of it. The hon. Gentleman is all over the place, and we will not bother to respond to his rather silly point.

This is a very bad Bill. In a free country, it is fundamentally wrong to criminalise innocent citizens for activities that harm no one. That is the important point, and perhaps it is the answer to the question posed by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). Hunting may harm animals, but it harms no one. Parliament's first duty should be to defend the rights and legitimate interests of minorities. The Queen's Speech says that Ministers want to resolve the issue of hunting with dogs. I shall tell them how to resolve it—leave it alone. Leave the people of countryside in peace, and respect their liberty and livelihood. Listen to them, and join me in voting against this unnecessary, illiberal and ineffectual Bill.

Alun Michael *rose—*

Mr. Hogg: Object!

Mr. Speaker: Let me be clear. Is there an objection to the Minister speaking again?

Mr. Hogg: That is correct, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: It takes only one objection, and the Minister does not have a right to speak again. *[Interruption.]* Order. In that case, I shall call a Member from the Government side. Does Martin Salter wish to address the House?

Mr. Salter: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Kaufman: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Will you correct me if I am wrong? I was under the impression that when a right hon. or hon. Member moved a motion, he had the right to reply to it, and did not need leave.

Mr. Speaker: Parliamentary rules say that the Bill is an Order of the Day, therefore neither the Minister nor any Member has the right to address the House on two occasions if there is one objection. *[Interruption.]* Order. I am guided by the rules of the House.

David Winnick: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Of course I accept your ruling. Can you

[David Winnick]

tell the House whether you recollect, during your time in the House of Commons since 1979, a Minister being refused permission to speak for the second time?

Mr. Speaker: It is not for me to recall the matter. I am guided by the rules of the House.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You are, of course, entirely correct. I do not remember since 1970 anybody having such an objection called against them, but nor do I remember any time when the Government failed to put up two Ministers to defend their own Bill. Do you remember such an occasion?

Margaret Beckett *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the right hon. Lady please be seated? We shall be here all evening discussing points of order, when I have clearly made a ruling based on the rules of the House. I call the Secretary of State.

Margaret Beckett: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. It might be helpful to the House to know that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State is at the Agriculture Council in Brussels, from where I have just returned, which is why I was not in the Chamber earlier. I do not believe that even the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray) would wish someone who had not heard the debate to reply to it. My right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment was engaged in other parliamentary business.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I shall take another point of order.

Mr. Gummer: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. You will understand that the matter affects the rural areas of Britain considerably. The Secretary of State is right: she cannot be asked to reply to a debate—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is not a point of order. Any further points of order on the matter will delay an hon. Member addressing the House. I call Mr. Salter.

9.48 pm

Mr. Salter: Now is not the time for soundbites, but I feel the hand of history upon me. With my short political career, I am gratified that Conservative Members are so anxious to prevent me from speaking, and that Members on the Government Benches are so anxious to prevent me from giving this speech from the Dispatch Box, but I shall have to live with that.

I have been listening to the debate with interest, for what seems like many years. I have not come armed with a lengthy or prepared speech, but I shall use the time available to me. My views on hunting with hounds are well known. I agree with the hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier), who said that probably not a single opinion was swayed in the House tonight as a result of any argument that was made. However, I listened with interest to the hon. Gentleman who speaks for the Welsh nationalists and represents somewhere fairly unpronounceable, the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas), because he put together a coherent argument about why lamping will not necessarily work over waterside nature reserves, and I thank him for that point.

What I am interested in exploring is whether the fourth Bill on hunting to come before the House in six years will ensure the end of the obscene and barbaric sport of hunting wild mammals with hounds, or whether, as some have said, it is merely an unworkable fudge that pleases no one other than the lawyers and the middle way group. I suspect that my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider that the letter circulated by the middle way group was something of a mixed blessing.

As a supporter of early-day motion 273, which calls for a total ban on hunting, I can find little to commend in the Bill.

Dr. Palmer: Both of us support that early-day motion, which my hon. Friend initiated, and have supported earlier early-day motions on the same subject. Does he agree that the Bill gives us the first chance that we have had in our generation to end hunting with hounds? Does he also agree that, whatever its defects, it is an entirely welcome development—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Salter: I thank my hon. Friend for the parts of his intervention that I heard. Most Labour Members have been consistent in calling for a hunting ban, but let us make no mistake: we will resist the blandishments of Opposition Members, because the only way in which we will deliver a ban is to give the Bill a Second Reading.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Opposition Members have been chastising us for making criminals out of people for doing something that is currently legal. Will my hon. Friend confirm my belief that the Bill is not retrospective, so the only people whom it will turn into criminals are those who knowingly break the law in future, once it has been enacted?

Mr. Salter: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. We saw no greater example of thuggery and criminal behaviour than that which was set by the rural yobs who were outside this place earlier. Opposition Members and others in the pro-hunting lobby claim that they are the champions of tradition and law and order, but we saw that they have selective hearing. They will condemn others who break the law. They are the group of people who used to run the country. They still own it, but they cannot come to terms with the fact that they no longer run it.

Mr. Banks: Does not my hon. Friend find it extraordinary that the arguments mounted tonight about the freedoms of minorities, the right to debate and the exchanges that we have in this House were ruined when my right hon. Friend the Minister attempted to respond to the debate in the logical, cool and

dispassionate way in which he has attempted to proceed, but found that a sort of neo-Nazi group on the Opposition Benches tried to break it up?

Hon. Members: Withdraw!

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw that remark. *[Interruption.]* Order. That term should not be used. I call on him to withdraw his remark. *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Banks: I am being encouraged to withdraw the "neo"—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that I do not want him to worry about the "neo". He knows that he must withdraw the term that he used.

Mr. Banks: Of course, I withdraw, Mr. Speaker. The fact is—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must withdraw without reservations and there should be no other remarks. He should withdraw his remark.

Mr. Banks: I absolutely withdraw it, and I am glad that I have used up a few more minutes.

Mr. Salter: I can only—

Dr. Palmer: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are no further points of order.

Mr. Salter: I thank my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks). I can only assume that he was referring in an over-enthusiastic way to the fact that the British National party was present at the liberty and livelihood march.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Does my hon. Friend, like me, find it confusing that those who want foxhunting to continue reject the notion of drag hunting, although it could preserve the rural jobs that they are constantly banging on about? Or do they reject it because they like the thrill of the chase, and the sight of blood?

Mr. Salter: That is interesting. We have heard much from Conservative Members about the prejudice that has been evident in the debate. A number of us, including Ministers, were privileged to visit the New Forest drag hounds a few years ago. We remember the prejudice shown against the New Forest drag hounds by the hunting community, who made it impossible for them to drag hunt over specific tracts of land. I am as alive as any Member to the tactics that the Countryside Alliance and the hunt supporters will use to justify their arguments.

I may have to do this in Committee or at a later stage, but I want to question the Minister about some of the presumptions behind the Bill. It is presumed that this Parliament is competent to rule on issues such as the death penalty, and competent to decide what is or is not treason and who will or will not go to prison—

Mr. Simon Thomas: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I am glad that the hon. Member for Reading, West (Mr. Salter) has had an opportunity to speak, but I am concerned about the fact that we have not heard the Minister's response to the debate. Now that it is permissible to put written ministerial statements on record, is it permissible for the record of today's debate to include the reply that the Minister would have made?

Mr. Speaker: Perhaps the Minister will find another opportunity.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Salter: I have been extremely generous, and I will now take no more interventions.

As I was saying, this Parliament is deemed competent to rule on the death penalty; yet for some reason we are being invited to sub-contract the decision on hunting first to a registrar and then to a tribunal including a land manager—how impartial will he or she be?—a veterinary surgeon or a lawyer. When I told my constituents that I would vote for a total ban on hunting with hounds, I meant what I said. Unless I hear much better arguments than I have heard today, I will not vote for a Bill that sub-contracts the decision I make, as a Member of Parliament, to a body that is not elected.

I also fear that the rich and powerful interests that back the hunting lobby will seek a judicial review of every decision made by the tribunal. There is talk of job losses, but if the Bill is passed unamended there will be a massive growth industry. Lawyers will line their pockets with fat fees. What we see now is the poverty of the argument—

Keith Hill (Streatham) *rose in his place and claimed to move,* That the Question be now put.

Question put, That the Question be now put:—

The House divided: Ayes 371, Noes 155.

Division No. 25] **[9:58 pm**

AYES

Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh [illegible]h *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm

Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Short, rh Clare
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe and Dan Norris

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Douglas Hogg and Mr. David Wilshire

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 164, Noes 365.

Division No. 26] **[10:12 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic

Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Paul Goodman and Gregory Barker

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*

Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on second or third reading).

The House divided: Ayes 368, Noes 155.

Division No. 27] **[10:25 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Gordon *(Dunfermline E)*
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*

Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Straw, rh Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*

Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Fisher, Mark
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Paul Goodman

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

HUNTING BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Hunting Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Thursday 13th February 2003.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

The House divided: Ayes 331, Noes 165.

Division No. 28] **[10.38 am**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz

Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Pearson, Ian
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi

Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Willis, Phil
Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Gerry Sutcliffe

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cameron, David
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sanders, Adrian
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Desmond Swayne and
Hugh Robertson

Question accordingly agreed to.

HUNTING BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Hunting Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenditure incurred by a Minister of the Crown in connection with the Act, and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums payable out of money so provided under any other enactment, and

(2) the payment of sums into the Consolidated Fund.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

The House divided: Ayes 338, Noes 98.

Division No. 29] **[10:50 pm**

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Amess, David
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin

Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Follett, Barbara
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Ingram, rh Adam
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Linton, Martin
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil

Wills, Michael
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Dan Norris and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ancram, rh Michael
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Bellingham, Henry
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Leigh, Edward
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Stanley, rh Sir John
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Thurso, John
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Gregory Barker and
Mr. Bill Wiggin

Question accordingly agreed to.

SELECT COMMITTEES

Motion made and Question Proposed,

That

(1) Standing Order No. 152 (Select Committees related to Government departments) be amended as follows:

In the Table

Item 7, column 2, leave out from 'Office;' to 'and administration' in line 7 of that item;

After item 8 insert

'Lord Chancellor's Department	Lord Chancellor's Department (including the work of staff provided for the administrative work of courts and tribunals, but excluding consideration of individual cases and appointments)	11';

and

(2) the Order of 5th November 2001 relating to Liaison Committee (Membership) be amended as follows: Paragraph (2), after 'International Development' insert 'Lord Chancellor's Department'.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

COMMITTEES

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): With the leave of the House, I shall put together motions 7 to 10.

Ordered,

Education And Skills

That Mr John Baron be discharged from the Education and Skills Committee and Mr Robert Jackson be added to the Committee.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

That Mr Eric Martlew and Mr Mark Todd be discharged from the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee and Ms Candy Atherton and Mr Mark Lazarowicz be added to the Committee.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER: HOUSING, PLANNING, LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND THE REGIONS

That Alistair Burt be discharged from the Committee on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions and Mr John Bercow be added to the Committee.

WELSH AFFAIRS

That Chris Ruane be discharged from the Welsh Affairs Committee and Mr Huw Edwards be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. John McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

PETITION

Hunting with Dogs

11.2 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): Having just witnessed the Second Reading of the Bill that many people hope will herald the end of hunting in this country, I rise to present a petition signed by more than 2,800 of my constituents and others calling for the abolition of hunting with dogs, making specific reference to deer, hares, foxes and mink. It was collected over a relatively short period, and it is certain that many more signatures could have been secured had that been the objective of the exercise.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Residents of Pudsey Constituency and others,

Declares that hunting foxes, deer, hares and mink with dogs is a cruel and barbaric practice that has no place in a civilised society.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons pass legislation to ban hunting with dogs.

And the Petitioners remain etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Coalfields (Education)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

11.3 pm

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): I am delighted to have succeeded at long last in the ballot for this important Adjournment debate. I can tell the House that I have been trying for at least a year to secure this debate. Before turning to the issue of education in the coalfields, may I be the first Member to congratulate the Minister for School Standards on the recent football award that he won for scoring a goal at Newcastle? I am sure that he will enlighten the House further when he comes to reply to the debate—*[Interruption.]* Yes, I know.

The coalfields of Britain are still an important area despite the fact that most pits have now closed. The coalfields are substantial, and range from Fife and Ayrshire in Scotland through the north-east, west Cumbria, Yorkshire, Lancashire to the midlands, and the Welsh valleys. There are even coalfield communities not so far from here, in Kent. In total, Britain's coalfields have about 5 million people living in and around them. What is more, they are strong Labour communities, commonly known as the heartlands, so the Government ignore their voice at their own peril.

The main stimulus for this debate was the publication in September 2000 of a report commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills from Tony Gore and Nicola Smith of Sheffield Hallam university, entitled "Patterns of educational achievement in the British coalfields." The four main findings of the research that I draw to the attention of the House are, first and foremost, that the proportion of pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at grades A to C is 7 to 10 percentage points below the national average.

Secondly, educational attainment in the coalfields tails off badly in the mid-teen years, between the ages of 14 and 16. In primary schools, the gap between performance in the coalfields and the national average is relatively small and has tended to narrow over time. Thirdly, there is no evidence that performance in the mid-teen years relative to the national average is getting any better. Lastly, even among those staying on in full-time education beyond 16, performance in the coalfields still lags behind the rest of the country.

There is no suggestion in the research that the coalfields are unique. A number of comparator industrial areas show similar evidence of underachievement, but the research concludes:

> "Although none of the individual coalfield areas may be amongst the worst performing in the country when compared with some inner city LEAs, the consistency of the shortfall between the figures and the national averages, especially at secondary level, gives cause for concern."

The report also states:

> "Further action is required, especially directed at those in their teenage years. The geographical scope of such action needs to be wider than a small number of schools or a limited selection of relatively small neighbourhoods."

For mining areas, the issue is a great worry, because it is in our children that the future welfare of our communities lies. The widespread closure of the pits in the 1980s and 1990s brought mass unemployment and social decline to many parts of Britain, none more so than in my area. In 1984 we had 10 pits employing 12,000 workers, and more importantly, the prospect of well-paid steady jobs in the coal industry for the young people of our towns. Less than 10 years later, all 10 pits were shut and a whole generation of workers was effectively written off as surplus to requirements by the previous Tory Administration.

Why do we have a record of underachievement in many of our coalfield areas? I suspect that one of the main causes of the problem is historical. At school-leaving age, young men and women could rely on getting a job at the pit or in its related industries. There was no need for qualifications, as the Coal Board provided on-the-job training throughout one's career, so there was a great tradition of schooling in coalfield areas. The most able children went into professional careers, such as management and surveying. The middle tier became electricians and fitters at the pit, and the less skilled became faceworkers or worked on the pit top or in haulage and so on.

Now times have changed, and the only way young people will get decent, well-paid jobs is if they are adequately qualified. The research is worrying. Without action by the Department for Education and Skills, another generation could go the way of the previous one. I do not deny that the present Government, more than any other before them, have made education their top priority. Government initiatives such as the literacy and numeracy hours are making a tremendous impact on the overall levels of attainment throughout Britain. However, good as these policies are, they are national policies from which all our children benefit, but they do not address the problem of the gap in performance that exists between the coalfields and the rest of the country.

In the coalfields and in other areas where performance lags badly, there need to be extra, targeted initiatives if those areas are ever to catch up with the rest of the country. I have mentioned the success of the literacy and numeracy hours in primary schools. Another Government initiative that has been extremely successful at both primary and secondary level has been education action zones. The Barnsley education action zone, which was set up in 1998, was one of the first 12 nationally. It contained 21 schools—three secondary schools, 16 primary schools, one special school and one nursery school. I should like to highlight the record of achievement of one of the schools in that zone, which is situated in my patch: Willowgarth high school in Grimethorpe. Willowgarth's improvement has been greater than the zone average. It has moved from a record of 13 per cent. of pupils gaining five A to C passes in 1998 to 35 per cent. in 2001. That is a remarkable increase of almost 200 per cent. in its success rate in less than four years. I had the privilege of presenting the annual achievement awards at Willowgarth some two weeks ago. It was a delight to see the look of satisfaction and pride on the faces of all the children and parents.

Achieving educational success is not the big mystery that it is sometimes made out to be. It is about a motivated work force, both teaching and non-teaching, working in harmony with the students and, equally as importantly, with parents and the local community, so that the school becomes a focus for local pride. That is what is now happening at Willowgarth. Before the

education action zone was established, Willowgarth never came higher than 12th out of the 14 secondary schools in Barnsley in its record of achievement. It is now fifth out of 14—an incredible performance that speaks for itself.

Another important feature of Willowgarth's success is the fact that 35 per cent. of pupils leaving the school were accredited with work-related key skills. Some 90 per cent. of pupils leaving in 2001 did so with an accredited information and communications technology qualification—either a GCSE pass or a GNVQ—helping better to equip the children for the world of work.

In my opinion, the main reasons why the EAZ has been so successful at Willowgarth are the broadening of the curriculum to include more GNVQs and the extension of the school day to support targeted students. It is that sort of support, which the EAZ staff have provided, that is vital to continuing educational success in the coalfield areas, especially via the excellence in cities initiatives, which are now superseding many of the larger EAZs.

Incidentally, Willowgarth high school has submitted a bid for technology specialist school status. I endorse the bid and commend it to the Minister.

While I am on the subject of specialist schools, I should like to point out that all coalfield MPs were delighted with the Secretary of State's recent announcement that greater flexibility would be given with regard to achieving the £50,000 private sponsorship level. I know from my constituency's experience that that has acted as a major barrier to schools in coalfield areas in bidding for specialist school status. I have personally campaigned on the issue for some considerable time.

An exception to the £50,000 sponsorship rule can, however, be found in my constituency. Ridgewood school in Scawsby in Doncaster has submitted a bid to become one of the country's first engineering specialist schools. The bid has struck a chord with local businesses. Given Doncaster's international reputation as a centre of engineering excellence, that does not surprise me. After all, great steam engines such as the Flying Scotsman, the Mallard and the Blue Peter were all built in Doncaster. Some 70 local employers have already signed up to the bid and 20 have offered financial support, ranging from an offer of £150 from a small company to one of £10,000 from a major local engineering employer.

Ridgewood's record of achievement is very impressive. This year, it achieved a 65 per cent. rate in those gaining five GCSE passes with A to C grades. That was the second best record of any school in Doncaster. From a social inclusion perspective, more than 90 per cent. of the students achieved five A to G grades. Every student in the sixth form at Ridgewood was entered for exams and the school achieved the outstanding success rate of 100 per cent., with every student getting at least one A to G grade. That is also fantastic.

As I understand it, only a handful of schools nationally are so far bidding for engineering specialist school status. I commend Ridgewood's bid to the Minister as an exceptional one.

It would be remiss of me not to mention Doncaster's desire to become an education city. This is an excellent initiative, putting education at the heart of Doncaster's future regeneration. It is an extremely interesting project, co-sponsored by Doncaster council, Doncaster college and Huddersfield university. As the Minister probably knows, I am a member of the Select Committee on Education and Skills, which will go to Doncaster in the new year to look at the education city project.

Another successful initiative from which both Barnsley and Doncaster have benefited is the implementation, in recent years, of education maintenance allowances. They have made a big difference to the staying-on rate among pupils over 16, especially in Doncaster, where there has been a 5 per cent. increase. I was delighted to learn that from next April EMAs will be rolled out nationally. As I am sure the Minister knows, my Select Committee has recommended that consideration be given to extending EMAs to higher education. I strongly support that idea.

There is no doubt that there is a major funding crisis in higher education that the Government must address. I am glad that they seem to be moving away from the idea of top-up fees, which I know would be very unpopular with students and parents alike. My bottom line is this: I will support the system that will take more students from poorer backgrounds to university. That should be the Government's main objective in trying to deal with the funding crisis. So far, we have signally failed to achieve that goal. I believe that tuition fees have produced a major barrier to higher education, particularly for students from mining communities.

The Minister may well say "How can that be, as 40 per cent. of students do not pay tuition fees?" I would give two main reasons. First, a cash culture is still very prevalent in coalfield areas, which probably contain the highest percentage of people without bank accounts. Cash is still the key in those communities. Secondly, but more important, there is still an anti-debt culture in the coalfields as a direct consequence of the 1985 miners' strike. Many mining communities and families were brought to their knees financially by that strike, and it will be some time before the anti-strike attitude disperses.

It is for those reasons that I am becoming more in favour of a graduate tax, or an end-loading rather than a front-loading of student debt. I also feel strongly, however, that not just graduates should bridge the current funding crisis in higher education; the Government have a responsibility to play their part.

So far I have tried to highlight the Government's many achievements for the coalfield areas, but what more can be done? I would like the Government to consider two issues in particular. First, in response to the 1998 coalfield taskforce report commissioned by the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Education and Skills has introduced no measures targeted specifically at the need to raise performance in coalfield schools and colleges. The coalfield communities campaign, which I am pleased to say is based in Barnsley and represents more than 80 local education authorities, would like the Government to consider measures intended specifically for coalfield areas, given the scale of the current problem of under-achievement.

Secondly, the most important deviation from the Government's "one size fits all" approach has been the introduction, in 1998, of the excellence in cities

[Jeff Ennis]

initiative, which set a precedent by targeting areas where educational achievement lags behind. The trouble is that most coalfield areas tend not to be cities. The classic mining communities usually have a population of between 2,000 and 10,000, so most coalfield areas fail to qualify for this important source of special support. The Government must seriously consider rolling out the relevant features of the excellence in cities initiative to all coalfield areas—and I mean all of them.

In the coalfield communities, a generation of older workers has been discarded through the running down of the mining industry. The Government must not discard a younger generation of people in the same communities through failing to enable them to achieve acceptable educational standards.

11.20 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) on not only his outstanding speech tonight but the passion with which he speaks on the Floor of the House, in the Select Committee on Education and Skills and elsewhere. On my first appearance before the Select Committee in June, he asked me about some of the issues that he raised tonight. He pursues them diligently. He knows, although other hon. Members may not, that I shall appear before the Committee again on Wednesday. I look forward to continuing the conversation with him then.

I am pleased that my hon. Friends the Members for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), for Barnsley, West and Penistone (Mr. Clapham) and for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley), and the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price) are present. I congratulate them on staying here at this late hour for an important debate and providing moral support for me as well as for my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough. I hope that I would have been present for the debate, even if I were not the Minister answering it because South Shields is a former mining constituency. Many of the issues that my hon. Friend raised also affect my constituency.

The meeting of the coalfield communities campaign to which my hon. Friend referred, and at which the educational research was first published, was held in the town hall in South Shields. I spoke at the conference, and I perceive such issues as critical in changing structures and cultures in my constituency.

My hon. Friend mentioned some important data that were produced jointly by the Department and the coalfield communities campaign under the Department's sponsorship. That independent research dealt with educational attainment in coalfield areas. It is unfortunately true that although pupils in our constituencies fare well at primary school and do some outstanding work, by the time they reach secondary school and key stage 3, which covers 11 to 14-year-olds, GCSE and beyond, attainment falls well below national averages.

The research that we commissioned warned against a specific "coalfield effect", and highlighted other parts of the country where similar under-performance occurs. However, my hon. Friend made a powerful case to show that specific factors are at play. For example, the lack of investment in the coalfield areas in the past 20 years, especially in the 1980s, had a devastating effect and the speed of economic collapse left little time for the planning that is necessary to deal with major industrial change.

My hon. Friend did not have much time to congratulate the teachers and pupils in Barnsley on their outstanding work. I hope that he will forgive me if I take a few moments to do that. In the middle of much discussion of problems, we should not forget that teachers, head teachers, support staff and pupils work in schools in the coalfield areas day in, day out for 38 weeks a year. Some achieve remarkable results. My hon. Friend may know the figures that I am about to cite, but perhaps other hon. Members do not. In Barnsley, at key stage 2, which covers 11-year-olds, the number of children who read, write and count well when they leave primary school increased by 11 per cent. in the three years to 2001. In maths, the percentage of children who do well has increased from 55 per cent. to 63 per cent., and for science, the figure increased from 64 per cent. in 1998 to 82 per cent. in 2001. Those are significant advances.

Just under 30 per cent. of 15-year-olds and 16-year-olds gained five A to C grades at GCSE in 1998. In 2001, that had increased to more than 35 per cent. My hon. Friend referred to the outstanding work of the education action zone in Barnsley. The higher than average rates of improvement in that zone are testimony to the power of Government intervention and to the potential that exists in those communities. The young people who are growing up there have the potential to do well in education.

In the education action zone, the number of seven-year-olds who read to the expected standard has increased by 12 per cent., compared with a national average of 4 per cent. in the past three years. There are similar figures for 11-year-olds: there has been a 16 per cent. rise in the number of young people doing well at that age. The effects are, however, less marked at secondary level than at primary level, and that is the issue that my hon. Friend is highlighting in this debate.

I want to focus the second half of my remarks on the challenge that we face in the secondary sector. In the spirit of harmony that is prevailing in the Chamber at the moment, I shall start with some more good news about Barnsley. My hon. Friend will remember that, in 1999, 28.6 per cent.—nearly a third—of children in Barnsley were failing to get five grades A to C at GCSE. I beg your pardon, Madam Deputy Speaker, I meant to say that the percentage of lower-attaining schools was nearly one third. Two years later, that percentage had been halved. The number of schools where less than 25 per cent. of pupils were getting five good GCSEs had been halved in the space of two years. We await this year's statistics with—well, I was going to say trepidation, but, in the light of the figures that I have just given, I should say that we await them with anticipation, because I am confident that the outstanding performance of the young people and teachers in the area will continue.

Like my hon. Friend, we want to go further in raising the performance of young people in the coalfield areas, because the truth is that they do not just need average

levels of performance; they need to perform above the average level if they are going to overcome some of the disadvantages that are placed in their way. I want to highlight for my hon. Friend four issues that we are focusing on over the next three years to tackle some of the problems. The first relates to the quality of school leadership—not just the head teacher but the senior management team, comprising 12 to 15 people in any primary school. We want to ensure that they are of the highest quality, and have the proper training and support. As part of the excellence in cities group, schools in Barnsley will be receiving £125,000 a year extra for the next three years, specifically for leadership development, because we all know that the leadership of a school is a critical factor in raising performance.

Secondly, we want more schools to have access to the specialist schools programme and to share their facilities and their excellence. I can tell my hon. Friend that 20 per cent. of secondary schools in coalfield areas are now specialist schools, and I am delighted to say that, of the four bids for engineering college status, two have come from coalfield areas. I hear what my hon. Friend has said about Willowgarth and Ridgewood, and I will certainly look carefully at the applications that have been made. In fact, they are already being carefully scrutinised. I would trespass into dangerous territory if I said anything further on that, but I promise him that there will be due diligence in the assessment of those bids.

I hope that my hon. Friend was pleased by the announcement by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the development of a partnership fund to help to bridge the sponsorship gap in cases in which schools have worked hard to build the links with the outside community that are important to a successful secondary school and can lead to the motivation and development of curriculums and programmes that support young people's achievement, but in which there has been a problem in raising the full funds. We want to help to bridge that gap, and the partnership fund will help to do that.

The third priority for us is the reform of the school work force. My hon. Friend referred to the range of professionals who work in schools. Obviously, there will be the head teacher, the teachers and the caretaker, but there will also be learning mentors who come in to support young people, language specialists, and sports coaches who come in to support teachers and help young people. That is a major part of the agenda, and I am pleased to say that funding for young people in Barnsley will have risen from an average of £2,840 per pupil in 1996–97 to £3,850 by 2005–06. The preponderance of that money will be in the hands of the head teachers to spend on a range of staff—not just teachers; other support staff as well—to make the most of the learning opportunities for young people.

Our fourth priority is to develop partnership beyond the classroom. My hon. Friend referred fleetingly to the important role of parents, and I completely agree with his points about supporting good behaviour and high aspiration. The role of outside bodies, notably universities, is also important in helping to broaden the horizons of young people and to give them the confidence to aim high in terms of higher education or high-quality vocational education. This is not just a matter of programmes and structures; it is also a matter of culture. Too many young people think that university is beyond them, when in fact they have the brains to do well. We need to do a better job of helping them to gain access to information on what is good about university life. We also need to ask the universities to play a more proactive role in helping to raise standards within schools. There is major work to be done in linking our higher and further education institutions with our secondary schools. That is the way to provide the role models that will help young people to believe that they can move on and achieve a lot.

On challenging the poverty of aspiration that has at times marred some coalfield communities, my hon. Friend will be pleased to know that 15 of the 72 education action zones and 13 of the 58 excellence in cities areas are in coalfield communities. I very much take his point about the need to extend the excellence in cities programme and its success beyond cities. That is why we are developing the excellence clusters programme to take care of smaller areas, which are not defined as a city but which can benefit from the strands of work at the heart of that programme.

My hon. Friend also referred to education maintenance allowances, and I know that he has campaigned for a long time for the nationwide outreach of that programme. I can confirm that that will happen next year.

The debate is drawing to a close, so I should point out that we on the Labour Benches—I am sure that I can speak also for the hon. Member for East Carmarthen and Dinefwr (Adam Price)—are all committed to every single child. We believe that every single child is special and that every single child has a talent and a potential to fulfil. It is the job of the education system to help to develop that talent to the full. Some children face greater barriers than others, and the Government's job is to help them to overcome those barriers. We recognise that and the need to address the issue, which involves funding as well as programmes. It also involves a culture of achievement, which must go from the top of the education system to the bottom.

I reject wholeheartedly the terrible English curse according to which, somehow, more means worse and that more achievement represents a dilution of standards. I say the opposite—more achievement is testimony to the hard work of children and the skills of their teachers. If any proof of that were needed, I know from my research for the debate that there is already a beacon school in Barnsley, Darfield Upperwood primary, whose outstanding performance has delivered a better education not just for its own pupils, but for other pupils in the area.

That is the theme behind much of what we are doing. Let us not confine excellence to the few; let us spread it to the many, because the many have potential as well as the right to see it fulfilled.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes to Twelve o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 17 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Traffic Congestion

1. **Sue Doughty** (Guildford): If he will make a statement on his plans for traffic and congestion reduction in England. [85901]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): This afternoon, I shall make a statement and publish a report on the Government's 10-year transport investment plan. The investment plan will bring about reductions in congestion, but continued progress will require sustained investment as well as other measures over many years.

Sue Doughty: The Secretary of State said this morning on the radio that he seeks merely to stem the remorseless rise of congestion. Does that mean allowing it to continue to rise? If so, what has happened to the imaginative and innovative solutions that we need to reduce the growth in traffic and to reduce actual traffic and congestion by 2011?

Mr. Darling: I have said on several occasions that it is clear to me that the levels of congestion in this country two years ago, when these targets were fixed, were far higher than people thought. It is also clear that, as a result of strong economic growth, the pressures on the system will be far higher than was anticipated. As I shall make clear later this afternoon, without the investment that we are bringing forward, congestion would rise remorselessly. That was what happened in the past, and that would be the case now were it not for our planned investment. That investment plan is designed to cut congestion and make a significant impact, but, overall, levels of congestion will be higher than we thought two years ago. I am being realistic about that, because it is the right approach to take. What is necessary, however, is to continue that investment, year on year, in road improvements, in bypasses, in junction improvements, in public transport, in buses and in rail. That is what we intend to do.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): My right hon. Friend will be aware that I have raised on previous occasions the serious congestion on the A1 western bypass, a two-lane motorway, around the Tyne and Wear conurbation, which is often easily as congested as the M6, a three-lane motorway. Will he give the House some information on what progress is being made on introducing measures to relieve congestion on that road?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend makes a key point. If we are to tackle congestion, we need to look at its causes, and, in particular, at the places where it occurs. He will be aware that I made an announcement last week about a number of road programmes. The road mentioned by my hon. Friend is being studied by the Highways Agency and as and when we have something to say about it, I shall report it to him and to the House. The key point in relation to congestion is that we must, as a country, commit ourselves to sustained investment, year on year, decade on decade, which successive Governments have failed to do in the past.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Secretary of State said last week:

> "I have enough experience as a Minister with large IT projects to be very wary of people who come along and say, "Don't worry, it'll be all right on the night." It does not quite work that way."—[*Official Report*, 10 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 162.]

Does he have every confidence that, come the end of February next year, people will be satisfied with the system that will be operating in London?

Mr. Darling: As I said, I have enough experience as a Minister dealing with IT projects for which I have responsibility to be cautious. Equally, I have enough experience to know that when other people are dealing with projects I should be even more cautious.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Will the Secretary of State cast a second glance over the proposals to dual the A453, the final part of which runs through the Clifton section of my constituency? The point at which the delays occur on the A453 has always been that at which the road crosses the River Trent, where the bottleneck is the bridge itself, which is not to be widened. Will he consider phasing the proposals to judge whether the final part of the scheme will work, because so much is dependent on diversionary transport planning, much of which is not yet in place?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the problem, because a few months ago I drove down that road, and I remember the congestion point that my hon. Friend mentioned. My recollection is that the Highways Agency is considering whether there should be a further crossing over the Trent to accommodate that problem. I shall look into the matter again and write to him. He is right to raise the general issue that if one sorts out congestion at one point, one should try to sort out the congestion at the next point down the line.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): How will cutting rail services and increasing rail fares help to tackle road congestion?

Mr. Darling: Over the next few years we will double the amount of money spent on the railways; from recollection, we are spending something like £12 billion on the railway system. I have made it clear on a number of occasions, as has Richard Bowker, the chairman of the Strategic Rail Authority, that the rail industry must get a grip of the costs that it faces. The Government are willing to spend more, and investment is being made, but, as in other cases, that must be coupled with reform. First, the industry must get a grip of its major project costs, but it must also deliver better standards in relation to reliability and the quality of service offered.

I am sure that many Members of the House will know from their own experience that too many rail companies in this country have not improved their performance. Richard Bowker and the SRA are therefore right to drive a hard bargain on behalf of the public, who expect us to make sure that money is spent prudently and to the best possible effect.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): But will my right hon. Friend not accept, as I believe he does, that the only answer to road congestion is an integrated approach that talks about long-term investment in the railways and public transport as well as in necessary road improvements? I am sure that he does not want to be called the son of Beeching, so will he assure the House that we will not have railway closures and public transport cuts? That is not the way to improve road congestion.

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is right. As I said last week, any transport policy has to be measured and balanced. That means that we have to spend more on our railways because they are suffering from year after year and decade after decade of under-investment. We also have to make sensible improvements in our road network, which, in many cases, was designed 30 or 40 years ago and now carries levels of traffic that could not have been anticipated then.

However, it is equally true that, if we spend more, we must make sure that we get more out of the system. I am sure that my hon. Friend cannot be the only Member of the House who becomes frustrated to find that, when we put more money into the railway system, too many companies do not make the improvements that they should make. Frankly, the reliability levels of the trains need to be improved. Poor maintenance and staffing problems are all problems that the industry needs to sort out.

I am very clear about this. The Government are prepared to spend more on the railways—it is substantially more—but, at the same time, we are entitled to say to the industry, "You've got to get a grip of costs and you've got to get a grip of projects. Above all, you've got to provide a much better service than at present." I believe that the railway industry now understands that the Government, and through them the SRA, are extremely serious when we say to it that it has got to up its game and drive up standards.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): If the Secretary of State is blaming what he calls an unexpected rise in congestion on unexpected economic growth, will he explain how a 5 per cent. growth in the number of jobs in the past five years translates into a 16 per cent. rise in average journey times, into a 33 per cent. rise in the CBI's estimate of the cost to business of congestion and into a 40 per cent. rise in average congestion levels on motorways?

Mr. Darling: The principal cause of the rise in congestion on the roads and railways is that, for years, successive Governments failed to invest enough. Indeed, if we ask ourselves why much of the transport system in other European countries is, generally speaking, better than ours, we find that the reason is that they invested more year on year and decade after decade. The hon. Gentleman's problem—I put this to him last week—is that he does not have a policy for dealing with any of this. Until he has, he will forgive me for being a trifle sceptical of the criticism that he makes of us.

Mr. Collins: If the answer is investment, why are the Government proposing to spend in every year of the 10-year plan less on both roads and rail than Margaret Thatcher spent in every year of her premiership? If it is all unexpected, how come that it was predicted almost to the precise percentage point in the Government's own document "National Road Traffic Forecasts (Great Britain) 1997"?

Mr. Darling: On spending, it is a trifle disingenuous of the hon. Gentleman to exclude from his figures private investment, which is also going into road and rail. It is interesting that private investment under this Government is 10 times greater now than it was under Margaret Thatcher's Government.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): She got us into this mess.

Mr. Darling: That is as may be. However, the key point surely is that, unless all of us, including the Opposition, sign up to the proposition that we need to invest more in transport—public transport and in roads, rail and buses—the problems that face us will continue. I am clear that, as a result of the 10-year plan, we will stem the rising level of congestion that we would otherwise have faced. By investing in buses, railways, light transport and public transport overall as well as by putting more into the road system, we will steadily bear down on what is an undoubted problem. However, without the money and the commitment to investment, which the Conservatives certainly do not have, we will not crack the problem. The investment that the Government are putting forward will go a long way towards dealing with the problem. However, as I have made clear—let us face up to this—we have an awful lot more to do.

Airport Development

2. **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): What assessment he has made of the recent report of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution in relation to plans for airport development. [85902]

5. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What assessment he has made of the conclusions of the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution regarding the impact of a substantial increase in air travel on global warming; and if he will make a statement. [85905]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The Government will consider this report along with responses to our consultation on the development of air transport in the UK.

Tony Wright: Did my right hon. Friend notice that the subtitle of the royal commission's report is "flying to a warmer climate"? It estimates that as much as 10 per cent. of man-made global warming will come from aviation in 50 years' time. Given that, is it not daft that travel by train gets ever more expensive while travel by air gets ever cheaper, and that we have no tax on aircraft fuel? Are we sure that it is sensible to keep increasing airport capacity to meet demand without raising questions about the nature of that demand?

Mr. Darling: I did notice the subtitle of the report as I read it on an aeroplane, although I was returning to my constituency at the time, and so travelling to a colder climate. I also noticed that the report was not as thorough and, perhaps, in-depth as I might have liked, notwithstanding the conclusions. In particular, it did not give due credit to the fact that the Government made it clear in the consultation document that we believe that the air industry should pay for the environmental costs that it causes.

The report also did not take account of the fact that when I announced the consultation process, a number of hon. Members asked about rail alternatives, especially in the United Kingdom. I made it clear that once the west coast main line is upgraded and we have faster and more reliable train services, we will be able to encourage people to use that railway line rather than flying from Manchester to London, which strikes me as something they would not want to do if they had a reliable railway service. However, none of that gets away from the fact that many people go to airports to fly not within the UK or to close destinations in Europe, but to other parts of the world. For that reason, we need to consider the capacity of airports, notwithstanding the report's conclusions.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I know that the Secretary of State is trying to give full answers, but I have the difficulty of getting through the Order Paper and need his co-operation.

Mr. Mullin: But is it not the case that there is a flat contradiction between the Secretary of State's Department's plans for an indefinite expansion of air travel and the Government's commitment to the environment? Has he consulted his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and are they happy?

Mr. Darling: That does not happen to be the Government's policy. In the consultation, the Government asked to what extent we should meet the likely demand for an increase in flying over the next few years. The premise on which my hon. Friend bases his question is wrong. In the interests of brevity, I shall leave it at that.

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In seeking to meet demand for air transport, will the Secretary of State take note of the very serious air pollution that already exists in and around Heathrow? Will he exclude the possibility of a third east-west runway at that airport in favour of an incremental development of the airport system in the south-east of England as a whole, which is a more cost effective option?

Mr. Darling: It would be imprudent of me to come to a conclusion on something on which the Government are consulting. However, I am well aware of those points.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The House will be familiar with my interests in aviation and air transport. In drafting the response to the royal commission's findings, what assessment has the Secretary of State made of the potential for increasing the role of regional airports so that our constituents can travel from Scotland and the north of England directly, using regional air services, without being affected by the obsession of having to travel over London? Is that one aspect of his airport expansion proposals on which he might see fit to take a favourable approach?

Mr. Darling: I was not aware of the hon. Lady's interests in aviation, but as she has raised them I shall have a look. As for regional airports, as I said when I made my statement in July, many people in central Scotland, the north-east and the north-west of England would like to be able to fly to more international destinations and not have to come through a London airport. That is addressed in the consultation, and is something on which representations are sought—indeed, a number of people have made representations about it.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Can the Secretary of State give an assurance that information and recommendations from the royal commission will be included in the consultation papers on airport capacity developments that will be produced in the new year?

Mr. Darling: As my hon. Friend knows, the consultation documents refer to the environmental costs of airport expansion, as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) earlier, but I cannot give an undertaking that the royal commission findings will be incorporated in a Government paper, as that would not be appropriate. It is fairly well known that the royal commission has looked at the matter and reported—I am sure that people living at or around Heathrow will be well aware of the report, and will take up the arguments that they believe to be appropriate.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs told the House last Thursday that she had had discussions with the right hon. Gentleman about the report on

airport policy produced by the Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution. Does he recall those discussions, and can he tell us how he has amended his policy as a result?

Mr. Darling: On the documents, when we discussed the matter in prolonged exchanges in Question Time last month, I said that we would publish a further paper on the result of the court decision on Gatwick. The representations and general comments that we have received are publicly available and known about. Ministers will take them into account, as will the House.

It is important that we take into account not just what people say about the need to expand airports but what they say about the environmental cost of air travel—both are important. As I have said time and time again, next year we will reach a conclusion about what we ought to do. I am pretty clear about the fact that the House, the industry and the public want certainty about our strategy, and we still plan to make that decision towards the end of next year.

Vehicle Emissions

3. **Mr. Bill O'Brien** (Normanton): What representations he has made to the road transport industry to reduce pollution from vehicles which can cause asthma; and if he will make a statement. [85903]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Ministers meet regularly with representatives from the road transport industry, and the issue of the environmental and health impacts of road transport is frequently raised. Action at both national and European level has been very successful in reducing the levels of pollutants from road transport over the past decade, and the Government continue to play an active role to ensure future improvements in this sector.

Mr. O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend for his reply. Does he share my view that the increase in the number of people suffering from asthma, particularly children, is unacceptable? There is now evidence that particulates from vehicles are a cause of asthma—the problem is mainly caused by the density of traffic. Is my hon. Friend aware of the important studies by the Department of Health on the medical effects of air pollution, and will he act upon that information to ensure that the communities that we represent can be free of asthma?

Mr. Jamieson: I am aware of the report to which my hon. Friend referred—he is right to be concerned about this important matter, especially the impact on children. The latest research on the causes of asthma shows that there is no evidence that air pollution causes asthma, but there is certainly evidence that it exacerbates or may bring on attacks in people who already have asthma. We have therefore asked the Government's expert Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants to provide further advice next year.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Recently, one of the main causes of increased vehicle pollution has been the mad policies of the Mayor of London—narrowing streets, putting in chicanes, humps and bumps, and turning all the traffic lights red, which has been copied by other authorities around the country. In the interests of having cleaner air, will the Minister offer new guidance to local government to start easing the flow of traffic, rather than clobbering the motorist?

Mr. Jamieson: The congestion charging zone will give a dispensation to cleaner vehicles, which we greatly welcome. If we get some vehicles off the road to create a flow of traffic, that will reduce congestion. Roads can be congested by people travelling one person to a car, stop-starting, and travelling at low speeds. That is the most polluting aspect of vehicle usage, and we hope that congestion charging can make some contribution to tackling it.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will my hon. Friend examine carefully the relationship between congestion and asthma in London, and in particular, with the implementation of congestion charging in the spring, will he look carefully at whether the levels of asthma fall as the levels of congestion fall, as we hope they will?

Mr. Jamieson: That is a very good point. We have asked the Government's Committee on Medical Effects of Air Pollutants to consider the matter and refer it back to us next year. My hon. Friend will know that English local authorities can apply to have air quality management areas, in which they can have designated powers to conduct random roadside checks. All those things together will make a major contribution to improving asthma levels. Some of the evidence that we have at present is inconclusive. We want to make sure that the quality of the evidence is improved, so that we can take appropriate action.

Rail Franchise (Wales)

4. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): When the successful bid for the all-Wales rail franchise will be announced. [85904]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Strategic Rail Authority has asked for best and final offers to be submitted by bidders in February 2003. It expects that a preferred bidder will be announced in spring 2003.

Mr. Llwyd: Bearing it in mind that Wales has the worst railway services in the whole of the UK in terms of frequency, punctuality and so on, what does the Minister think will be the ultimate effect of the direction from the SRA to cut the franchise bids by 20 per cent? In a rural context, common sense dictates fewer services.

Mr. Spellar: The SRA has actually asked bidders to look at what would happen under reduced subsidy levels. As the hon. Gentleman knows, Wales received a subsidy last year of 14.3p per passenger kilometre, compared with a national average of 3.4p. The SRA is saying that companies should be looking at how they can bear down on their costs. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, the train operators, Network Rail and the contractors must consider how the public—

the travelling public and the taxpaying public—are to get value for money out of the rail system. That is a proper question to ask, and one that any responsible Government would support.

Ian Lucas (Wrexham): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the advent of an all-Wales rail franchise should not diminish the importance of services into England? Does he share my profound regret that a town such as Wrexham, the capital of north Wales, still does not have a decent rail service to London, which is a constant drain on the developing industry there?

Mr. Spellar: I fully accept my hon. Friend's point with regard to Wrexham. North Wales will benefit from the upgrade of the west coast main line, which will significantly improve journey times to north Wales. My hon. Friend will also be aware that in co-operation with the Welsh Executive, we have been looking at improving the road network in that area. I accept that there will be further problems to deal with. There have been decades of under-investment, which we cannot remedy overnight. We are, however, taking significant steps in that direction.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): The Minister knows that First Great Western recently put forward a proposal to link Wales to London by high-speed line. The Strategic Rail Authority gave that proposal a very negative response. Is it now the Government's policy that the private sector should not be involved in developing ideas for the enhancement of the rail infrastructure?

Mr. Spellar: No, we are certainly not saying that. The SRA is clearly saying to train operators, and rightly so, that their first priority must be to ensure that the franchises that they already have run efficiently and effectively, are reliable and provide customer satisfaction. There is much work to be done in the future as regards enhancements, but the key thing is to run the system as it is in order to cater for the travelling public and for freight. Train operators should be focusing all their efforts on that. Once we have got that sorted out, they should look at future enhancements.

Public Transport (Disabled Access)

6. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): If he will make a statement on access to all forms of public transport for people with disabilities. [85906]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend for his fine record of championing the causes of disabled people.

Regulations requiring access for disabled people, including wheelchair users, to new trains, buses and coaches have been introduced. We have also accepted the recommendations on transport made by the disability rights taskforce and recently issued the first of two consultation documents on proposals to implement them.

Mr. Clarke: I thank my hon. Friend for his generous reply. Will he focus in particular on access to buses to ensure that the appropriate equipment is made available and is constantly monitored? Will he also bear in mind the need for disability awareness training, especially for drivers?

Mr. Jamieson: The Government share my right hon. Friend's commitment to providing accessible public transport and full access for disabled people. That relates especially to buses. As he probably knows, since December 2000, all new buses have had to comply with the needs of disabled people. We recognise that the matter involves not only improving trains or buses, but the training of the people who deliver the services. We have placed a duty on drivers to give appropriate assistance to disabled people from October this year. I am aware of a number of training scheme initiatives for bus drivers that will assist in improving services for disabled people.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I know that the Minister is aware that many of the essential inter-island lifeline services in my constituency are provided using Islander aircraft, which have access difficulties for people with some disabilities. Can he give my constituents some assurance that those lifeline services will be protected when the regulations take effect in 2005 and that we will not be left with a situation in which one size is supposed to fit all?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that we are considering those matters, especially in the consultation that is taking place now and in the coming year. We want to ensure that we get it right. I can assure him that there is a total will to ensure that all public transport facilities are fully available to disabled people. We welcome and listen to the views of disabled groups, including lobbying groups, which make very important representations to us, and I will bear in mind the points that he makes.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): Richard Branson gets a lot of stick from us—*[Interruption.]* Indeed, but I travelled on one of the spanking new voyager trains from Preston to Bristol only a few days ago and was staggered at how sophisticated they are. There is even signage in Braille in the toilets and elsewhere. Will the Minister pass on those good ideas from the voyager train, which could be picked up by other train operating companies?

Mr. Jamieson: I am sure that the Virgin operators will read *Hansard* and take note of what my hon. Friend says. As he will know, the SRA has a code of practice that takes into account the needs of disabled people, especially in respect of new rolling stock and the refurbishment of existing rolling stock. I, too, have travelled on some of the new Virgin trains and I concur that they are excellent not only for disabled people, but for all passengers.

Train Operating Companies

7. **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will make a statement on the most recent rail performance indicators from train operating companies. [85907]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The figures published by the Strategic Rail Authority on 12 December show that overall performance between July and September of this year was better than for the equivalent period last year. However, much more needs to be done to drive up reliability and the SRA is leading work systematically to address the problems that cause delay on the network.

Mr. Heath: Much more certainly needs to be done, given that since the advent of this Government, delays have doubled and cancellations have increased by more than half. As it is very often not the rail operating companies that are at fault, but the track and infrastructure, will the Secretary of State answer the question that was put to him earlier, but which he failed to answer: how will interests of the travelling public be assisted by cancelling even more services, reducing maintenance and increasing fares?

Mr. Darling: As the hon. Gentleman asked the question, let me answer it. The delays to trains are caused in a proportion of roughly half and half by problems on the track and problems in the train operating companies, which are currently responsible for about 48 per cent. of all delays. If one asks what the causes are on the part of the companies, one sees that 45 per cent. of them relate to problems with the train fleet—that is, reliability and maintenance problems.

Some 12 per cent. relate to stations and problems in getting the trains away, and 18 per cent. relate to problems in relation to crewing. All those are management issues, so it does not necessarily follow that if we give the train operating companies more and more money, we will get a better service. As I made clear in my earlier reply, we must get a grip on costs and drive up the performance of management to get a better standard. I should have thought that all Members of the House, even Liberal Democrats, would sign up to that.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Can my right hon. Friend explain why the Strategic Rail Authority has handed vast amounts of money to Connex, which is probably one of the most reviled managements in the whole railway system, and in whose interest it was to allow those people to continue, because they manifestly are not doing any of the things that my right hon. Friend has asked them to do?

Mr. Darling: In relation to Connex, the House and my hon. Friend will know that the decision has been taken to bring the franchise to an end earlier than would otherwise have happened. The reason that it has run forward to 2006 is, first, because that line is about to receive a lot of new rolling stock, and a new company coming in coupled with new rolling stock might have been problematic. Secondly, I came to the view—I have to authorise those things at the end of the day—that the cost of taking the Connex operation back in-house would probably have been higher than that of continuing with Connex until we can replace the franchise in 2006. I reached that judgment after consultation with the Strategic Rail Authority, but I took the view that Connex could not continue in the way that it had for the reasons that my hon. Friend knows. However, I have to arrange an orderly transfer; a disorderly transfer would have been an absolute disaster.

London Underground (PPP)

8. **Simon Hughes** (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): If he will make a statement on progress towards the start of the public-private partnership contracts for the London underground and the transfer of assets to Transport for London. [85908]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Commercial agreement has been reached on the public-private partnership deals, and the preferred bidders have begun to raise their finance. We expect the JNP contract to come into force at the beginning of next year, and the BCV and SSL contracts to do so in the spring.

The Mayor of London has said that he may appeal the European Commission's decision that the notified PPP arrangements do not constitute state aid. It would be inappropriate to transfer London Underground to Transport for London during the appeal period, or pending any actual appeal, of the state aid decision. The same position applies in relation to any legal challenge in the English courts.

Simon Hughes: Transport Ministers will have received the report from London Underground yesterday showing that the private sector costs have gone up by £300 million and the public sector costs have gone down by £200 million. Therefore, the estimate for the total project over the seven and a half years, which is the guaranteed price period, is in the same ballpark—about £9.5 billion for each. Given that the Government pledge was that the private option would save £4.5 billion and would go ahead only if it proved better value for money, are Transport Ministers big enough to admit that they will not save that money, that the private option will not prove better value for money, and now choose the other better and cheaper option?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman, in his mayoral bid, wants to postpone investment in the underground for several more years. He neglects to point out that London Underground says that this still represents value for money and that the contract is over 30 years and not seven and a half years. What the travelling public in London want is an end to the wrangling and an end to the threats of litigation after two failed court cases, at considerable cost to London travelers and ratepayers. They want the companies to get in, the investment to go in, and the tube to improve. I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman does not support that.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Is there any serious transfer of risk to the private sector with 30-year contracts without a clause enabling termination in

the public interest, and given the Government's new letters of comfort to the private sector issued only last week?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend should observe that there is the shareholder risk if companies fail to perform. The key basis of the contract is that it is driven by performance, and there will be a review at seven and a half years as well. What voters and the travelling public want is for the contract to get on and the nitpicking to stop.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The prices in the contract are fixed for only seven and a half years. The Minister implies that the savings will continue afterwards. For the first seven and a half years, the Government subsidy will be £1 billion a year. Yet when they first made the announcement in 1999, they said that taxpayers would pay no subsidies. Will the Minister explain that?

Mr. Spellar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for pointing out that we are investing £1 billion a year in London Underground, which needs the money. As I said earlier, the contract represents value for money even with the adjustments that the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) mentioned. London Underground have been negotiating exactly that, and the contract would have been in place much sooner had not Transport for London brought two abortive legal cases. Without those, we would already be experiencing the benefits. The sooner that happens, the better. I hope that it will happen fairly early in the new year. I also hope that Conservative Members share that aspiration.

Bus Services

9. **Vernon Coaker** (Gedling): What steps he is taking to support improvements to local bus services. [85909]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Government's 10-year transport plan and the Transport Act 2000 are the key elements that we have put in place for achieving improvements in bus services. We are now taking forward several other initiatives to ensure that the objective is achieved. For example, we have established the bus partnership forum, and we are currently reviewing value for money from existing bus subsidies.

Vernon Coaker: Will my right hon. Friend consider what we can do with local bus companies such as Nottingham City Transport, which has cut some of its unprofitable routes, especially to outlying estates, thus often isolating those communities? Will he ascertain whether we can increase urban bus grants in the same way as we provided rural bus grants to try to ensure that isolated estates retain the bus services on which they depend?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend knows about urban bus challenge. Indeed, Nottingham city council succeeded in its bid for funding in the 2002 urban bus challenge competition for the Sherwood-Matterley feeder link. That will benefit a part of my hon. Friend's constituency.

My hon. Friend draws attention to an important problem that occurs especially on the edge of urban areas in outlying estates where a decline in patronage causes difficulty with the sustainability of services. In some cases, the appropriate response is a subsidy from the local passenger transport executive. In others, we should consider whether we need continuing fixed routes or more demand-led transport systems. Authorities are examining those matters. I am more than happy to consider the issues that my hon. Friend raised. They are not confined to his constituency, and they are a cause for concern.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The 10-year transport plan foresees an increase of 10 per cent. in bus journeys by 2010. That includes an expected 50 per cent. increase in such journeys in London. The inescapable mathematical consequence is that rural bus travel will continue to decline. Is the Minister resigned to that?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman should observe not only increasing car ownership but the increase in the number of driving licence holders, notably women, from 50 per cent. to 60 per cent. of the population. That has an impact on demand in rural areas. He is right that we will hit the 10 per cent. target. Even on the current figures, which we hope to improve, there was a 1 per cent. increase last year. Given his constituency, he will be well aware of increasing car ownership and usage in rural areas, and the consequent need for us to consider more demand-responsive services rather than the traditional bus routes, which are under much pressure through changing patterns of demand.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): Does my right hon. Friend accept that some of the problems are caused by the Conservative Government's decision in the 1980s to deregulate bus services outside London? The extra money that the Government are laudably investing in bus transport is being eaten up by the profits of large companies, which do not increase coverage but place even more pressure on passenger transport authorities for more subsidies. Will he consider reregulating bus services outside London to solve the problem?

Mr. Spellar: There is a variable picture across the country. In some areas, local authorities and the bus companies are working extremely well together to the benefit of the travelling public, but my hon. Friend is absolutely right—that picture is not universal, which is why we set up the bus partnership forum. I had the local authorities coming in with a litany of complaints about the bus companies. Equally, the bus companies were coming in with complaints about the local authorities, so we have got them together round the table. We have set up time-limited working parties to iron out a lot of those difficulties and to enable the companies and local authorities to come together and start spreading best practice across the country. We are starting to see some outcomes, but there is still a long way to go to achieve the service that her constituents deserve.

West Coast Main Line

10. **Tony Cunningham** (Workington): When he expects improvements in journey times on the west coast main line to be achieved. [85910]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The Strategic Rail Authority's draft strategy for the west coast route modernisation project envisages that journey times will be reduced substantially by winter 2004. Journey times will be further reduced by 2006, when the vast majority of the upgrade will be complete.

Tony Cunningham: While I welcome that, we all know that the only real improvement in journey times will come with new trains and track improvements. We will get the new pendolino trains, which are to run from London to Manchester and from London to Birmingham. Much, much later, they will run further north. We will also get west coast main line upgrades as far as Crewe, and perhaps further north later on. When the Minister is in discussions with Network Rail, the SRA and Virgin, will he remind them that there are people who live north of Preston? My constituents have to travel by train because the nearest airport is more than 100 miles away.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank my hon. Friend for that. He is aware that the west coast main line serves people well beyond Preston. In fact, some in Scotland might think that they have an interest in it as well. In the thrust of his question, he rightly underlined the west coast main line's strategic importance and rightly said that new rolling stock, which was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice), has been introduced to the line. However, as my hon. Friend also pointed out, we will not be able to provide that service unless the track is complete and up to standard. We are now convinced that Network Rail has a grip on the issue and a realistic timetable for improvements. We want that to be delivered so that the line is fully operational by 2006.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): Following on from that, does my hon. Friend agree that the reality is that, although the SRA has put a plan out to consultation, there are great worries that the money and the resources will not be there due to the speculation over the weekend? Can he confirm that the moneys will be there?

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend knows that a huge investment is being made in that line—a total of £10 billion. He refers to stories that were in the newspapers over the weekend. Those who have been invited to bid for the new franchises have been asked what they can provide at a lower rate of public subsidy. They have also been asked what they can provide at the same and at a greater rate. Unfortunately, the only story we saw in the newspapers was about cutting those subsidies.

Transport Links (Eastern Region)

11. **Barbara Follett** (Stevenage): What plans his Department has to improve east-west transport links in the eastern region. [85911]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): East-west transport links in the east of England are being investigated by the London to south midlands multi-modal study, which is nearing completion. The final report will be published early in the new year. We will consider the regional planning body's recommendations on the study and make a further announcement on how they will be implemented in due course.

Barbara Follett: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply and for the £145 million that the eastern region received in last week's local transport settlement, but is he aware that none of that money went towards improving east-west transport links? Will he bear that in mind in making future allocations, particularly as there is an urgent need for those links to bring employment to the Suffolk coastal towns?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend is aware that we are considering not just the immediate area in London and the south midlands, but the area surrounding Ipswich, not least because of the connections out to the east coast ports. We need to wait for the outcome of the multi-modal study and, of course, the views of the regional planning body. I will certainly take account of her views when we come to that consideration and hope also that she will make representations at that time.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Will the Minister confirm that he has no intention of allowing, let alone financing, the railway and motorway from Luton to Stevenage, which the Luton airport operators have said would be necessary if their expansion plans were approved and which would destroy the environment in my constituency and that of the hon. Member for Stevenage (Barbara Follett)? It would probably end in her back garden. Will he also confirm that the real way to stop unnecessary cross-county transport and travel is to focus airport growth in a minimum of hub airports rather than unnecessarily expanding airports such as Luton?

Mr. Spellar: The right hon. Gentleman is asking me to prejudge not one consultation, but two. I need to await the outcome of both consultations before I can come to a view.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister was asked—

Public Appointments

35. **Mr. Tom Harris** (Glasgow, Cathcart): What work is being undertaken by his Department to encourage younger people to seek a public appointment. [85936]

40. **Jeff Ennis** (Barnsley, East and Mexborough): What progress has been made by his Department in increasing the number of disabled people seeking public appointments. [85941]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government are committed to increasing diversity in public appointments and value

the contribution that young people and disabled people can make. That is why we are taking a range of initiatives, from citizenship education in secondary schools to encouraging departments to publicise public appointments in journals such as *Disability Now* and *Disability Times*.

Mr. Harris: Given the subject matter of this question, it is appropriate that my hon. Friend is answering it. Does he agree that far too few young people express an interest in public service? Is not there a danger that, unless we can convince younger people that their opinions and experience are valued, their disengagement with the political process will only accelerate?

Mr. Alexander: I agree with my hon. Friend. Engaging young people in the political process is a challenge not only for the Government, but for all political parties. One of the particular challenges that we face is that only 10 to 15 per cent. of public appointments come up every year. We have made some progress on that, but we can make further progress, especially with regard to young people.

Jeff Ennis: Has the Minister's Department liaised with disability organisations on this important issue? What can it do to speed up the process so that at long last public bodies are truly representative of society?

Mr. Alexander: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. The Cabinet Office and the equality unit have held discussions on these specific areas. We are keen to increase the number of adverts placed in journals that address the needs of particular communities, including the disabled.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): I commend to my hon. Friend the work of A National Voice, which is the national organisation for young people in care. It explodes many of the myths about young people in care. Will he assure me that such organisations will be fully involved in the work to develop and improve the care system and on the Green Paper on services for children at risk?

Mr. Alexander: I shall certainly bear in mind my hon. Friend's observations on the care system, and I will ensure that my colleagues in government are fully appraised of the work of the organisation of which he speaks.

Open Source Software

36. **Mr. Richard Allan** (Sheffield, Hallam): What progress he has made in implementing his Department's policy for open source software. [85937]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): We have jointly established a group to raise awareness of the policy and to build expertise in software procurement. The Cabinet Office effectively promotes and is active in its deployment of the open source software policy.

Some recent examples of public sector usage of OSS include the Department of Trade's Small Business Service, the Meteorological Office and West Yorkshire police. Those organisations are either using or piloting open source software for their operational use.

Mr. Allan: The Minister deserves credit for his open source policy. Will he confirm that it will apply in full to the national health service, which is a major purchaser of IT services and could benefit from acquiring the rights to bespoke software and deploying it openly among the developer community? Has he been able to reach agreement on his policy of using open source software as the default exploitation route for Government-funded research and development software?

Mr. Alexander: I welcome the hon. Gentleman, who is now dealing with these issues, to his new position on the Front Bench. I shall make a couple of general observations and then address the specific question of the health service. We always maintain an interest in best value for money solutions, be they OSS or other types of software. We are also determined to remove reliance on individual IT suppliers, and the Office of Government Commerce is taking forward a range of work in this area. The hon. Gentleman may also be interested to know that I discussed IT matters with the Secretary of State for Health this morning.

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): One perception about open source software is that it is less secure than proprietary software, but that is not true. What steps is the Minister taking to promote the security of IT systems across government, particularly those using OSS?

Mr. Alexander: I know of the expertise of my hon. Friend in this area, and it goes without saying that the security of Government systems is vital. We are taking active steps on a monthly and ongoing basis to keep appraised of the latest IT security challenges that we face. Properly configured open source software can be at least as secure as proprietary systems; in fact, at the moment OSS is subject to fewer attacks than are alternative forms of software. However, this is an area of ongoing work for the Government.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Has the Minister examined the use of open source software to solve a very big Government problem: their inability to answer letters in anything less than two or three months? Would it not be a good idea to examine how to get much better standards of performance in serving us and our constituents?

Mr. Alexander: One of the challenges relating to software systems is the legacy issue, and one such legacy that we encountered after 1997 was the slowness of Departments in responding to letters. Work is now being undertaken by each Whitehall Department to ensure that letters are responded to at an appropriate time.

Civil Service (Recruitment)

37. **Mr. Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich, West): What steps he is taking to ensure equality of opportunity in recruitment to the civil service. [85938]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government remain strongly committed to equality of opportunity, and to creating a civil service that is fully representative of the community that it serves. Government Departments have delegated responsibility for most recruitment, but they have set themselves challenging diversity targets.

Mr. Bailey: I thank the Minister for his reply. What advice can he give to young unemployed members of the ethnic minority community in my constituency on how best to improve their chances of being recruited to the civil service, both regionally and nationally?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes an important point. A range of community organisations is receiving direct sponsorship to encourage under-represented groups to apply for work in the civil service. One example that may be of interest to him is Black Britain—it can be found at blackbritain.co.uk—an online business that provides black communities with information on jobs across Departments in Whitehall.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Does the Minister agree that, in talking about equality in this context, he should be equally concerned with quality? If he cannot explain today what a "representative" civil service actually means, can he give us an absolute assurance that, when it comes to recruitment to the civil service, merit will always come above all else?

Mr. Alexander: I would hope that that is not a contentious point on the Floor of the House, but it could be so for those Opposition Members who have no interest in building up the public sector and the civil service in particular. We maintain our ambition of merit and equality of access to the civil service, and we see no contradiction between drawing talent from the widest possible pool across the country, and ensuring excellence in the public realm in the United Kingdom.

Angela Eagle (Wallasey): It is interesting to note that the Opposition seem to think that there is such a contradiction. I congratulate the Government on the work that they are doing in this area, but I ask my hon. Friend to recommit his Department to driving forward equal opportunities in respect of gender, ethnic minorities and disability—across the whole piece—in order to make the civil service more representative of the people that it serves.

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend makes some vital points. Of course, within the civil service there are targets not just for women and for ethnic minorities, but for disabled citizens; however, along with those targets we have also taken forward streams of work that are attracting non-traditional entrants. As the work of the civil service in relation to the new deal and modern apprenticeships shows, many new routes of access are now available to people who perhaps had not previously considered serving the public interest in the civil service.

Civil Emergency Contingency Planning

39. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on the organisation of civil emergency contingency planning. [85940]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Within the Cabinet Office, the Minister for the Cabinet Office, Lord Macdonald of Tradeston, has ministerial responsibility for civil emergency contingency planning. He is in regular contact with ministerial colleagues on civil contingency issues, both within formal committee meetings and on an ad hoc basis.

Miss McIntosh: As the Minister will be aware, the emergency planning college is situated at the Hawkhills campus near Easingwold in my constituency. Who is responsible for delivering contingency planning? What should Members of Parliament do in the event of a terrorist attack on the House?

Mr. Alexander: My noble Friend Lord Macdonald of Tradeston recently visited that college, and heard about the important work being taken forward there. I pay tribute to that work today. The Minister responsible for the protection and safety of UK citizens is my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary. He is in charge of three Cabinet Sub-Committees, and he co-ordinates the work of Government not just in one locality but across the country.

Occupational and Private Pensions

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the Government Green Paper entitled "Simplicity, Security and Choice: Working and Saving for Retirement".

Decisions on pensions are some of the most important of our lives. Since coming to office in 1997, this Government have faced three specific challenges on pensions—of affordability, pensioner poverty and expectations. Rising longevity poses important challenges for the affordability of pensions systems right across the developed world. The old age dependency ratio is expected to more than double in the EU, with even greater increases in other developed economies such as Japan.

It is good news that people live longer, but if people want their standards of living to continue to rise in retirement, they must either save more or work longer, or a mixture of both. The UK is in a stronger position to meet this demographic challenge than most other developed countries, not only because our dependency ratio is expected to increase by half as much as the European average, but because of the choices that the Government have made over the past five years to ensure that the UK pensions system remains affordable.

We rejected demands to link the basic state pension to earnings, because that short-term solution would not have been sustainable over the long term. Instead, because of our targeted approach, projections show that public spending on pensions in this country will remain stable over the next 50 years at around 5 per cent. of gross domestic product. In contrast, EU forecasts show that other European countries such as Germany and Spain will require increases of between 40 per cent. and 80 per cent. in public spending on pensions over the next 50 years in order to meet their pension liabilities.

That same targeted approach has enabled us to meet the second challenge, of pensioner poverty. Since 1997, we have strengthened the foundation of basic state support through the introduction of the minimum income guarantee and, from next October, the pension credit. As a result, next year the poorest third of pensioners will be on average £1,500 a year better off.

I can tell the House that the Government continue to reject calls from the pensions industry and others that all targeted support for pensioners should be scrapped and instead added to the basic state pension. Such a move would mean an increase in the maximum basic entitlement of £10 a week for some pensioners, but at the expense of a cut of £17 a week for the poorest pensioners. That would amount to taking resources from the poorest pensioners and redistributing them to the richest, and it is not our way.

Over the past five years, as we have taken action to tackle pensioner poverty, the pension contributions of people on higher incomes have risen by 40 per cent., increasing the incomes that they can expect in retirement. The challenge facing society today, therefore, has to do with the expectations of middle-income earners—people who expect continuing rising standards of living in retirement, but who to achieve that will either have to save more or work longer, or both.

Evidence shows that perhaps 3 million such people are currently not saving enough for their retirement, and others may not be saving enough to provide the pensions that they want. At the same time, occupational schemes have come under pressure from rising costs and increasing complexity. Some employers are closing schemes or cutting the amount of contributions, and many people are leaving the work force earlier.

There is a choice to be made on how we meet these challenges. Some believe that a radical strengthening of the voluntarist approach to pension provision can never be made to work and that the United Kingdom should move beyond it, for example, adopting further compulsory pension contributions. We believe that the partnership between Government, individuals, employers and the financial services industry has long been a strength of the pensions system in the United Kingdom, and that the proposals we are setting out today will renew that partnership and reaffirm the responsibilities of each member.

Our proposals show how, if all partners play their part, the voluntarist approach can work to maximum effect. The test will be whether, with this radical strengthening of our approach, employers and employees can rise to the challenge voluntarily, or whether we will need to introduce more compulsion. In a voluntarist system, over and above the level of support provided by the state, individuals are best placed to judge their own long-term savings needs and aspirations for retirement; but the success of that approach rests on the information and understanding that people have, and the clarity of the options open to them. The approach will fail if the complexity of products and the cost of financial advice deter people from saving.

Since 1997 we have taken action to rebuild trust in the financial services industry, to clear up pensions mis-selling—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"]—for which Opposition Members ought to apologise—and to introduce new savings products such as individual savings accounts and stakeholder pensions, opening up new opportunities for people to save. For too many people, however, pensions planning—as we all know—has remained an incomprehensible maze.

As I told the House in July,

> "Pensions simplification has to be at the heart of any strategy to encourage greater pension provision". —[*Official Report*, 11 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 1053.]

Nowhere is that truer than in taxation of pensions, which has grown complex enough to challenge even the experts. There are currently no fewer than eight sets of tax rules governing pensions—each with its own annual limits on contributions and benefits—imposing unnecessary inflexibility, driving up costs and, worst of all, discouraging people from saving.

Today I can announce a radical simplification of the rules. We propose to sweep away the eight existing pensions tax regimes with their associated limits on annual contributions and benefits. We propose to replace them with a single lifetime limit assessed at the point of retirement, and we propose to set that limit at £1.4 million. The lifetime limit will be complemented by a light-touch compliance regime based on an annual

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limit of £200,000. That limit will not affect the majority of people. Further details are contained in an Inland Revenue consultation document published today by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor. As my right hon. Friend announced in the pre-Budget report, the tax-free lump sum will remain, as will existing tax reliefs for pension contributions by employees, the self-employed and employers.

These proposals will help people to make clear, confident decisions. They will encourage more saving, and enable more people to build up a bigger tax-free lump sum. They mean far greater individual choice and flexibility in terms of when and how much to save for a pension. Over 99 per cent. of the population will be able to save more, with tax incentives, than is possible under current rules. The proposals will also reduce administrative burdens on employers and pension providers alike. Taken with the other measures that I am announcing today, they could save employers between £150 million and £200 million a year in pensions administration.

We will match this radical simplification of pensions taxation by breaking down other barriers to pension saving. We will provide individuals with more information about their own circumstances, and our proposals will increase the availability of state pension forecasts and extend the coverage of combined state and occupational pension forecasts. We will promote total benefit statements in the workplace, and highlight the additional value that tax relief contributes to saving in a pension.

To broaden access to advice, we will work with the financial services industry to develop mass-market financial advice in high street banks, and will consult on options for a possible requirement on employers who do not provide pensions to provide financial advice free of charge through the workplace. I can confirm to the House that we will implement the recommendations of the Sandler report to make it easier to save through simpler products, dramatically stripping out regulation and sales costs.

We also propose to offer the self-employed the right to opt in to the state second pension. I can also announce that we will increase product choice and flexibility in the annuities market by consulting on proposals to allow limited-period and value-protected annuities.

The proposals that we are setting out today will also reaffirm the role and responsibilities of employers in the pension partnership. Many employers recognise the important benefits to recruitment, retention and staff motivation that good pension provision brings. But, elsewhere, some employers have been reducing their financial commitment and contribution to workplace pensions, causing anxiety and damaging confidence in pension provision. There is a difficult balance to strike, here. We want to increase member protection without imposing burdens on employers.

I can announce today that we propose to create a new proactive pensions regulator, to focus on schemes where there is a high risk of fraud, bad governance or maladministration. We are also setting out proposals for a fairer sharing of assets when schemes close, with more priority for workers closer to retirement or those with more years of contributions. We propose stronger protection for members where employers wind up schemes, and the capping of provisions to prevent executives abandoning ship and taking the lifeboat with them. We recognise, as good employers already do, the vital interest that employees have in their pension arrangements, so we propose requiring employee consultation before schemes are changed.

We can only expect to enhance protection for employees if we make it simpler and easier for employers to run schemes. Following Alan Pickering's report, we propose radically to reduce the regulatory burden on occupational schemes by simplifying the contracting out rules, including reforming the reference scheme test and ending restrictions on how and at what age contracted-out rights can be drawn. We will also replace the minimum funding requirement with scheme-specific funding requirements, saving companies £80 million a year. We will also consider allowing employers to make membership a condition of employment. I can also announce our aim to consolidate all pensions legislation into a single pensions Act.

These radical reforms mean big cuts in the administrative burdens on employers and schemes. We will also work with a new employer-led taskforce, including trade union membership, to identify and promote good practice.

Enabling people to work a few years longer can make a huge difference to retirement income. The 1980s and early 1990s saw the employment rate for older male workers decline. That trend has been reversed, with 900,000 more people over 50 now in jobs than in 1997. However, we must go further, by doing away with inflexible and outdated approaches to retirement. Our proposals will allow people to choose to work for longer if they want to do so.

We propose to promote flexibility in retirement by building on the success of the new deal 50-plus; legislating against age discrimination; ending compulsory retirement ages; and raising the normal pension age for most groups in the public services to 65 for all new entrants. To smooth the cliff edge between work and retirement, we propose to allow people to carry on working while drawing an occupational pension; and to improve the incentives for those who want to work past state pension age, we will bring forward increases to the extra state pension that people get by deferring. That means that a single pensioner who has accumulated £100 a week state pension and second pension entitlement could choose to take their pension at 70 and get £150 a week instead.

We are also consulting on the chance for those who defer to take a lump sum instead of the enhanced pension. For a single pensioner, that would be a one-off payment of £20,000 on top of their normal pension, or £30,000 for a couple.

I have one further announcement to make about the state pension age. We have received representations for a significant change, with persuasive arguments to move to a higher state pension age, releasing resources for use elsewhere in the pensions system. I have carefully considered that option, but have concluded that it would disproportionately impact on the poorest workers—those most dependent on the state pension, many of whom have had hard working lives.

As well as being forced to work for longer, those people would, because of lower life expectancy, see a bigger than average slice of their retirement taken away. I have therefore decided that we should not raise the state pension age. Our measures to give people far greater choice about flexible retirement are the right way to address the issue—not raising the state pension age.

The proposals that we are setting out today seek to renew the pensions partnership in the UK. They show how, with all partners playing their part, the voluntarist approach can be made to work to maximum effect. As I have said, some people believe that the voluntarist approach to pension provision can never be made to work, and that the UK should adopt a system of compulsory pension contributions.

There is a choice. The case for compulsion has not yet been made, but because of the magnitude of such a decision and the need to help to build a wider consensus on the way forward, I am today establishing an independent pensions commission, reporting to me as Secretary of State on whether the current voluntary system is sufficient to ensure that employers and employees rise to the challenge. I can tell the House that Adair Turner, former director general of the CBI, has accepted my invitation to chair that commission. It will report to me regularly on whether there is a case for moving beyond voluntarism.

The time has come for all the partners in the pensions system—the Government, employers, employees and financial services—to rise to the pensions challenge, and I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): May I begin by thanking the Secretary of State for his statement? It was due in the autumn and it comes not a moment too soon. What is at stake is nothing less than the prospects for a decent retirement for millions of our fellow citizens.

This time, the Government must get their pensions policy right. They have tried many times before. Can the Secretary of State tell the House how many consultation documents on pensions the Government have produced since 1997? When I tabled a question about how many documents there had been, the Department replied that the information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. That is not a good sign—on my reckoning there are at least 38. In fact, I have some of the previous consultation documents here, and, as they have poured out of the right hon. Gentleman's Department, the crisis in our funded pensions has got steadily worse.

Does the Secretary of State recognise how serious the problem is? Does he realise that the speed at which pension funds are closing to new members has doubled in the past year? Does he know that more than half Britain's leading companies have now closed their pension schemes to new members? Does he know that the number of people who are retiring with an occupational pension is going down and that the number of pensioners claiming means-tested benefits is going up?

Not all the causes are under the Government's control, but that makes it all the more important that Governments get right the things that they do control. Instead, we have had the Chancellor's notorious £5 billion a year grab on our pension funds; another £1.5 billion a year taken from our pensions because contracted-out rebates are too low; and nine out of 10 stakeholder pensions with not a penny in them.

So why did not the Secretary of State come to the House of Commons this afternoon and apologise on behalf of the Government for turning what was one of our great post-war successes into an economic and social disaster? There was no recognition of the scale of the crisis, and there was certainly no strategy for getting out of it. Because they have not got a solution, they pretend there is no problem.

The Secretary of State did not even repeat the Government's original objective, published in a previous pensions Green Paper, to increase from 40 to 60 per cent. the proportion of pensioners' incomes that comes from funded savings. Are they doing so badly that they have given that up altogether? Will he offer any estimate of the increase in pension savings that he expects as a result of today's announcement?

I warn the Secretary of State that he appears to base his arguments on the assumption that flows of savings into our pension funds have grown by 40 per cent. since 1997. He has already had to write me one letter of apology for producing incorrect statistics on the size of our pension flow, and I warn him that he might have to write a second one if he uses such statistics.

We will look carefully at the Secretary of State's proposals in the days and weeks ahead, but there seem to be too many old ideas rehashed and relaunched. Of course we want flexible retirement, but what the Secretary of State has announced—or rather reannounced—today has been announced by the Government five times already. In fact, it was in the original pensions Green Paper, published in December 1998. We do not need more consultation; we need action.

Yes, we need to offer more protection to employees who have been working for a company for years and find their hopes for a decent pension dashed. In fact, the Government had a consultation document on that as well—"Security for Occupational Pensions". It is more than two years old and nothing has been done. Meanwhile, the workers at Maersk and ASW, as well as those in dozens of other schemes that have wound up, have paid the price.

We agree with the Secretary of State that it would be better to offer people more flexibility in taking the state pension, but, again, his proposals are not new. Will he confirm that Parliament passed legislation to make such changes in 1995, in our Pensions Act? That was when the Labour party was arguing for a pension age of 63, by the way. Of course we understand the need for consensus and stability to encourage long-term saving, and we will support his measures where we can, but it is no use pretending that what he has announced today will somehow reverse our pension crisis. It is too little, too late.

We believe that the burden of regulation and red tape on pensions is too great. That is why we supported Alan Pickering's inquiry, but it is typical of the Government that they produced another 251 pages of regulation even after they had introduced the deregulation review. Can the Secretary of State tell us more about the basis on which the new simplified tax regime will be constructed? He has referred to the eight tax regimes that already exist, but it appears as though he is adding a ninth to

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apply in future alongside the eight that will continue to apply in respect of previous contributions. So will he confirm whether he will be keeping the 1,300 pages of tax regulations for contributions already made and adding another tax regime on top?

Does the Secretary of State accept that we need better incentives for people to save for their pension instead of cutting back on the incentives that already exist in the tax system? Will there be losers in the proposals that he has put forward today? If so, how many will there be, and how much will they lose? Can he give a cast-iron assurance that the Chancellor is not using the simplification exercise as an excuse for another stealth tax?

The other day, the Secretary of State said that he was not offering a quick fix. I agree with him on that. His proposals are certainly not quick and they will not fix the problem either. The truth is that British pensions are in deep crisis. Millions of our fellow citizens face an impoverished retirement. All that has happened while the Government have been consulting and reviewing. At the end of that process, British pensions are in a far worse state than they were before it started.

The Secretary of State could have come to the House and admitted that the old approach was not working and that a radically new one was needed. We need new flexible ways of saving that match the way people live their lives today. We need a far simpler benefits regime for pensioners and we need to reverse the spread of means-tested benefits. Why will the Secretary of State not recognise that problem and do something about it? Without that, there is a gaping hole at the heart of his pensions proposals. He would have had support in all parts of the House for a bold reform, but he missed that opportunity. Instead, he offered us more of the same.

Today's statement simply fails to match the scale of the crisis in the savings of our country. Governments should encourage people to save, but, under this Government, savings are penalised as they never have been before. Pension funds which only five years ago seemed solid and prosperous are now insecure and under threat. After today, and after this missed opportunity, millions of people will face a new era of financial insecurity, knowing that this Government, their mistakes and their wasted opportunities are to blame. Will the Secretary of State start his response today by apologising to the millions of people whose pensions have lost value as a result of the Government's policies?

Mr. Smith: What was abundantly clear from that statement is that there is a gaping hole where any alternative policies from the Opposition ought to be. It was very clear that, even in the time that the hon. Gentleman had to study our Green Paper and my statement, he had not grasped the sweep and radicalism of our tax simplification. It does not add a ninth tax regime—that is the sort of thing that the Tories used to do. It scraps the eight and brings in a new simple regime that will encourage and promote saving where the Conservatives—as well as presiding over pension mis-selling—erected, often with the very best of intentions, walls of complexity around pensions and long-term saving, which serve this country very badly. The Conservatives should support not only the simplification of taxation but the stunning reforms that we are carrying through on contracting out the reference scheme test and the guaranteed minimum pension. The right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) is nodding—he at least realises the radicalism of what we are doing.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) spoke about the ending of the tax credit and taking £5 billion out of pension funds. But the country will know that the Conservatives' attack is worthless and that they are shedding crocodile tears, as there is no commitment on their part to reversing that position. If it is doing such damage, why has the shadow Chancellor not pledged that his party will reverse it?

The hon. Gentleman, as he has done before, referred to what he called means-tested benefits. As we all know, that is Conservative code for abolishing the pension credit, the measure that we are introducing and which, from next October will reward—as opposed to the Conservative party in government who penalised—those with modest occupational pensions and savings. The Opposition are proposing to take an average £8 a week off half the pensioner households in the country. They should support our proposals.

I welcome one thing—it is important—that the hon. Gentleman said, namely, that on the simplification proposals where we can build consensus, we will. There is a particular responsibility on pensions Ministers and spokespeople of all parties to endeavour to establish the broadest possible consensus on this issue so that we can together build the foundations for long-term saving and security for older people. I am pleased to see that some Conservative Back Benchers are nodding, even if those on the Front Bench are not.

The other parts of the hon. Gentleman's remarks were muddled, damaging and would hit the poorest hardest. That is not compassionate conservatism but the same old Tory Front-Bench view, which is more extreme than ever.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): If there were an offence of mis-selling Government pension policies, the Secretary of State should be bang to rights this afternoon. It sounded like an Arthur Daley scheme. He says that he will reward pensioners who defer their state pension by five years and go without their £4,000 a year state pension for that time, but what will they get in the end? Only £20,000. Well, that is a great incentive. The Secretary of State has failed to address the tough choices that needed to be addressed. A company such as BAE Systems, which is a large employer, projects a £1 billion deficit in its scheme in three years' time. There was nothing in the statement that was up to the scale of that problem. Is there anything that would match a £1 billion deficit in one scheme?

What about the position of women? I am pleased that, finally, there is a chapter about women in the document. We have put women's pensions back on the political agenda, but I have read that chapter and it is empty. It has nothing for the women who feel cheated by their pension provision. In the past two days, more than 150 women have written to me describing their anger at their pension position. What have the Government got that is concrete for women other than more information? What will they deliver for the needs of women?

What about the hope that people will save more? The Government have ducked the tough choice. They have set up a commission to consider the matter, but presumably it will have to wait until the issue has had years to run and then it might recommend compulsion. That would take years more, so it could be 10 years before we make sure that people save. Hoping that people will save has failed. We need to make sure that Government, employees and employers all put money into pension schemes for people on middle and higher earnings. If we do not do that, another decade will be wasted.

The Secretary of State rightly talks about consensus, but that implies that all sides are willing to move. Sitting next to him is a Chancellor who is so wedded to mass means-testing that he is in a minority of one. If the Government will not give ground on mass means-testing, what scope is there for consensus? We have heard about a task force, a commission and a proactive regulator, but we have not had the tough choices for a crisis. This is a missed opportunity.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Gentleman talks about mass means-testing. However, the truth is that, with the pension credit, we are rewarding people on modest occupational and savings incomes. Like the Tories, he would obviously take us back to pound-for-pound withdrawal, which penalises those on the lowest incomes.It is difficult to take seriously proposals on public spending from a party that, since the general election alone, has made 80 promises for extra public expenditure.

The hon. Gentleman attempted to deride the opportunity for people who defer taking their pension to receive a £20,000 or £30,000 lump sum. The matter is out for consultation, so, if he thinks that the sums are wrong or that the figures should be actuarially adjusted, he can make recommendations to that affect. However, does he not realise the radical potential of allowing people who have never before in their lives had access to that sort of money to have access to the sort of lump sums that people on much higher incomes in much more generous schemes can have? Why not give those people that choice, which has hitherto been confined to the rich?

I acknowledge the seriousness with which the hon. Gentleman addresses the needs of women in the pension system. He is right to raise that issue. As he says, we have dedicated a chapter in the Green Paper to it. He asks what we are doing for women pensioners. Does he not realise that the majority of the beneficiaries of the very minimum income guarantee and pension credit that he attacks are women? Does he not realise that in introducing the state second pension, the overwhelming majority of beneficiaries will be women, including carers and those with broken work records? It is difficult to take the hon. Gentleman's criticisms seriously when he does not recognise the huge steps forward that our policies have represented for women and other pensioners.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): May I welcome unreservedly the Secretary of State's statement on simplification, especially the move towards a fairer winding-up system, and on getting those with annuities a better deal? Does he accept, however, that his statement will be viewed as the last throw in making the voluntary system work? As the voluntary system is failing to give a growing proportion of pensioners a minimum adequate pension, does his Green Paper list the criteria by which we will judge the success or otherwise of his strategy? Can we expect to see success, or failure, this side of the election?

Mr. Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for welcoming the simplification of the provisions on winding-up, the greater security that we are extending to people and the improvements to the annuities regime. Like other hon. Members, I respect his expertise and long-standing interest in such matters. Indeed, the idea that we could give an option on wind-up to pensioners based on the length of their time in a pension scheme is something that he proposed, as we acknowledge in the Green Paper.

My right hon. Friend says that our proposal might be seen as a last throw for the voluntary system. Let me make it clear, as I did in my statement, that by strengthening the voluntary system through introducing measures to simplify the regime, by enhancing protection for scheme members and pensioners through the radical reform of taxation, and by cutting costs on pension schemes and employers, we hold out the prospect of delivering our promise and renewing and refreshing the partnership on pensions.

We are equally clear in the Green Paper, however, that that has to be reviewed. My right hon. Friend asks about the criteria for that. They must include the trends in pension provision and long-term saving. The review must be based on an assessment of whether each partner to the pensions partnership meets its responsibilities. That has to be part of the test. It is why we need a regular review and why Adair Turner, who leads the commission, will report regularly to me. If the evidence shows that we need to move beyond the voluntary system—for example, by additional compulsion—we have a duty to make that clear to the country.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): The Secretary of State will know that I welcomed the Government's commitment to increase by up to 60 per cent. the share of pensions liabilities which will be met by funded private pensions. Since then, however, the crisis in private pension schemes, aggravated by the pensions tax and the disincentive effects of increasing means-testing, has moved us in the opposite direction. Although I welcome some small measures announced in the statement, nothing in it is commensurate with the scale of the challenge or the crisis facing private pensions. Is he still committed to that 60 per cent. target?

Mr. Smith: That indeed remains our objective. It is why the Green Paper sets out all those proposals for radical simplification. There is a sweep and a stunning simplicity to what we propose, not only on tax, but on the reforms on contracting-out the reference scheme test and the rest of it. Coupled with stronger protection for scheme members, that is the way to renew confidence in private pension provision. Of course, I share the right hon. Gentleman's goal of providing a higher proportion through the private sector. With our proposals, we can renew confidence so that we move in that direction.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): My right hon. Friend should be wary of building consensus with

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people responsible both for raiding SERPS and for the personal pensions mis-selling scandal. Does he agree that over the years all Governments have deceived people about the real cost of providing a decent pension? In the light of that, does he think that a lifetime tax-free limit of £1.4 million, equivalent to £35,000 a year in someone's working life, is the right way to use tax rebates from the Government?

Mr. Smith: I hear what my hon. Friend has said about consensus, but I genuinely believe that there must be durability in pension regimes and confidence in pensions that should transcend individual Parliaments and, indeed, individual Governments. We are all responsible for trying to make this work in the best interests of the country and future generations of pensioners—I know that my hon. Friend will want to do so. As for the £1.4 million limit, all that we have done is translate into a lifetime limit the current maximum entitlement on tax relief. That is the right thing to do so as not to disappoint people who have planned their retirement on their expectations of the existing system.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): There is much that the House will welcome in the Secretary of State's statement this afternoon, and much that will repay careful study. However, there will be disappointment about some of the longer-term aspects of what he said. Is the independent pensions commission, to be chaired by Adair Turner, to be limited merely, if I can put it that way, to the question of voluntarism versus compulsion, or is the Secretary of State prepared to expand its remit so that Mr. Turner can consider longer-term cases and continue to give advice about the way in which the pensions industry needs to be reconfigured in the longer term?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome. I greatly appreciate the work that the Select Committee is currently undertaking and, as part of the consultative process on the Green Paper, I shall look with great interest at its recommendations and the outcomes of its work. The commission's proposed terms of reference are set out clearly in the Green Paper. First, it will make an assessment of the information that it needs to do its job. I know that the hon. Gentleman, like others in the House, has questioned the adequacy of statistics on pensions in the past—the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred to that. It is therefore important that an accurate baseline assessment is made. Having done so, the commission will assess long-term trends in savings—not just pensions, but other savings vehicles as well—and how well various partners in the pensions partnership are meeting their responsibilities, and will make recommendations accordingly.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I welcome the suggestion of a flexible retirement age and the rejection of any increase in the state retirement age. There is certainly a job to be done by the Government and employers in encouraging more people to work until the existing retirement age but, to do so, they need to tackle the issue of age discrimination in the workplace.

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for her welcome. She is absolutely right—good as it is to enable people to work beyond 65 if they wish to, the really important thing is to get more people to participate in the work force up to the age of 65. Building on the work that we have already done in the Age Positive Campaign, which has turned the tide—900,000 more people over 50 are in work now than in 1997—we should move on from the Green Paper to introduce legislation to prohibit age discrimination, as well as introducing other measures to enable and encourage people to carry on working where they are able to, and want to.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): We would all welcome any simplification of the tax rules, which will help some employers in particular. May I press the Secretary of State on a couple of matters? First, how will the proposals interface with all the legacy schemes introduced by the state—graduated pensions, SERPS, the guaranteed minimum pension and state second pensions? Will all those still be burdens on employers, as they are on our own pension scheme, as I know to my cost and that of the other trustees? Secondly, will the changes that the right hon. Gentleman is making in taxation effectively be retrospective? If so, will there not be some substantial losers, particularly those in pre-1970 schemes where, despite what the right hon. Gentleman said, there were no cash limits on what could be put in? Finally, will the Secretary of State and the Chancellor look at the possibility of allowing the first 25 per cent. of an annuity to be taken tax free, where the annuitant puts all of their pot into a pension, as many poorer pensioners should? At present all they can do is take a tax-free lump sum, which may be to their disadvantage.

Mr. Smith: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's expertise in these matters and welcome his recognition of the fact that the simplification measures will be of benefit to employers. With reference to the interface with the state system, I think I made it clear that the basic state pension, our proposals for the pension credit and the state second pension remain. There will, though, be a considerable gain to schemes and scheme administrators through the radical simplification of the measures in respect of the guaranteed minimum pension which, as he knows, is a great cause of complexity and cost. As regards the rights that people have under previous regimes, all accumulated rights will be respected and honoured. In so far as there will be losers, there will be disappointed expectations on the part of as few as 1,000 people, who might have been expecting to go beyond the limits that we are confirming with the new lifetime approach.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend accept that for millions of ordinary people on average and lower incomes, a universal state pension at a much higher level than it is now will be the only way to avoid poverty in old age? Does he therefore accept the view expressed by his own adviser in *The Times* today that we should proceed towards a much better state pension without means-testing and based on compulsory contributions from both employers and employees?

Mr. Smith: I addressed that argument in my statement. I acknowledge and share my hon. Friend's concern that those on the poorest incomes should gain

security in their retirement through the state system, as well as through their own efforts. However, as I spelled out, the arithmetic is such that if we were to wrap up the minimum income guarantee in the basic state pension, yes, the basic state pension could go up by £10 a week, but those getting the minimum income guarantee—the poorest pensioners—would lose out to the tune of £17 a week. That is the arithmetic, which confirms that we are right not only to have increased the basic state pension, as the foundation, by more than inflation and by more than earnings, but to build on top of it an improved state second pension that will help 18 million people—many of them on low incomes, many of them carers or disabled people—as well as bringing in the pension credit, which will reward modest pensions and savings income, whereas it was penalised in the past.

Mr. James Arbuthnot (North-East Hampshire): I welcome some of the things that the Secretary of State said, particularly about simplification of the tax regime and simplification of pensions in general. Does he recognise that some of the things that the Government have done in relation to introducing a minimum income guarantee and pension credit on the one hand, and on the other pledging themselves to the target of 60 per cent. from private funding, which I was pleased to hear him reconfirm to my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), the former Secretary of State, give the impression that the Government did not really know in which direction overall they were moving? Will the Secretary of State now commit himself to doing his utmost to reduce means-testing, and if so, what target would he introduce for reducing means-testing?

Mr. Smith: I accept and welcome the spirit in which the right hon. Gentleman acknowledges the benefits and gains from the statement and the Green Paper proposals that we have set out. On the core of his question, I believe that there is indeed a consistency of purpose in what we are doing. That purpose is to use the available resources to the best possible effect. Yes, we should help all pensioners, as we are doing—on average, they will be £1,150 better off next year in real terms—while giving greatest help to those who need it most in the £1,500 of benefit that will go to the poorest third of pensioners. At the same time, as we are proposing today, we must simplify and reform occupational and private pensions saving so that those who can afford to make more provision for their retirement or want to contemplate a longer working life can do so. At the interface between the two, we have the pension credit, whose great strength is that it gets us away from the pound-for-pound withdrawal of lower levels of saved and pension income to which I am afraid that the right hon. Gentleman's Front Bench and the Liberals would return us.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr): I welcome the fact that the Secretary of State is not ruling out compulsion in the longer term if the voluntary approach does not work. I also thank the Minister for Pensions in particular for listening to the concerns of former United Engineering Forgings employees in my constituency, who stand to lose out greatly on their pension entitlement as the company has gone into receivership. How will the proposals announced by the Secretary of State affect those workers, and how will they help them?

Mr. Smith: I acknowledge my hon. Friend's record of work on behalf of the constituents to whom she refers. We are consulting on proposals in the Green Paper that will strengthen protection for workers on the winding up of a company. In the case of solvent employers, we are consulting on options either for a full or partial buy-out of accumulated pension rights, and for insolvent employers, we are considering the opportunity of using a clearing house to get them better value and annuities that protect their future income. As the TUC has urged, we are also consulting on opportunities for mutual insurance, including the possibility of a central discontinuance fund.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The more the Secretary of State encourages flexibility for people to work beyond the state retirement age, with which I have no problem, the more important it will be for him to introduce flexibility in the requirement to take an annuity at the age of 75 for all those products that are money-purchase based. Why has he not reconsidered that issue? At the moment, he needs as much flexibility in the pensions market as he can get.

Mr. Smith: The problem is that what the hon. Lady advocates could be done only at a cost of hundreds of millions of pounds. She and her party have to decide how much of a priority her proposal is. It is important to underline that annuities remain the only means of guaranteeing an income for as long as people live. It is one of the quirks of human nature that people are inclined to underestimate how long they will live. The Green Paper and tax simplification document contain very important proposals that will help prospective annuitants with the introduction of value-protected and limited-period annuities.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): The target used by many commentators and academics in describing what constitutes a reasonable pension is 67 per cent. of final earnings. Does the Secretary of State agree with that target and, if not, what percentage does he suggest?

Mr. Smith: I am very sceptical of the idea that expert commentators, the state or anybody else can specify what the replacement rate or, indeed, the long-term savings rate should be. I think that those decisions are better taken by families and individuals jointly with their employers throughout the country. As I said in my statement, for that to happen, people must have accurate information about their prospects and a simple range of products that they can trust, and they must be incentivised to do the right thing. Our proposals do all of that.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): The Secretary of State has been less than convincing on how the provision of a decent state pension is compatible with the Government's increased reliance on means-testing.

[Annabelle Ewing]

Does he accept that means-testing is demeaning, unduly complex, acts as a disincentive to save, has a negative impact on take-up, and hence is failing our pensioners?

Mr. Smith: It is a distortion to refer to the proposal as though it is some old-style measure. Actually, it gets us away from weekly means-testing, with an assessment made every five years. Does the hon. Lady feel demeaned when her tax is assessed on that basis? What is the difference? If we are to make the best use of the limited funds available, it makes sense to give an entitlement that benefits everybody, but to have a system that enables us to get the most help to those who need it most. The logical implication of what the hon. Lady and those who think like her advocate is that we should take money from the poorest pensioners and give it to those who are better off. That does not commend itself to me.

Mr. George Mudie (Leeds, East): I welcome the Minister strengthening the position of workers when a final salary pension scheme is wound up, but does that mean that he is giving up the ghost on final salary pension schemes, or is there enough in the Green Paper to persuade employers to continue to run them? On shareholders, does anything in the Green Paper increase the 1 per cent. cap in view of the low take-up? If not, what measures are in the Green Paper to increase take-up?

Mr. Smith: We certainly have not given up on final salary pension schemes. Employers, together with their employees, must determine those matters for the future. One welcome implication of our proposals is that employers will have to consult their employees before they change a scheme. I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House support that. We shall encourage employers to provide good schemes by cutting administration costs by £150 million to £200 million.

As has been acknowledged in the industry, the 1 per cent. cap on charges has been of great benefit in driving down the level of charges. We shall consult early next year on the stakeholder suite of products, and evidence on the impact of the cap will be taken into account.

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): Will the Minister clarify his intentions for the many very small businesses that are struggling for survival? Will there be a lower limit, in terms of annual turnover and the number of employees, below which there will be no requirement to participate in employees' pension schemes?

Mr. Smith: We are consulting on the proposals in the Green Paper precisely to take those views closely into account. Earlier, Conservative Front-Bench Members complained about our consulting. I think that it is right that we consult, so that we take into account the interests of the general public and, importantly, of small businesses as well as larger ones.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): As it is virtually impossible to convince young people that they will ever grow old and need a pension, and very difficult to persuade young couples in the early furniture-buying, child-rearing days of marriage to make adequate pension contributions, is not the only practical long-term solution a scheme based on compulsory contributions, guaranteed and underwritten by the Government because all parts of the private sector are no longer to be trusted? If compulsion is inevitable, why not have it sooner rather than later?

Mr. Smith: I take my hon. Friend's point about the difficulty of encouraging younger people to save. There are plenty of pressures on them to consume and spend their money in other directions. Our proposals include working in partnership with the Financial Services Authority and the financial services industry to intensify the drive to promote education and improve financial literacy so that people better understand what they need to do to save for the long term. The evidence shows that sending people a combined state and occupational pensions forecast has an impact, even on younger people's saving behaviour. However, the great merit of our lifetime limit on taxing pension contributions is the greater flexibility that it gives people to determine the period in their lives when they want to make the bulk of their savings for retirement.

My hon. Friend made the point that any compulsory system would have to be underwritten. If it were compulsory to contribute additional sums towards a pension, people would expect the state to stand behind what was guaranteed. That would resemble a tax to many people. I do not perceive much enthusiasm among young people for higher taxation.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): The Secretary of State knows that self-employment is a growth industry. Many self-employed people in manual and construction industries live their lives according to the proverb that a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. In the light of past pension mis-selling, and even the occasional failure of Governments to advise women about the reality of their choices, what guidance will be given to self-employed workers to take up a state second pension?

Mr. Smith: We must ensure that the self-employed are a priority for receiving the pension forecasts that we will give out to an increasing number of the working population. Evidence shows that the self-employed are polarised in their savings behaviour between those who have made adequate provision and those whose under-saving is potentially calamitous. It is important that they are alerted to the need to save more.

The Green Paper contains two pieces of especially good news for the self-employed. First, they will be able to opt into the state second pension. They need to judge for themselves whether to do that. Secondly, our new tax regime will allow much greater flexibility, for example, for people to transfer savings that are in an individual savings account, or released from housing or business equity, into a pension plan later in life that will attract tax relief. That could be especially beneficial to the self-employed.

Ms Candy Atherton (Falmouth and Camborne): I welcome the Government's intention to legislate against age discrimination and enable older workers to choose when they retire. However, many employers find it

difficult to obtain insurance to enable them to continue to employ older workers. Will my right hon. Friend look into that?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I shall be pleased to do that. It is right to record that, in proceeding with our commitment to counter age discrimination, we are building on my hon. Friend's past legislative initiatives.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members know that we shall return to these matters. I therefore now call the next statement.

Transport Investment Plan

4.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): With permission, I should like to make a statement on transport investment. Today, I am publishing a report on progress since April 2001 on the 10-year investment plan for transport.

The plan commits the Government to spending more than £180 billion of public and private investment over 10 years. It is an unprecedented commitment, which will provide stability and increasing spending in the long-term. Maintaining the investment year after year is essential to make up for decades of under-investment and neglect.

Over 10 years, that means public expenditure of more than £22 billion on strategic roads, £33 billion on the railways and £51 billion on local transport. The plan marks the first time that a Government have been willing to commit themselves to such a level of funding over a long period. The funding makes and will continue to make a genuine difference.

If we examine other countries' successes in transport, the common factor is sustained investment year after year, decade after decade. That is why we remain committed to updating and rolling forward the plan in 2004 to coincide with the next public expenditure review. It will take account of progress so far and the challenges that have to be met in the years to 2015 and beyond.

Such long-term commitment and planning is essential to rebuild and maintain the transport infrastructure that we need for continued growth and prosperity. The report sets out the achievements of the first 18 months since the plan came into effect. As I told the House last week, our objective is to improve Britain's rail and road network. We take a balanced approach with investment to tackle congestion, improve reliability and make journeys safer, and to do so in a way that is consistent with our wider social and environmental obligations. I shall set out some of the key points.

Last week, I announced major investment designed to tackle congestion and improve journey times. Schemes will range from major enhancements of some of our key strategic routes—for example, the M1 and M6—as well as bypasses and smaller schemes to tackle bottlenecks. We have also introduced measures to manage better existing roads, and I also announced further investment in local transport and rail.

As the report makes clear, the latest analysis shows that there was more traffic in 2000 than had been thought. That, coupled with the fact that economic growth over the next 10 years is projected to be higher than anticipated, means that the forecasts made two years ago almost certainly underestimated the congestion that we face. Without the investment in the 10-year plan, congestion would have continued to rise unchecked. The report shows that we will not only stem that growth, but deliver considerable reductions in the congestion that we would otherwise have seen.

To tackle congestion, it is necessary to tackle its causes, which is why we are spending more to deal with bottlenecks on the roads system and spending more on public transport. Measures to tackle congestion are

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

beginning to make an impact. Bus use nationally has begun to grow after years of decline and stagnation, light rail use has grown by a third over the past two years and the number of rail passengers has increased by nearly a quarter since 1997. We clearly need to do more, but all that will be possible only because of the commitment to sustained investment year on year. I shall announce further measures next year.

The House will also wish to know that there has been a 15 per cent. reduction in deaths and serious accidents on roads. For children, there has been a 27 per cent. reduction, which is a tribute to all those who have done so much to improve road safety. On railways, public expenditure is estimated to be £33 billion compared with £29 billion 18 months ago. We are committed to sustaining that investment, as it is essential to improve both reliability and safety, but it is also essential that the industry get a grip of major projects.

The public rightly expect us to ensure that their money is well spent and that there is rigorous control of costs. Spending in the next few years will rise from £2.1 billion in 2001–02 to £4.3 billion in 2005–06, which means that, although there is £312 million less for the SRA over the coming three years than was forecast earlier this year, spending on rail is double that at the start of the plan.

That investment will deliver results only if costs in the industry are brought under control, which is why Richard Bowker, the Strategic Rail Authority chairman, is right to insist that the railway industry gets a proper grip on its costs—something that was conspicuously absent in the past. The report shows that the railways are carrying nearly a quarter more people than they were five years ago, but we will sustain that increase in use only if we can show that the service is better and, crucially, more reliable.

That needs more investment, but it also requires better management of the existing network, which is what the SRA is providing. The SRA is carrying out a review to ensure that the best use is being made of existing capacity, projects are more tightly managed and costs are driven down. As the report shows, significant public investment is going into the west coast main line, which will allow greater reliability, but only because the SRA and the industry showed their determination to exercise rigorous control of the project and its costs.

Progress is being made elsewhere, too: sustained investment year on year—over £1 billion-worth of new rolling stock has been introduced since April 2001 and a further 2,100 railway vehicles are on order; 90 per cent. of the first phase of the new channel tunnel rail link is complete, which is the first major new rail line for over 100 years; the installation of a new safety system, the train protection warning system, on about 70 per cent. of the track and about 90 per cent. of the passenger fleet; upgrading of the power supply for London commuter trains; and more maintenance, more renewals.

Investment yes, but, just as elsewhere, with investment must come reform. Every one of us knows that standards on our railways can be improved. The report shows that we are prepared to spend more, but, in return, the railway industry has to do far more to drive up standards and reliability. Our priority is to deliver a safe and reliable transport system that enables people and goods to move around the country as easily and efficiently as possible. The plan sets out the investment to achieve that over a 10-year period.

There are no quick fixes or easy solutions. Sustained investment is needed year on year and over many decades. We are committed to the long haul, and to the sustained investment and improvements in services that are essential to our continued economic and social prosperity.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): As ever, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement, and for the fact that he is making a statement to the House at all. Yesterday, the Prime Minister's official spokesman said not once but twice that this would be a written, not an oral, statement. All hon. Members will welcome the Secretary of State's recognition that a fiasco of this magnitude required him to come to the House to face the music. Does he realise that, so bad is his predicament, some people may almost feel sorry for him? Does he accept that many will understand why he may have been reluctant to come here for his third statement of failure in as many weeks? Two weeks ago he made a statement after the courts threw out his airports consultation. Last week he made a statement on the need to reverse the Government's entire approach to road building. Today he makes a statement on the collapse of his rail policies. Is he as grateful as the nation that because of Christmas he cannot come here to make a statement next week, otherwise who knows what disasters he would have to admit to then?

Does the Secretary of State accept that he came here today not to praise the 10-year transport plan, but to bury it? Now that he has abandoned the congestion targets, scrapped the rail passenger target, done a complete U-turn on road building and admitted that many proposed rail infrastructure improvements will not happen, will he admit that the 10-year transport plan is so much of a corpse that Amanda Burton has been spotted preparing a post mortem?

The Secretary of State clearly has a sense of humour. He has produced a document entitled "Delivering Better Transport". My favourite corker line in it is:

"Overall, this report shows that we have made a good start".

If this is the Secretary of State's interpretation of a good start, one shudders to think what a bad start would have been. Will he clarify what he said this morning on the "Today" programme, when he claimed that he was "getting a grip" on costs in the rail industry? Will he confirm that, as the Under-Secretary set out in a parliamentary answer, the SRA's budget for 2001–02 was set at £1.28 billion but had to be increased to £1.87 billion? Does he concede that in the current year it was set at £2.17 billion and has risen again to £2.37 billion? How is that "getting a grip" on costs? Given that record, is the SRA best placed to lecture the rest of the industry on the need for cost control?

On page 41 of the document, it says:

"The structure of Network Rail is designed to ensure that . . . it is incentivised to . . . drive down costs."

Will the Secretary of State confirm that, as Network Rail's press office told the House of Commons Library today, the maintenance budget for the rail network has

risen from £1.9 billion in 1999–2000 to £3.8 billion this year? Will he also confirm that that includes a rise of £1 billion in the 12 months since the Government took control of Railtrack, and that it has been accompanied by an increase, not a cut, in the number of trains delayed by track work? Who is to blame for this explosion of costs in a company that, in his phrase, is now in the public sector? How does a doubling of those massive sums represent a driving down of costs?

Does the Secretary of State accept that, because of the complete collapse of cost control at Network Rail, the SRA is now telling the train operating companies that they may have to cope with 20 per cent. less subsidy, which will mean higher fares and fewer trains? Will he answer the question that he dodged on the "Today" programme this morning? Does he stick by the target in the 10-year transport plan to increase rail passenger numbers by 50 per cent.? If he sticks by that target, how does he propose to deliver it?

Will the Secretary of State clarify his excuses for all these failures? In his document, he says that we must avoid the years of

"stop-go funding and shifting policies."

Last year, the Government did not add one inch of tarmac to the national road network, and this year they have announced a huge increase in road building. What is that if not stop-go funding? There is no long-term policy consistency.

It is hinted in *The Guardian* today that the Secretary of State has said that the increase in congestion is because local authorities have not yet introduced congestion charging. Is he for or against congestion charging in London? He has dodged that question eight times on the radio, and he has three times refused to answer it in the House, so will he answer it today?

Does the Secretary of State endorse the comments of an off-the-record source in his Department, who told the BBC on Sunday that the Secretary of State blames the legacy of the Deputy Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) for the mess that he is in? Does that not come closest to the truth? Is the Secretary of State not just the fall guy, the loser at pass the parcel, the last one left in the room when the integrated transport policy disintegrated in his hands?

After five and half years of wasting time and money, after a list of broken promises and abandoned targets that has grown as long as a queue on the M6, and after yet another admission of complete and total failure today, will not the British public conclude that Labour has not got a clue about transport and is hopelessly, undeniably and uselessly incompetent?

Mr. Darling: On the hon. Gentleman's first point, I can assure him that it is always a great pleasure to come to the House to debate with him. I look forward to it—indeed, at the weekend I was disappointed when at one point I thought that I might not be able to do so today. However, here we are, and as ever he has shown why it is such a pleasure for me to debate with him.

The first concession that the hon. Gentleman seemed to make was that, in his view, Mr. Jim Naughtie of Radio 4 is a better examiner of me than he is. That is evident, as he kept referring to all the things that I did or did not say to Mr. Naughtie. On the subject of the press, I noticed that the hon. Gentleman put out a press statement that makes one or two criticisms of what we are doing. It concludes by stating:

"It's time for a new approach."

Does not that sum up his problem? He has promised us a new approach since the summer, but there are now less than seven days before Christmas and we have yet to get the Conservatives' new policies.

The other matters that he raised do perhaps merit a substantive reply. As I have said time and again, what the transport system needs—railways in particular, but roads as well—is a commitment by Governments to steady funding, year on year, decade by decade. The hon. Gentleman is critical of the current roads programme, but here I should give the previous Government some credit. Some of the roads that are being completed now were actually planned during the time of the previous Tory Government. However, it surely follows that one reason why fewer roads are being completed now is because of decisions that were taken 10 years ago, when, as a result of the economic crisis that the Tories ran into, they had a spot of bother with public spending. The point of the 10-year plan—*[Interruption.]* The Opposition cannot have it both ways. If they agree that some of the roads now being completed were planned under them, it follows that some of the roads not now being completed should have been authorised some years ago.

On the railways, again, we are dealing with something of a long-term problem. In complaining that we are spending too much on the railways, the hon. Gentleman expands on the Leader of the Opposition's firm promise that they are not going to match our spending on transport. So we must look forward to Tory cuts in their next manifesto. We have had to spend more on maintenance because after the Hatfield rail accident, it was manifestly obvious that the state of the railways was far worse than anybody in the industry—or, I suspect, in this House—ever realised.

That leads me to my second point. We do need to spend more on maintenance, and to spend money on making sure that we get a reliable train service, but as I said during Question Time, we must drive down costs. This is an industry that for many years did not have sufficient regard to the need for proper cost control. Many Members have rightly said, "Why are you giving more money to people who ask for more funds to renew their franchises? Why aren't you just saying no?" I understand that point, but I am saying through the SRA to the industry, "You need to get control of your costs and to drive up standards." I make no apology for the fact that we are spending more and telling the industry that it must get a proper grip on funding.

Finally, although the hon. Gentleman is entitled to make his criticisms if he can, he cannot get away from the fact that the fundamental problems—be it road congestion or train reliability and the need to maintain the track—require steady investment. For as long as the Tory policy is to spend less on the trains, they have limited credibility in this area.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for giving me advance sight of his statement, although hon. Members will rarely have heard one more unjustifiably complacent. Is not the 10-year transport

[Mr. Don Foster]

plan in tatters? Does the Secretary of State accept that he has had as dismal a month as any experienced by rail commuters?

In the past month, we have learned that rail delays have doubled under Labour, and that cancellations are up by 50 per cent. Bus and rail fares have increased in real terms, while the cost of motoring has fallen. We have learned also that, under Labour, buses outside London are carrying fewer passengers, that the airport consultation paper was illegal and biased, that there has been improper accounting of Network Rail, and that the public-private partnership for London Underground no longer offers value for money. Moreover, we have learned that Labour's road congestion targets will not be met, that rail improvement projects are being shelved, that some rail services are being abandoned, and that passengers will be expected to pay even higher fares.

To cap it all, the Secretary of State has returned to the failed predict-and-provide approach to the road building programme. As the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) asked, how can the Secretary of State claim in today's report that the Government have made a "good start" to delivering the improvements envisaged in the 10-year plan? Does not the right hon. Gentleman agree that the only way to tackle rising road congestion is to provide an integrated public transport system that is safe, reliable and affordable? How can that be achieved by cutting rail services, increasing fares and reducing by £312 million the money going to the SRA? How can it be achieved by initiating—against the advice of the Government's own advisory bodies—a massive road building programme that contains not even a hint of road pricing? How can it be achieved when the Department for Transport does not even monitor all the aspects of its own plan?

Why is it only now that the Secretary of State has woken up to the massively escalating costs of rail improvements and maintenance? Even his predecessor acknowledged the problems created when there are too many contractors on the line.

The 10-year plan is unravelling, so does the Secretary of State accept that it was flawed from the start and that claims of available funding and anticipated outcomes were massively exaggerated? If this is to be yet another of the lines in the sand for transport so often promised by his predecessor, will the right hon. Gentleman assure the House that at least there will be no fiddled figures this time, that realistic targets will be set, and that he will work with others to find the imaginative and innovative solutions needed to produce the truly integrated transport system that this country needs and deserves?

Mr. Darling: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman did not send an advance copy of his statement to me, as he has clearly been preparing it for some time.

The hon. Gentleman raises a number of matters, but I have made it clear that the progress report merely details what has happened in the 18 months since the 10-year plan was put in place. It is an investment plan, and its essential element is the allocation of £180 billion of private and public money over a 10-year period. That money remains in place, and will be spent. Indeed, some £6 billion in the second half of the plan remains unallocated, and I shall allocate that in the coming period.

The money is there, and the hon. Gentleman's assertion that something has happened to change that is simply wrong. The money is there, and it is beginning to make a difference. There is no doubt that the scale of the task in relation to road congestion and the railways is far greater than many people believed when the plan was put in place, but that is something that we must face up to. People know from their day-to-day experience what the problems are, and it is no use politicians pretending that there are easy and simple solutions.

The hon. Gentleman implied that he would want to spend more on public transport, and I understand that that is the Liberal position. I tackled the hon. Gentleman last week about his party's new spending plans, but his fellow Liberals may not be aware that they contain five tests that must be met. One test is that the pledge has to be funded within current budgets, so the hon. Gentleman's party is not making any more money available. Another test that must be passed is whether any project could not be delivered better by the private sector. That goes rather further than any other major political party.

The hon. Gentleman says that his policy is to raise the cost of motoring, at the same time as complaining about it. I would love to see that being peddled around some rural constituencies as a Liberal policy.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Does the word "abracadabra" come to mind?

Mr. Darling: Many words come into my mind in connection with the Liberals, but most of them are probably unparliamentary.

The key point is this. The 10-year plan set out an investment strategy, involving both public and private money, covering a far longer period than had ever been covered before. It is our job to make sure that we tackle the problems, which is why I announced the investment in roads last week. Incidentally, although the hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) condemned it, three of his colleagues said that they wanted even more to be spent on the roads. We must also get to grips with the rail problems, but they are deep-seated. I have always said that we are in this for the long haul.

We need to gain control of costs, but I am confident that in time we can begin to change, and build a transport system that will underpin our continued economic success. We will not do that, however, without the continuing investment to which the Government are committed—unlike the Conservatives, who are committed to the opposite, and unlike the Liberals, who would never be able to fund all their aspirations despite the injunction now imposed on them.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): I congratulate the Secretary of State on the quality of the opposition that he has managed to arouse this afternoon. Few people, surely, could have such obtuse and unhelpful policies to offer as criticisms of his plans.

May I ask the Secretary of State a rather simpler question? As his Department knows, it is important to remember that if we manage to keep motoring costs

constant we can affect congestion by 6 per cent. Given that public transport costs appear to be rising despite his best efforts, will he please accept that we must now start looking at the costs of motoring as well as railways?

Mr. Darling: I understand my hon. Friend's view, which she has expressed consistently for a long time, but we must consider not just the costs of motoring but the attractiveness, as well as the availability, of public transport. In too many parts of the country, it needs substantial improvement. I am thinking particularly of rural bus services. As for the railways, while there is no doubt that more money is going in and reliability and punctuality have improved over the past year, there is still a long way to go.

Our strategy is this. We need to invest in public transport—to spend more on supporting railways and buses—and also encourage local authorities to draw up proper plans for improving the environment of town and city centres, thus encouraging people to use public transport and leave their cars at home whenever that is possible. As I have said, however, it is also important for any transport strategy to be balanced and measured. There must be a balance between the private car and public transport, and that is the objective in our plan

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Thameslink 2000 plan, announced with great fanfare in his predecessor's 10-year plan and delayed within 10 weeks because of environmental problems, has now—after 10 months—been deferred indefinitely owing to cost overruns? Can he also confirm that there will be fewer services on the lines taking my constituents to London? When will they see any improvement, rather than deterioration, while plans are constantly being delayed?

Mr. Darling: The environmental problems to which the right hon. Gentleman refers are planning problems. No Government and no railways can get around the fact that planning permission must be applied for.

As I have said a number of times in the House when I have been asked similar questions about Thameslink, we must bear it in mind that we are trying to build a railway rather than redeveloping parts of London. In the case of Thameslink, some people have seen an opportunity to do an awful lot of redevelopment along the way. That inflates costs, and while it may be desirable for development reasons it does not help us to build the railway.

I am anxious to get Thameslink extended. The right hon. Gentleman is right: it has been a major boon for London, opening links between north and south that existed to no real extent for a long time. Two things are necessary for the extension. We must secure the planning consent, which is being considered at the moment, and the project—like all rail projects—must be both affordable and deliverable. If those things can be achieved, Thameslink will significantly improve north-south links across London, and I for one would dearly like that to happen.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): May I ask my right hon. Friend about the prospects for the Crossrail project? It is extremely important that reliability and congestion for those who commute from my part of east London are improved. Will he assure me that the Government are committed to backing that project for the next 10 years?

Mr. Darling: It might help if I tell my hon. Friend and the House where we are on that. When I looked at the plans a couple of months ago, it was clear that we did not have something that was sufficiently worked up and deliverable to be able to cost it and draw up plans to put in place. I therefore asked the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London to come up with workable, affordable and deliverable plans by the end of February. That work is being done.

On the general point, there can be no doubt that, with what is happening in London now, and especially taking into account forecasts for the future, the need for an east-west rail link is important. The amount of development at Canary Wharf, the Thames gateway and other areas means that there will be significant transport pressures. Given the time it takes to deliver any major rail infrastructure project, the sooner we get on to producing such plans, the better. I must emphasise, not just today but no doubt for many weeks to come, that I make no bones about the fact that, unless we start to control costs and tell people that they cannot just think of a number and expect us to pay it, we will not see such projects. As it is, I very much hope that we can get something done because those two main crossings—Crossrail and Thameslink—are critical for the future of London for the next 50 years.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): When the Government and their associated transport agencies can be so cavalier and treat so lightly their targets and commitments, why do they still require the county of Bedfordshire to build a substantial number of new houses over the next decade, thus adding to rail and road congestion?

Mr. Darling: On targets, as I said earlier, the scale of the congestion problem is far greater than people thought, but that does not mean that we do not tackle it. I am telling the House—I have been open about this for sometime—that because the scale of the problem is greater, it will take longer to achieve the targets. That does not mean, however, that we abandon the objective.

Sadly, I do not have ministerial responsibility for housing policy, but I know that there are pressures on transport links between Bedfordshire and London and other parts of the country. I respectfully suggest that the hon. Gentleman take up the issue of housing with my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): A paragraph of the helpfully produced statement refers to projects being "more tightly managed" and to costs being driven down. Having visited the RMT's quarterly conference in Perth earlier this year, I know that part of the difficulty is that there are fewer and fewer engineers who are capable of tight management. If, over the long term—this is a long-term matter—more rail engineers could be trained, that might solve part of the problem.

Mr. Darling: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is no doubt that, especially during the Railtrack period, a

[Mr. Darling]

number of railway engineers simply left or used other aspects of their engineering skills and were not available to the railways. I suspect that the industry will pay a heavy price for that for some time to come. The former Secretary of State for Transport set up the rail academy to try to encourage the training of more engineers. I agree with my hon. Friend that it is imperative that we encourage people into this career. With the right management and the right controls, the railways have a good future and should offer a very good career for someone with engineering skills—either a young person or somebody who is currently working elsewhere. The Government will do all that we can to help the industry to attract such people, because that is its future.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Secretary of State look into a perversity of the punctuality target system? For example, if a train on the Waterloo to Reading service is running late, an announcement is made to passengers that the train will not to stop at up to seven intermediate stations so that it can get to Reading on time, which completely disrupts and messes up their journey. I am sure that that was not intended. Do we not need a different system so that everyone can arrive on time, rather than just the few people going to the terminus?

Mr. Darling: As part of the franchising agreement, the SRA is looking at some of the perverse incentives in the system. It has also announced that the south-west line will be the first in Britain whose management—the day-to-day operation—will be the same for both the track and the train operator. The right hon. Gentleman may recall that one of the by-products of privatisation is that the track is managed separately from the trains, and that we have ended up with the absurd situation in which a train operator could see a fire on the line but could do nothing about it without contacting the track operator. On the south-west line, the SRA is trying out a new system with one general manager. That will be much better because it will begin to tackle one of the fundamental flaws of privatisation—the belief that the track and the trains have no relationship to each other. In reality, they are intimately related, so unitary management will be much better.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): In focusing public money on congestion hotspots, will my right hon. Friend look carefully at the marginal cost of car usage versus the marginal cost of public transport usage, especially when evaluating the London congestion charging scheme? The scheme is expected to generate an operating profit of £121 million next year, which could be set against the cost of public transport systems in the capital.

Mr. Darling: It is clear that the money raised from congestion charging schemes in London or elsewhere must go back into transport improvements. In general, the Government are keen to ensure that public transport is improved, and the Croydon tram scheme is an example. A lot of money was put into the scheme and it is working well. On my hon. Friend's central point, if money is to be raised from motorists by congestion charging, it must go back into improving public transport.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): After the privatisation nightmare of the Conservative years, it is hard to believe that things could actually get worse on the railways, but somehow the Government have conspired to achieve just that. Will the Secretary of State explain how the reduction in subsidy and the expected higher fares will attract more people on to the railways? What does he say to the hard-pressed rail users of Scotland who have already been short-changed by the SRA and who now face a further deterioration in their service?

Mr. Darling: The hon. Gentleman is wrong: so far, the subsidy has not come down. Indeed, we have the opposite problem: many train operating companies are coming to us and asking for more and more money. On behalf of the Government and on behalf of people who pay taxes for such things, I have to say that we must be satisfied that the expenditure can be justified and that the companies need to take far tighter control of costs. In relation to the railways generally, it is worth bearing it in mind that, since 1997, they have carried about a quarter more passengers. Of course, there are problems in the system, which is why we need more investment. The hon. Gentleman represents a Scottish constituency, so he will know that, for example, the line to Inverness has been plagued by problems with landslips and so on. Many of the problems stem from successive underinvestment. That is why we are putting more money into the system, which the hon. Gentleman would be unable to do because of the policies espoused by his party.

Helen Jackson (Sheffield, Hillsborough): It is not the fault of the people of Sheffield that the bulk of their train services are provided by Virgin Cross Country, with its new trains and their lousy reliability, and Arriva Transpennine, which has pretty awful trains with even worse reliability. I am sure that the people of Sheffield would blame not my right hon. Friend's investment programme but the botched privatisation scheme of the previous Conservative Government. Will he urge the private companies to put things right, as they promised? They may deliver new services, yet Virgin's promised new half-hourly services regularly run up to an hour late on almost every route.

Mr. Darling: When the Virgin Cross Country service was introduced in September, it was generally welcomed because the quality of the rolling stock was a lot better; indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Pendle (Mr. Prentice) commented on it. That is worth noting, but the problems arise from two sources. First, there have been problems with the reliability of the new trains. Although teething problems are inevitable to some extent—British Rail had them and, I suppose, anyone would have them—sorting them out has taken longer than might have been thought.

The second thing, which is a serious problem throughout the railway network, relates to capacity, particularly in the midlands, where Virgin Cross Country trains encounter other mainline services. That problem arises with a fragmented railway system,

because, under the present rules, which are about to change, people can say, "I want to run more trains on the railways; I am entitled to do it," without any regard to the knock-on effect on other operators.

Those things are being sorted out by the SRA, but although I accept what my hon. Friend says about the need to improve reliability, which is critical if we are to get more people on to the trains, we need to look at the underlying problems, and they are being looked at. However, it is welcome that those behind the industry want to transform cross-country services, which were pretty lousy in the old BR days, into something better. The difficulty is that we have a wee bit further to go before we can reach that happy position.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): After all the advance briefing and spin, the Secretary of State could not bring himself to say in the statement that the Government have abandoned the central target of cutting congestion. In its place, can he offer this prediction: will congestion be higher, lower or about the same in three years' time compared with today?

Mr. Darling: I would not have described the weekend's press as spin—not from my point of view, anyway. If that is the hon. Gentleman's idea of spin, I can understand why his party is in such difficulty at the moment. I have made no bones about the congestion target. It is hardly spin to tell "Newsnight" in an interview with Mr. Paxman that I did not think that we would hit the target. I was answering the question that was put to me. The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins) should have asked me that question in the House, but he did not. I do not know why.

I make no bones about the fact that, for the reasons that I have stated, I do not think that the congestion target will be reached in the expected time scale, but the amount of congestion would be spiralling out of control if we had not put such measures in place. Those measures will have a substantial impact on the growth that would otherwise have taken place, so I am being straightforward with hon. Members and the public. When Ministers realise that there is a problem in relation to such things, they should tell the House and the public generally because, frankly, what the public want to hear is not so much the recriminations about the whys and wherefores, but what we are doing to sort out the problem. Unlike the Conservative party, we have a plan, a programme and investment to sort it out.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement today and particularly his confirmation that the transport plan involves substantial long-term investment. May I ask him whether he regularly assesses the transport plan's impact on climate change? In particular, does he consider that the review of the first 18 months of the plan that he has announced today will enhance the ability of UK transport to contribute to carbon dioxide emission reductions?

Mr. Darling: It is important that the transport plan, and everything that the Department for Transport does, has regard to our environmental obligations. That is one reason why the Department is keen to support and improve technology for cleaner cars and so on. We are keen to reduce congestion because there is no doubt that congestion leads to increased pollution. Again, one of the major objectives of the 10-year plan is to put more money into public transport because it consumes energy more efficiently. So my hon. Friend is right: the interests of the environment are clearly served by ensuring that we maintain the 10-year investment plan, which is what we intend to do.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House what impact the proposals will have on the midland main line to Leicester and beyond, which has improved so much since privatisation? What impact will it have on the Leicester to Hinckley and Birmingham line? Does he not feel a deep sense of humiliation coming to the House this afternoon as a Labour Minister and presenting policies that reduce subsidies to railways, which his party has always gone on about as being so important? Is it not disingenuous to ignore the transport achievements that took place under Conservative Governments, such as the conception to completion of the M25 motorway system?

Mr. Darling: I would like to study the hon. Gentleman's question tomorrow, as I picked up only bits of it, and it seemed to range from the midland main line to the M25.

Mr. Tredinnick: What is wrong with that?

Mr. Darling: Nothing in principle; I just did not quite follow the logic of the hon. Gentleman's question. The central point, I think, is that we need to maintain investment to improve the quality of services, and we will need to maintain investment in both road and rail. We do, however, need to control costs. If he asks me whether I have difficulties about controlling costs, my answer is no. Had the last Conservative Government had some regard to controlling costs, they might not have embarked on the privatisation of the railways in the way that they did. Without doubt, that contributed significantly to costs getting out of control in far too many cases.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Does my right hon. Friend accept that part of the way in which we ought to measure the 10-year plan is by how far it reduces the need and the desire of people to travel? Part of that is making sure that people can live and work much closer together, and the other part must be enabling people to walk or cycle to work. What is happening to the money to be spent on making it more attractive for people to walk and cycle?

Mr. Darling: On the latter point, it is important that local authorities—mostly, they are responsible—pay particular attention to creating environments in which people feel safe when they want to walk or cycle to work. That is happening in a number of towns and cities, but more can be done. In relation to my hon. Friend's more substantive point, I understand the argument that we should try to locate people and their place of work closer together. During the 1970s and 1980s, many transport planners and town planners felt that that was possible.

[Mr. Darling]

I am not sure whether I would adopt that as a major part of a transport solution. It is a fact of life that people are likely to move jobs more frequently, which means that, from time to time, they will probably have to travel further than otherwise.

I agree with my hon. Friend's first point, however, in relation to the attractiveness of public transport. I cite the west coast main line, which I know affects him and his constituents. There is no doubt that if, for example, we ask someone travelling from Manchester to London why they do not use public transport, we must be able to point to a reliable, frequent, clean, safe train service as an alternative. The west coast main line will go a long way to providing that, as will—given that we are in praise of Virgin—the new electric tilting trains, which will come into service next year. I understand that, yesterday, a train went to Manchester in just over two hours, which is a significant improvement on the current service. There will be improvements in years to come, but I do not shrink from the fact that we face a significant long haul to accomplish the changes that we all want.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I would hope that all hon. Members standing would be able to catch my eye. If we have short questions and answers, that might be possible.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): What allowance has the Secretary of State made for potential cost overruns in his plans, as he will be aware that, yesterday, the cost of the public-private partnership contracts went up by £300 million?

Mr. Darling: The position is that we make provision for the likely costs. It would be a big mistake, however, to build into our budget provision for cost overruns, as that would be an open invitation to people at large to come and get us. That is certainly not our policy, although it may be the policy of the Liberal Democrats.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): In answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell), my right hon. Friend said that the rail academy had been set up. The reality is that the project is stalled in the Strategic Rail Authority at present, and there is great concern that it will be downgraded and even abandoned. There is a massive skills shortage on the railway, and without that rail academy we will not meet the 10-year plan.

Mr. Darling: I have seen the letter that my hon. Friend wrote to me about this subject, and I am about to reply to him now. I told my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) that it is planned to set up a rail academy, but it will not physically be situated in Carlisle or anywhere else. It will simply be a means by which we can enable more training to take place in different places up and down the country. It will not be like a university that is situated in one place. However, I plan to write to my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) to set out the position fully.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): I was interested in what my right hon. Friend said about the importance of building capacity. How many local transport plans contain proposals for reopening old lines or building new railways?

Mr. Darling: The answer is that a number of them do, but they are not always matched with the means of doing it.

Mr. Prentice: Is my right hon. Friend going to do something about it?

Mr. Darling: In some cases, there is an argument for reopening or building heavy rail, and we talked about Crossrail earlier. In other areas, heavy rail may not be the solution. For example, much of Manchester's light-rail metro runs across lines previously used by heavy rail. I would not sign up to the proposition that heavy rail is always the solution. However, when local authorities are considering that option, they need to come up with a proposal for paying for it and must ensure that the sums add up.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): My right hon. Friend has rightly focused on costs and on the need to get a grip on them and force them down. It is instructive to compare the costs in BR days with those of today. Rail infrastructure costs have trebled in less than 10 years, and the cost of replacing a mile of railway line is now £1.5 million, compared with £350,000 under BR. The contracting culture and privatisation have caused the problem. Will he not accept that we must, in all practical terms, look to public ownership of the railways once more?

Mr. Darling: That would be one way of spending quite a lot of money. My hon. Friend's point about rail costs increasing is true, but it is over-simplistic to suggest that it is all due to the fact that contractors are used. We have to spend more to replace railways because an awful lot of them were built by our Victorian forefathers. They were maintained in the BR days, but are now coming up for wholesale replacement.

The hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) has left the Chamber. He was briefly in the place occupied by the Scottish nationalists but has now been replaced by a Welsh nationalist. However, I told the hon. Gentleman that the structures on the highland line that were collapsing were built by the Victorians. The problem is that not enough money was spent on them over the years. Therefore, we now have to spend more per mile to replace them than we would have done if we were simply conducting routine maintenance or even renewals 30 or 40 years ago.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Will my right hon. Friend accept that what has been said about buses—very little indeed—will not be that well received by average punters in what is laughingly called a bus shelter in Hemel Hempstead or Kings Langley? They often wait for an hour or more with absolutely no information about when, if ever, they will see a service. Much of the time, services are summarily withdrawn.

Will my right hon. Friend investigate the suggestion that we should have a strategic bus authority, which, among other things, would have as part of its brief the

provision of information for bus passengers along the lines of the information that is currently available for London Transport passengers? People would then be enticed to use buses and would not have to put up with the current fiendishly awful system.

Mr. Darling: In my defence, I have not said much about buses because no one has asked me much about them. You, Madam Deputy Speaker, would no doubt have something to say if I volunteered lots of information without being asked for it.

On my hon. Friend's point about the particular problem in Hemel Hempstead, he has no doubt had a word with his local authority. Last week, in the local government settlement, I announced that significant sums were available. There is a lot more money for transport, but we look to local authorities for the provision of bus services.

On the point about a strategic bus authority, I am bound to say that my instinct is not to set up another bureaucracy. That can sometimes be a distraction from the main point, which is to ensure that we have better bus services.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): What assurances can my right hon. Friend give that improvements in passenger and freight services will assist the ongoing economic regeneration of Liverpool? May I also thank him for his decision to approve the tram line in Liverpool? That will certainly help.

Mr. Darling: On the last point, I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I noticed that she thanked me before I announced that decision in the local press.

On passengers and freight, there is no doubt that the upgrading of the west coast main line, which is an essential part of the links to Liverpool, will mean that there is more capacity for both passengers and freight. My hon. Friend is the first to ask about freight. It is worth noting the 7 per cent. increase in the number of trains that carry freight, and that should be welcomed.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): I am glad that my right hon. Friend mentioned the reduction in the number of road deaths. I am sure he would agree, however, that it is unacceptable that about 3,500 people are still killed on our roads every year. Will he ensure that part of the investment will be used to reduce the speed of motorists, especially in villages in my constituency? We also need increased investment to get a reliable bus service. People are transferring to their cars because bus services across the country are unreliable. Will he ensure that that and the investment in local transport plans lead to a greater reduction in the number of people killed on our roads every year?

Mr. Darling: I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend. Although our roads are relatively safe compared with those in the rest of Europe, nine people will be killed on our roads today. When we discuss the safety of other modes of transport and when the measures taken by local authorities to discourage cars going at speed are criticised, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that nine families today will lose someone. No Government should sit back and tolerate that. It is why I will never apologise for measures taken either by us as a national Government or by local authorities to make our roads safer. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that.

Points of Order

5.26 pm

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker, of which I have given notice. The Ministry of Defence announced today that it has begun preparations for a possible war against Iraq. Letters are going out to reservists, contracts are being sought for cargo ships to move troops and equipment, and tanks are being prepared for use in the desert. Furthermore, the US Secretary of State, Colin Powell, indicated that later this week the US will reject the dossier that the Iraqis submitted to the UN. That is hardly a surprise to anyone who recognises how much President Bush wants to go to war.

The House starts its Christmas recess on Thursday, so MPs could be left without any opportunity of expressing their views about going to war. The last debate on Iraq certainly did not give us that opportunity. Has the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Defence said whether a statement on Iraq and a possible war against it will be made before the Christmas recess?

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Further to that point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Hiring cargo ships does not come cheap. Can the House of Commons be told about the terms of compensation before any action is taken? If those terms have been worked out, one draws the inevitable conclusion that the decision to go to war has already been made because compensation is crucial in that matter. I have just returned from giving the Zayed lecture in Abu Dhabi. Arabs from all over the Gulf think that the war is an extraordinary folly that sets the Christian world against the Islamic world. Surely the House of Commons should have a statement before the recess.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I am unaware of the Prime Minister or the Secretary of State for Defence making such a request. However, the points raised by both hon. Members are on the record and the respective Ministers will be aware of them.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I gave notice of the fact that I want to raise the way in which the House authorities accommodate demonstrators. In the main debate last night, my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) said:

"Is it true that the hon. Gentleman"—

the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr. Gray)—

"sponsored 1,000 people to come to the House to demonstrate and that he put them in Room W1?"

The hon. Member for North Wiltshire replied:

"The hon. Gentleman is wrong. I have sponsored no one to come here today".—[*Official Report*, 16 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 636.]

A statement issued by the Metropolitan police giving advance notice of a mass lobby estimated that 1,000 people would be accommodated in Room W1, and named the sponsoring Members as Mr. Peter Atkinson and Mr. James Gray. I have spoken to the hon. Member for North Wiltshire to give him notice of my point of order, and he explained that he had not sponsored that group of people because he understood sponsorship to mean a financial contribution. Of course, I accept that explanation entirely, but in case my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham is accused of misleading the House—he is a sensitive person, as we all know—the record must be put straight.

There is a further serious point. If the House authorities are booking Room W1 for 1,000 people, we know that at least 970 of them—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has made his point.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. May I ask whether, overnight, there has been a transformation of Room W1, which, to my knowledge, manages with some difficulty to hold only 15 people at most?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) has certainly made his point, and it is now on the record.

ROYAL ASSENT

I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that Her Majesty has signified her Royal Assent to the following Acts:

Consolidated Fund (No. 2) Act 2002

Appropriation (No. 2) Act 2002

Orders of the Day

Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill

[Relevant documents: Thirteenth Report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2001–02, on The Planning Green Paper, HC 476-I, and the Government Response thereto, Cm 5625; Planning, Competitiveness and Productivity: Memoranda submitted to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2002–03, HC 114-II; and Memorandum on Planning, Competitiveness and Productivity: Research commissioned from Roger Tym and Partners by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister: Housing, Planning, Local Government and the Regions Committee, Session 2002–03, HC 114-III.]

Order for Second Reading read.

5.31 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

On 18 July, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced to the House the need for a step change in the Government's policies for building successful, thriving and inclusive communities in all regions. He will publish a communities plan in the new year setting out the way in which we will develop our policy. We will set our policy on improving housing in an overall context of creating and maintaining sustainable communities. Every action in the plan will be underpinned by that objective. To create and maintain sustainable communities successfully, we need to work together at all levels to improve local economies; promote safety and stability, provide good-quality public services; build a skills base; and engage with our communities.

Any plan needs to be set against our wider agenda of strengthening local and regional government, community engagement, community cohesion and social inclusion. The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill currently being considered by the House gives regions, if their people so choose, a distinct political voice and a real say over decisions that matter to them. For the first time, regions will have responsibility for taking greater control over things that matter to people—economic development, regeneration, planning, housing, transport, health, culture and the environment.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): That Bill will give regional authorities dramatic powers. Should they not be left with county councils in areas that have not voted for a regional assembly?

Mrs. Roche: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the regional planning body includes many directly elected members or local councillors who, of course, are directly accountable to their electorate. He also knows that many Conservative councillors are strong members of those regional chambers. During my time at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and, before that, at the Cabinet Office, I have had the pleasure of meeting many Conservative councillors who are engaged with such bodies and make a strong contribution to them. I am not sure that they would recognise the views expressed by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. McLoughlin *rose—*

Mrs. Roche: No, I must make progress, if the hon. Gentleman will allow me. I am sure that he will seek to catch Madam Deputy Speaker's eye later.

The Local Government Bill, which is also before the House, offers new flexibility and extends the freedoms available to local government. It will free successful councils to innovate and make real improvements in local services and the quality of life in their communities. A reformed planning system is a key tool in delivering sustainable communities. That is the purpose of the Bill.

Planning is critical to the delivery of new housing, the transport infrastructure, hospitals and schools. It is critical to ensure that we make the best use of our land, increasing development on brownfield sites and protecting and enhancing our green belt and valuable countryside.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): If transport is so important to planning, why do the Government's proposals leave the responsibility for transport with county councils, not with the regional authorities?

Mrs. Roche: We already have regional planning guidance. We have an unnecessary layer, the county structure plans, which in the main replicate what is done at national and regional level. Of course, there is a part to be played by the counties and others in transport plans, but we envisage that where people would like elected regional assemblies, those should have powers in transport matters.

As I said, it is critical that we make the best use of our land and protect valuable countryside.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Can the hon. Lady clarify whether the compulsory purchase powers in the Bill will enable councils to deal with the problem where companies such as Property Spy buy up greenbelt land, sell off little fragments at inflated prices claiming that it could be developed some day, allow it to become derelict and an eyesore, and thereby hope to hasten development? Can compulsory purchase powers be used to cope with that problem?

Mrs. Roche: I shall come to that aspect, but the Bill does not deal with all aspects of compulsory purchase. I know that the right hon. Gentleman has a great interest in that topic. The Bill already contains some 90 clauses, but that does not mean that it is the end of the process on planning. We have limited our objectives to a number of key compulsory planning issues. I shall deal with compulsory purchase a little later.

The current planning system has served the country well, but it needs reform to support the new agenda. Anyone looking at the record over past decades will recognise that all Governments have failed to address the problems of the planning system. Too many councils fall short of the targets for handling planning

[Mrs. Roche]

applications. Too many local plans are out of date and no longer reflect the realities that many communities face.

We set out our proposals for reform in the planning Green Paper last year. We received more than 16,000 responses—one of the biggest responses to consultation on record—which amply demonstrates the importance of the planning system. There was certainly a consensus about the need for change. All of us as constituency Members have experience of planning issues and know how important they are to our local communities.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): My hon. Friend mentioned the consultation papers published by the Government over the past few years. The responses to the papers mention planning gain as an important issue. Why have the Government not taken the opportunity to clarify the rules on planning gain in the Bill?

Mrs. Roche: I understand my hon. Friend's point, which is extremely important. I have seen in my constituency and elsewhere and heard from councillors of various parties how helpful planning gain under section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 is. I can assure him that revised guidance will be used. I hope that that will satisfy him.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The Minister referred to our experience of the planning system as constituency Members. How does she recommend that we explain to our constituents the new proposals for local development, which include a local development framework, local development schemes, local development documents, development plan documents, action plans and statements of community involvement? Does she think that that system will be easier to explain than the current one?

Mrs. Roche: With great respect to the hon. Gentleman—in my legal days, that opening was usually the polite way of being slightly rude, but of course, I would have no intention of doing any such thing in this honourable House—if he looks closely at the Bill and the Green Paper, he will see that, in talking about a local development framework, we are referring not only to the documents that will form part of that framework, but to the process of involving local communities. We may explore that matter further in Committee, but I think that he will find that it is simpler than he has suggested.

We have listened to the concerns that have been expressed. In July, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister set out our response to the consultation in our paper on sustainable communities, "Delivering through Planning". We continue to listen. As with any legislation, the Bill will not be the last word on the matter. However, while we continue to listen, our objectives for the Bill are straightforward. We want to make the system fairer, faster and more predictable and to bring to planning clarity, certainty and more strategic direction.

Of course, the reform agenda is not only about legislation. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced in July an extra £350 million for the planning system over the next three years. Some £50 million will be released in the next financial year.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): I welcome the additional £350 million, but my understanding is that it will not be ring-fenced. If that is the case, surely it is wrong, because we want to give specific direction and resources to planning authorities so that decisions can be made more efficiently.

Mrs. Roche: Ring-fencing has been the subject of lively discussion, but we think that planning is about local democracy and trusting local authorities.

We will set out for the House the full details of how the new grant will operate. The extra money will go to the authorities that demonstrate their commitment to high-quality planning. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced the main elements of the grant in his pre-Budget report. It will incentivise improved performance by local planning authorities and reward authorities in proportion to the extent of their performance improvement. Some of it will be used to strengthen regional planning and support delivery of existing housing targets.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Does my hon. Friend agree that one way of strengthening the process is to put more resources into parish and town councils? In rural areas, one of the ways in which we can build consensus is by developing a capacity for local people to feel genuinely involved in the planning process. There is no better way of doing that than through parish and town councils.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend makes an important point. The Bill takes nothing away from the existing rights of parish councils. One issue that we are exploring is how, by working with other organisations, we can improve the quality of planning decisions at officer level and also in respect of councils and representatives. Although not necessarily a part of today's discussion, it is an important aspect of the planning system.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): I am pleased to hear my hon. Friend speak about strengthening local authorities' powers to make better quality and speedier decisions. One of the great frustrations of urban authorities, particularly those with universities based in them, is their inability to secure sustainable communities in the face of huge increases in property acquisitions and conversions to houses in multiple occupation. Will it be possible, under the powers set out in the Bill, for local authorities to set ceilings on their areas' capacity to deal with that overloading of property conversions for letting, which hinders the survival of sustainable communities?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the important point that my hon. Friend makes. It is not a precise point for this legislation, but it is certainly important for my colleagues involved in that aspect of the Department's work.

As I was saying in response to my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), we will issue new guidance on how planning obligations will work to make the section 106 planning obligations system more transparent and simple.

This is not just about setting targets for local authorities and asking them to do better. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will lead the way in setting itself challenging targets for handling Secretary of State cases. We shall continue to review planning policy statements to make them clearer and more succinct. I think that that will be appreciated by all hon. Members.

Successful planning reform also depends on a change in planning culture. I add to the point made earlier about our needing to improve the education and training, and raise the skills and morale, of both planners and councillors. We also need to look at ways of spreading best practice and providing help and guidance to local authorities. Whatever the differences of opinion across the House about the approach to the planning system and planning reform, we all agree that planning is vital to our communities. Therefore, we all subscribe to raising standards and spreading best practice for both planning officials and councillors.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Does my hon. Friend agree that education for local authority councillors is important also in this regard: they should focus not just on the narrow, local planning aspects of the decisions that they take, but on the wider regional and even national issues involved?

Mrs. Roche: I absolutely agree, which is why we shall continue to work closely with local government associations and others to ensure that this is not a one-off approach, but one that continues throughout the process.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: I want to make progress.

Mr. Steen: I think that the Minister is making excellent progress and I hope that my question will help.

My concern with the Bill is about local democracy. On smaller district councils, the cabinet system has already excluded an awful lot of councillors. I fear that the Bill will alienate councillors and separate them from officials. Officials will get much more power and become more involved in planning decisions at the expense of local democracy and the councillors. Will the Minister confirm that that is not the case?

Mrs. Roche: It is not the case. I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern, and he makes a valid point, but let me try to reassure him. The Bill does not stipulate what decisions must be taken by officials or councillors. The hon. Gentleman is understandably confused about best practice targets, whereby routine and uncontroversial planning decisions can be taken by skilled planning officials, freeing councillors to deal with important matters such as controversial planning decisions, of which there are many in our constituencies.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): In my constituency, councillors of all parties and the public believe that the planning process does not reflect their concerns and needs. Councillors feel that they cannot throw out applications, typically those for building high-value flats, because the planning rules do not give them grounds to do that even though the local infrastructure is significantly overloaded. Can the Minister give any hope that the Bill will help with that?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the concern, which applies in areas such as mine. Clearly, officials understand the planning system and the guidance. It is therefore important that the messages from our discussions of the planning process in the past year stress the importance of continuing education for councillors so that they have confidence that they are making the right decisions. *[Interruption.]* Before the hon. Gentleman gets to his feet again, I believe that some officials do not always have confidence in their decisions. Sometimes the guidance is interpreted differently and consequently different decisions are made. That is why it is important to spread best practice.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Does the Minister agree that if the new system is to be successful, local people must feel that they own it? Although clause 17 provides for some community involvement, there is no provision for such involvement in drawing up the regional spatial strategies that will inform the contents of the local development documents. Community involvement is thus circumvented.

Mrs. Roche: The Secretary of State must give approval, and would want to ensure that decisions took account of all relevant matters. There is a distinction between the regional spatial strategy, which is a strategic document, and the local development framework, which covers what happens on the ground in a practical way.

The Bill simplifies the plan-led process by abolishing the middle tier of planning that exists in some areas. The new system will have two linked levels of planning: regional spatial strategies and local development frameworks. The latter will consist of a set of local development documents, which each authority will be required to prepare. Together, the documents will replace local plans and unitary development plans. They will set out development proposals and have a clear map so that everyone knows what goes where.

Each authority will prepare a local development scheme, which will list the local development documents.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I welcome the Government's change of heart to require local authorities to produce a plan for their areas. That will provide much greater certainty for prospective developers, and people who live in a community and want to know what will happen to the land next door. It is a welcome change for which I thank my hon. Friend.

Mrs. Roche: I should probably thank my hon. Friend, who was a key advocate of that change. I understand his reasons completely. People were anxious to ensure a clear map and the ability to understand what is happening in an area. Maps will be introduced in secondary legislation. Again, I thank him for his contribution.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): Will the Minister give way?

Mrs. Roche: I must make some progress.

Counties will be consultees on regional plans and continue to be responsible for transport, waste and minerals plans. Regions can use them as agents on sub-regional planning, and, when agreed, the Bill will enable counties to work with districts on local plans. As I said previously, the role of parishes is unchanged. Greater emphasis will be placed on local community participation. Local planning authorities will have to prepare statements of community involvement, which will set out how they will consult local communities on devising local development documents and significant planning applications.

The Bill provides for making grants. Under those provisions, we shall make grants to organisations such as Planning Aid. That will allow them to develop a greater role in targeting communities that traditionally do not get involved in the planning system, especially groups in deprived areas or those representing the socially excluded. I emphasise the importance of those provisions; we all know Planning Aid's valuable contribution.

Alan Simpson: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Roche: No, I must make some progress.

The Bill will introduce a statutory purpose for planning. We want a planning system that supports and promotes sustainable development. The Bill imposes a duty on those with plan-making functions under parts 1 and 2 to exercise them with a view to contributing to achieving sustainable development.

Sustainable development does not mean no development, but sustaining high, stable economic growth and employment, social progress, effective protection of the environment and prudent use of resources. The Bill also grants new powers for local planning authorities to introduce local permitted development rights in local development orders.

Mr. Steen: Now that the Minister has made some progress, will she give way?

Mrs. Roche: No, I must make a little more. I have an eye to the time, because I know that many hon. Members wish to speak.

Developers will be able to request a statement of development principles. The Bill contains new provisions to speed up the planning process for applicants and introduces greater clarity. It will also stamp out abuses of the system by preventing repeat and twin-track applications.

The Bill reduces the time required for planning permission from five to three years and abolishes automatic renewal. Developers will therefore no longer be able to sit on planning permission for years without starting work. Many hon. Members are genuinely worried about that.

As I said earlier, the onus is not only on local authorities; we are serious about improving the planning system

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I heartily welcome my hon. Friend's comments about developers sitting on planning consents. However, what about developers who put down foundations and thus perpetually prolong planning permission, at great expense to local communities, which would like developments to be demolished or completed?

Mrs. Roche: I understand my hon. Friend's point. That is the precise reason for the way in which the Bill is drafted.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful for the Minister's generosity. Sustainable development has become a buzzword for the Liberal Democrats. Whenever they are asked a question, they reply, "sustainable development." Does the Minister realise that building programmes in many areas happen so fast and are so great that the infrastructure cannot cope with the new demands on it? Does the Bill define sustainable development so as to prevent building in constituencies such as mine, where the current infrastructure means that the rural area cannot sustain the number of people who move in?

Mrs. Roche: Much as I hate to disagree with the hon. Gentleman, I would not give the phrase "sustainable development" to one party. We would all buy into the concept because it is about getting the balance right in the planning process. Of course, business would like a speedier process, but it is right for local communities to have a direct say, and for their voices to be heard. If I may seek to reassure him, that is why the Bill seeks to strike such a balance.

The Bill will speed up the processing of major infrastructure projects by introducing new inquiry rules to allow inspectors to make better use of inquiry time while ensuring that everyone can adequately express their views and by putting in place new procedures to allow a team of inspectors to operate an inquiry.

Mr. Love: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mrs. Roche: Yes, for the final time.

Mr. Love: I give my hon. Friend extra thanks for giving way on this point. Concern has been expressed that many groups that want to make representations to inquiries form new groups to make more representations, thus further slowing the process. Has she taken that into account in trying to limit the time that inquiries take?

Mrs. Roche: Again, the question is one of balance. The consultation on the Green Paper involved a great deal of consideration of major infrastructure projects.

Of course everybody wants to hear from the local community and, in particular, local community groups, but such things cannot be allowed to drag on for ever and ever when much-needed projects are being considered. The new procedures will allow the team of inspectors in, which strikes the right balance.

The Bill will also introduce provisions to set up business planning zones, which will be planned in the regional strategic interest, but designated by individual local authorities. They will be areas in which high-quality development is fast-tracked to help to create jobs where they are needed most. The zones will not be a free-for-all, but will adhere to strict approval criteria set out in guidance and be subject to an environmental impact assessment.

The Bill will introduce a duty for statutory consultees to respond to a consultation request within a specified time and report on their performance in meeting their targets. It will also reform the development plan system in Wales, where a single-tier local government system and a uniform pattern of unitary development plans were introduced by the Local Government (Wales) Act 1994.

The basic pattern of development plans in Wales is to be retained. Local development plans will be simpler and more concise than unitary development plans. Procedures will be simplified and community participation improved. Provision is also made for the National Assembly for Wales to prepare and publish a national spatial plan for Wales.

Where it is necessary to use compulsory purchase to assemble land for regeneration and large-scale projects, the implementation of proposals in the statement made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 18 July should help to speed the process. We intend to achieve that by making the basis on which local authorities can exercise their powers clearer and more positive while also improving compensation by introducing additional loss payments.

The Bill sets out a reformed planning system for the 21st century that will help us to live in sustainable communities; a reformed system that will be faster and fairer; and a reformed system that will help us to meet the challenges of the future, deal with the problems of the present and protect the heritage of the past. I commend it to the House.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I should inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

6.3 pm

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): I beg to move,

That this House declines to give a Second Reading to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill because it fails to set out a planning framework; it introduces the concept of regional spatial strategies, taking power away from local authorities, particularly county councils; it creates an unclear mechanism of local development documents, principles, frameworks and strategies; it fails adequately to specify how the public will be involved in the consultation on these documents; it provides for the concept of the correction of errors, which would encourage poor decision-making; it abolishes outline planning permission, thus failing to provide applicants for planning permission with certainty; it fails to clarify the position on planning gains and obligations; and it does not adequately deal with the public expenditure implications of the revised compensation payments.

It is always a great pleasure to follow the Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women, who dealt with the House most courteously. At times, I felt as though we were already in Committee, such was her willingness to give way and to answer technical points. However, I have to say that her description of the Bill is not one that I recognise. I have read it and the explanatory notes.

Keith Vaz: The hon. Gentleman has read the wrong Bill.

Mr. Pickles: Almost certainly I did. I read the Bill that is before the House, not the one that the Minister talked about.

This could have been a great Bill that we would all be proud of and that addressed the stress in the system. It could have achieved quicker, more devolved local decisions. Instead of addressing the problems, the Government have chosen to politicise the planning process by dragging in a more remote regional authority, thereby breaking the link with decisions made by local people, which have been such an important feature of the past 50 years.

At one time, I thought that we were being treated to the Christmas carol concert of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and that we were being given a turn—a parody of a Bill whereby a party with a large majority could push any measure through the Chamber without the Chamber objecting. If that were the case, the Bill would come awfully close to being such a measure. Despite what the Government wish, most areas of the country will not vote for a regional assembly, so deciding to build a planning system around a non-existent assembly seems perverse to me.

To build a planning system in the certain knowledge that the south-east of England—this country's economic motor—will not have an elected assembly seems both wilful and contemptuous of local opinion. The planning system relies on three basic principles: the speed at which decisions are made, the quality of those decisions, and public acceptance of the decision-making process. In that process, there is often a tension between speed and the other two principles. That is where the problem lies.

The Bill's tone is overwhelmingly centralising. It will take power from local people, stifle local democracy and dramatically increase the power of the Secretary of State. The Government set out on this process of reforming the planning system with the declared aim of making it quicker and less bureaucratic, increasing certainty and enhancing business and public involvement.

Mr. Betts: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: Of course. It is always a pleasure to hear from the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Betts: Perhaps we are both reading slightly different Bills. The hon. Gentleman talks about centralisation, but has he read the sections on community involvement and the requirements on planning authorities to produce that? Does he not welcome them?

Mr. Pickles: I shall come to that. I am not saying that we cannot amend the Bill in Committee or that it cannot be improved, but I do have to say that the hon. Gentleman, perhaps due to his experience in Sheffield, is looking at the legislation through rose-coloured spectacles. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman, like me, is getting on in years and has to use glasses for reading. We congratulate him on his important victory—the Government are to allow local authorities to put together some plans, which is a very good thing—but he should not let that cloud his judgment on the rest of the Bill.

Mr. Steen: Does my hon. Friend agree that "community" has become another buzz word? If it means anything, it tends to be the local authority such as the parish, district or town council, but it does not mean the whole community. There is no way of consulting the community. Does he agree that the problem with the Bill and constantly harping on about the community is that there is no vehicle for consulting the community? It is lovely to say, "The community is going to be consulted." We all feel much more comfortable when we hear that, but it will not happen.

Mr. Pickles: I am sure that we can all agree that any consultation of the community must be sustainable. To answer my hon. Friend, part of the problem and the real trick for achieving success lies in getting involved in the strategic stage of the consultation process. So often, as he will recognise, consultation takes place in planning and other authorities when the process has been decided; it allows those who were involved to be told that they have done a marvellous job. The real trick of making a consultation work, if it can be made to work, is to get in at a strategic stage. That will be difficult to achieve, and I am sure that my hon. Friend, with all his experience, recognises that.

The Government set out to reform the planning system with the declared aim of making the process quicker and less bureaucratic, thus increasing certainty and enhancing business and public involvement. The explanatory notes declare that the measures in the Bill are broadly deregulatory and will simplify the planning process. Nothing could be further from the truth. The Bill fails to achieve what it sets out to do. It imposes further regulation, greatly complicates the planning system and is likely to slow down the planning process rather than speed it up.

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): The hon. Gentleman talks about the speed of the planning process. Does he accept that the unitary development planning process that was introduced by the previous Conservative Government took almost 10 years to unfold in Leeds? How can he possibly stand there and criticise the present Government for trying to speed up the process when the system that the Conservative Government introduced was so sadly lacking?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman must understand that these criticisms are made in the context of a loving relationship.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): We never knew.

Mr. Pickles: It is a side of me that my right hon. Friend has never noticed.

I am merely trying to improve the process, and I shall show how the Bill will slow it down. The most important aspect is that it will remove the democratic checks and balances from the planning mechanism, downgrade the role of local people and drastically enhance the power of Whitehall and the Secretary of State.

An intelligent, thoughtful planning process is likely to help to resolve the crisis in affordable housing, and increase the amount of house building on brownfield sites.

Peter Bradley: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman has referred to affordable housing. What increase in the availability of affordable housing, especially in rural communities, would be achieved by the extension of the right to buy to housing association properties, as championed by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis)?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman is welcome to take part in our consultation exercise. He will have seen that we propose a clear exemption for rural authorities with populations of 3,000. I see no problem. No doubt he will now feel ready to endorse the right to buy to ensure that people have a right to own their own houses. That seems to me to be of considerable importance.

It is worth remembering that, according to last year's Green Paper, 90 per cent. of planning applications are eventually accepted. Therefore, we are dealing with the controversy that surrounds 10 per cent. of applications. The Bill can only properly be described as an opportunity lost. It is not aimed at achieving a balanced planning system, but rather at fitting in with the Government's regionalist agenda. It was interesting that the Minister referred to that at the beginning of her speech. A sizeable portion of the Bill is aimed at steamrollering the English regions into a regional decision-making process, whether the region likes it or not.

The introduction of regional spatial strategies in the Bill is the clearest indication yet of the Government's desire to bypass county councils and other long-standing democratic bodies in favour of their regionalist pipedream. Regional spatial strategies remove a key democratic input into the planning process. The Bill severely erodes democratic control over future planning developments. It is difficult to understand why the Government insist on a planning mechanism that provides no direct democratic means for people to express their concerns over planning decisions that affect their county or region. The proposed system lacks accountability and openness. Surely that will have only

one result: increased public disenchantment with the planning system and a diminution of the legitimacy of planning. That can only mean poorer, more unpopular decisions at the end of the process.

The Government see regional assemblies as the solution to the democratic gap in the planning Bill. That is highly presumptuous. The Government promised to give the people, via referendums, a say on whether or not they have an assembly, yet they impose a planning Bill that removes democratic accountability in the planning system unless people say yes in a referendum.

If people do not vote for regional assemblies, whom will the Secretary of State designate for planning purposes? That is not clear in the Bill. Will it be the regional development agencies, whose performance varies enormously around the country, the Government offices under the control of unelected officials, or chambers, which are almost non-existent in certain areas? It would be helpful if the Minister who replies to the debate could make that clear.

Mr. Drew: Labour Members may be confused. For good or ill, regional planning conferences have long had a role in the planning process. There may have been problems, because they could be in conflict with the counties or the districts. What is the hon. Gentleman's view on the future of regional planning conferences? He seems to be against the Government's regional drift. Does he think that regional planning conferences could be got rid of?

Mr. Pickles: Regional planning conferences do not exist in every part of the country. The hon. Gentleman must understand that the engine for those conferences is the county council block. The county councils will be diminished by this process, and all their experience will disappear. The regional planning conferences are sometimes too restrictive. They prevent planning on matters in which adjoining authorities have a mutual interest but which do not fit into a particular structure in the region.

It is our contention that the Bill is anti-democratic, and that the counties, rather than arbitrary regions, are a better level at which to make strategic and structural planning decisions. County councils have a clearer view of the real needs of their local area, and their grasp of the important strategic detail is superior to that of large-scale regional authorities. County councils allow for accountability and represent an area with which local people can readily identify. They also have a long-standing pool of expertise in planning and local knowledge, which will be squandered and frittered away by this legislation.

Despite that, the role of county councils under the new arrangements is unclear. I heard what the Minister said, but it is unclear. Although county councils will still have control over minerals, waste, development and transport, according to the explanatory notes they will only be able to participate in the drawing up of local development plans. It is not clear how that is to be achieved and what their responsibility will be. I hope that it will be made clear in the Minister's winding-up speech, and if not, in Committee.

Are the Government prepared to make it clear whether and how county councils will be involved in the process, especially in the drawing up of local development plans? How can they be drawn up without properly considered waste, minerals and transport strategies?

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): The hon. Gentleman seems to be saying, almost in the same breath, that county councils are both local community authorities and strategic, semi-regional authorities. I am not sure that he can have it both ways. Which one does he plump for?

Mr. Pickles: That is their strength, and it is why they are a good unit. The hon. Gentleman makes my point. County councils represent real people in real communities. They can link up if there is commonality of interest. That is why what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends are seeking to do is such a travesty. The Bill rips power away from local people and diminishes accountability.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: Why the heck not? Let us go for it.

Mr. Love: I have been at meetings when members of the previous Conservative Government have confirmed that they seriously considered the abolition of the planning powers of county councils. Would the hon. Gentleman confirm or deny that?

Mr. Pickles: I can certainly say that I have never been in the same room as the hon. Gentleman when such views were expressed.

The Secretary of State is to be given virtual carte blanche to do as he wishes—he becomes a grand vizier of planning law. The tone of the Bill is set in part 1, which deals with regional functions. The Secretary of State will have enormous powers. Regional planning guidance issued by him forms part of the regional spatial strategy. The system effectively gives him prescriptive power of central control. He can control a regional spatial strategy that in turn controls a local development plan, which must comply with the regional plan. He even has powers to intervene in the creation of a local development scheme, and to revoke it altogether. He has powers to direct a local authority to withdraw, or to revise, its local development plan. He also has powers to order local authorities, against their wishes, to produce joint local development plans. Under the proposals for simplified planning zones and business improvement zones in the Local Government Bill, he can dictate policy against the wishes of local people.

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that, under the current planning system bequeathed to us by the previous Conservative Government, the Secretary of State has huge powers to call in almost any aspect—if not every aspect—of planning applications. Is it now Conservative policy to reverse that, and to reduce the powers of the Secretary of State within the planning system?

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman must understand that the planning system has been in existence in a proper, recognisable form for 50 years. As recently as five years ago, the relevant standard legal textbooks consisted of three volumes, but because of the continuous process of issuing new directives, there are now some 10 volumes. There is of course a point in the Secretary of State's being involved, but a balance must be struck between local communities and power at the centre. All that we are seeking to do is to redress that balance. We are trying not to remove the Secretary of State from the process, but to return to a proper balance. After all, the current planning system is part of the post-war consensus whereby people had trust in the system. My concern is that if we give too much power to the Secretary of State, people will lose confidence in the system.

The proposals for major infrastructure projects, which were expanded on in a statutory instrument earlier this year, give the Secretary of State enormous powers to set timetables for inquiries, to reject evidence and to appoint inspectors. One aim of the planning process review was to enhance the involvement of local people, but this Bill fails to achieve that. Instead, it raises the powers of the Secretary of State by several notches. The planning system will become overwhelmingly top-down. The Secretary of State will have an omnipresent role in the planning process.

This legislation also clearly fails in its declared aim of speeding up and simplifying the planning system. In fact, the Government may actually have achieved the impossible by making this highly bureaucratic system a smidgen more bureaucratic. Let us consider the example of the document on local development, which the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) mentioned earlier. The Bill is in a huge muddle about the overlap between a local development framework and a local development plan. Added to this confusion is the remarkable cocktail of local development orders, local development principles and provision for the Secretary of State to set fees and charges for a range of planning functions. The result can only be a more complex and expensive planning system, with several more layers and tiers than existed before the Bill came into being.

The Government may come eternally to regret their explanation of clause 37, which deals with the development plan. The explanatory notes state:

"Clause 37 defines the development plan by reference to the simplified hierarchy of plans and documents created by this Bill."

This is anything but a simplified system. The Minister mentioned Wales at the end of her speech, but in Wales there is no question of tiers. A much more simplified and less complicated system exists there in respect of documentation, and I hope that we will be offered an explanation of why what is good enough for Wales is not good enough for England.

This confusion and bureaucracy expands beyond local development plans and infects the rest of the Bill. Under the terms of clause 38, in drawing up the regional spatial strategy and local development plans a sustainable development plan must be drawn up in parallel. That is in addition to the homelessness plan that local authorities are obliged to produce under the Bill on homelessness, and to the housing plan contained in the Local Government Bill. Is it not possible that local authorities could simply collapse under the burden of these well-meaning but bureaucratic plans? How will this great bucket of plans complement each other and mesh together? The Bill totally fails in its desire to increase certainty in planning for business.

Statements of development principles are proposed as a replacement for outline planning permission, but the latter is a far stronger legal entity than the proposed new system. Companies often use the certainty provided by outline planning permission to raise funds for ventures, and to plan for the medium or long term. This legal certainty will be lost under the proposed changes, causing delay and perhaps making planning, finance raising and job creation more difficult for business. It is hard to see what statements of development principles add to the planning process, other than providing yet another target for judicial review. They do not provide a developer with a proper equivalent to, or any promise of, planning permission. The Green Paper seemed to suggest that the new system would run in tandem with the old outline planning permission, so that any major problems could be ironed out, but there is no mention of that in the Bill. Can the Minister clarify the transitional arrangements?

Because the Minister concerned is the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), and because it is getting close to Christmas, I have tried to find an aspect of the Bill about which I could say something nice. I hit upon the idea of compulsory purchase, but unfortunately part 7 , which deals with that, is not as welcome as it might first appear. We welcome compensation for landowners whose land is acquired, but the basic loss payment will be subject to a maximum amount, and in July the Deputy Prime Minister stated that property owners will be paid "hope value" for any possible planning gain. As a result, owners of some larger properties will actually be paid less than they are entitled to. Far from being more generous, the Bill is actually confiscatory. That is especially evident when we consider that the payment of compensation to property owners could take up to seven years. There is a great deal of justified complaint that current compulsory purchase claims take years to be settled.

Mr. Davey: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Pickles: In a moment.

An interesting feature of this Bill is what is not included in it. No mention is made of third party right of appeal. Is the Minister prepared to rethink this omission, particularly in circumstances where a local authority gives planning permission for its own land? I have talked about the three principles involved, and the issue is one of acceptability. For a local authority to grant itself permission, and for those affected to have no redress, looks wrong and feels wrong.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I hope that I can catch the hon. Gentleman on clause 43, on which the Minister did not amplify sufficiently. On omissions, I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and the official record will show tomorrow that neither the Minister nor—until now—the hon. Gentleman has referred to planning enforcement. One of the big problems is that, unless dilatory local authorities can pursue planning

enforcement with vigour—in fact, they are tardy—all this great machinery will come to nought, particularly for the small person, whose visual and aural amenity will be trespassed by selfish people who ignore planning law, and who are not chased by local authorities.

Mr. Pickles: The hon. Gentleman's constituency and mine share a border, and although we do not represent the same authorities, we share some of the same problems. Sometimes, because we say a certain thing, we think that action has been taken and the matter has been dealt with. The extra £350 million has been welcomed by my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman), but planning officers are needed to put that money to use. Local authority planning departments are grossly overstaffed. Planning officers who are properly trained soon find themselves in the private sector. Enforcement actions do not take place because local authorities are being squeezed by the Government and decide to put their money somewhere else. Often, frustrated constituents tell me that nothing has happened even though the local authority was supposed to take enforcement action. Even when such actions are taken, they can be appealed. The Bill could have dealt with that problem and speeded up the enforcement process.

Mr. Edward Davey: I think that I agree with the hon. Gentleman about third party right of appeal, although he needs to clarify the little that he said. I also agree with him about enforcement, but he said that the Government's proposed limit on compulsory purchase could be too low. Does he not realise that any limit that was even a little higher would make many regeneration projects prohibitively expensive?

Mr. Pickles: I shall answer that point in a second, but first I must apologise to the House. In my gross excitement about planning, I may have suggested that local authority planning departments were overstaffed. In fact, I know that I did, as my boss, my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), has just ticked me off. What I meant to say—what was in the Pickles mind—was that planning offices were understaffed. I apologise if I have inadvertently misled hon. Members about the state of local authorities which, I repeat, are understaffed.

Andrew Mackinlay: Especially when it comes to enforcement officers.

Mr. Pickles: As the hon. Gentleman says, especially when it comes to enforcement officers.

One problem with the compulsory purchase process is the long time spent haggling over prices. No one suggests that people should be paid above the market price, but the Bill makes it possible for them to be paid less than that price. If we are to learn from the way in which compulsory purchase operates elsewhere, we must be able to pick up how that problem is dealt with.

The hon. Member for Thurrock (Mr. Mackinlay) mentioned major infrastructure projects. I understand that he has strong feelings about what happened at Heathrow. It is important that the Government clearly indicate whether they support major infrastructure projects. A big test will be coming soon, in respect of the decisions about extra runways in the south-east.

Andrew Mackinlay: I hope that the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), who will reply to the debate, will make matters clearer. The guidance notes do not make it clear that there will be a planning inquiry in the traditional form when an inspector is appointed under clause 43. It might be implicit, but that provision is not made explicit in either the Bill or the accompanying explanatory notes. I want to safeguard the rights of the individual—the cussed, awkward, bloody-minded individual. It was people like that who fought the big battalions, such as the British Airports Authority, during the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry, and they will wish to do the same again. We need an undertaking that they will not be squeezed out, and that there will always be a proper inquiry in connection with clause 43.

Mr. Pickles: My understanding is that the Secretary of State will direct the procedure. However, I am sure that the Under-Secretary will answer that point when he replies to the debate.

I have forgotten the name of the inspector in the terminal 5 inquiry, for which I apologise, but I have read his evidence to the Select Committee. I thought that the reasons given for the delay were telling. It was not secured by bloody-minded individuals so much as caused by the system. The lack of direction caused delays for all sorts of reasons.

Dr. Whitehead: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the proximity of Christmas. He stated that local authorities' planning departments were understaffed, so will he confirm, in the spirit of goodwill, that he favours the appointment of large numbers of additional officers? Is that official Opposition policy? Does he have information to offer the House about the costing that the policy wonks will no doubt have done on the policy?

Mr. Pickles: I have written to Santa Claus, but sadly I did not ask for any additional planning officers. My substantive point is that remuneration levels for appropriately qualified people in the private sector are high, and that that adds to the difficulties faced by local authority planning departments. A person qualified in town and country planning is likely to make significantly more money in the private sector than in the local authority sector. However, I am sure that the Government Whips will be awfully pleased with that question. The hon. Gentleman may get a prize after Christmas.

Peter Bradley *rose—*

Mr. Steen *rose—*

Mr. Pickles: The time has come for us to move on.

Mr. Steen: I am most grateful for that. I know when my time has come, and I want to ask my hon. Friend about compensation. Some other European countries have been able to make speedy progress with major infrastructure projects because they are willing to pay

[Mr. Steen]

compensation at above market values. I disagree with my hon. Friend in that I believe that paying compensation at above the market value would speed up major infrastructure projects, as they would not be delayed by people haggling over small sums. Does he agree that that is an attractive approach that the Opposition should consider carefully?

Mr. Pickles: There is some truth in what my hon. Friend says. We should aim to ensure that the normal, generous market value is paid, but my point is that there should be no artificial ceiling that could prevent the process from going forward.

This Bill is a wasted opportunity, and that is tragic. The UK needs a modern and effective planning system so that it can compete in the 21st century. The Government are right that the planning system needs fundamental reform, but the proposed system is too slow, uncertain and bureaucratic. It does not allow enough input from business or the public.

The proposed changes will, if anything, make matters worse. The new system is more complex and top-down than what it replaces, and it offers less room for public participation. We cannot afford to get this reform wrong. Mistakes now could have damaging consequences for this country for years to come. The reforms need to be thoughtful, balanced and intelligent. They should increase the legitimacy of the planning process and enhance its effectiveness. The Bill clearly fails to do that.

The Minister, when she opened the debate, used her Department's favourite buzz words when she said that the Bill would be a "step change" for planning. I agree: the Bill does represent a significant step change for planning—it is a step change towards chaos and muddle, and it is a step change backwards. I urge the Government to reconsider the Bill.

6.39 pm

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): I suspect that when the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) reads his speech, he will conclude that much more of it should have taken the form of footnotes rather than actually being delivered. He complained, for instance, that my hon. Friend the Minister had not made much reference to the Bill, but he did not seem to refer to it much himself. Worse, he did not seem to recognise the country in which I think we live—a country in which regional effort is becoming important.

When the Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee took evidence yesterday, we discussed land in Warrington. The use of that land, for housing or for industrial development, has a direct effect on regeneration in Liverpool and east Manchester. Unless we are prepared to accept that there is now a regional dimension in this country, we will find ourselves in real difficulty. In the case of an awful lot of planning issues, we must look at the region.

The best part of the hon. Gentleman's speech was, in fact, his reference to an earlier intervention. We should pay tribute to the 1945 Labour Government who established the town and country planning system, which is one of the jewels in our crown. For more than 50 years it worked pretty well, although there was a slight hiccup when Nicholas Ridley wanted to tear it all up. That led to some of the worst out-of-town planning, and one or two other bits went wrong. Nevertheless, we need only look at national parks, areas of outstanding natural beauty and historic towns to see that our planning system has protected them from developments that might have ruined them—although they might also have made someone a quick short-term profit.

The planning system also protects many people who might otherwise have to live close to areas that are unattractive, whether because of local industry or because of leisure activities. We should remind people that it has served the country well. We should also remind them that we live on a small island with a large population, where difficult planning decisions will always have to be made.

One thing that worries me about the Bill is that it results from a myth. Unfortunately, when Lord Falconer joined the Department 15 months ago, he almost swallowed that myth hook, line and sinker. The myth, produced particularly by the Confederation of British Industry, is that our planning system makes us uncompetitive. That is nonsense. Lord Falconer should have learnt a lesson that many Ministers need to learn. Departments that can do things can often do them without legislation; it is those who cannot run their own Departments who say, "A Bill will enable us to put off the delivery of results until we have got the legislation through the House." It is to the credit of the Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Rooker and other Ministers that they listened to criticism at the time of the Green Paper, and have modified the Bill significantly. Moreover, the Department has recognised that many improvements in planning can be brought about through resources and administration rather than a big change in the legislation.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): Is the hon. Gentleman categorically disagreeing with the Minister, who said that a step change was required and would be secured? He just said that no big change was needed.

Andrew Bennett: I do not mind if we claim that it is a step change if that makes people behave in a slightly different way, but I firmly believe that the legislation is not all that necessary. What is important is the administrative change that has been promised. I do not think that we should complain that the Government have backed away from their Green Paper and come up with a much more realistic approach; indeed, they should be given credit for that. We should be proud of the fact that they published a Green Paper and then listened to the responses, including those of the Select Committee. I think that as a result we have better legislation, and I hope that better administrative action from the Department will follow.

Let me deal briefly with the myth about the planning system. When the Select Committee was considering the Green Paper, the director general of the CBI told us very firmly that, according to survey after survey, the planning system was destroying our competitiveness. When we asked for evidence, he could not provide it. During this morning's sitting, the best another CBI representative could do was tell us that the CBI had asked MORI to conduct a further survey, which had

shown that the planning system was a problem. When we asked how important the problem was, we were told that it ranked 13th out of 15.

Let us be clear about this. Our planning system does not limit productivity. For one thing, many companies never use it; levels of investment are much more important to them. The planning system does not make a huge difference to our effectiveness.

I think that the culture change, rather than the step change, is important. We need to ensure that planning departments are enablers rather than disablers—that they work hard, from the start of a planning application or, indeed, before the application is made—to ensure that the proposal is in the interests of both developer and local community. That comes down to the question of resources. When we had an exchange in the Select Committee about whether the extra money would be ring-fenced, I thought Lord Rooker was pretty good: he said that it would not be ring-fenced, but that he could guarantee that it would be spent on planning. If that can be achieved, full marks.

There are some problems, however. It is important for the money to be spent, but it can be spent only if there are people with the necessary skills. Sadly we have run down the number of planners in the country, and we have also run down respect for them. I hope that during the Bill's passage the Government will tell us more about how we are to secure more planners. To an extent, we must consider the way in which geography is taught in schools and the fact that some pupils are pushed into making a choice at 15. Far more should be encouraged to continue with geography, which can enable them subsequently to work in the earth sciences or in planning departments. I fear that, in that regard, the national curriculum is too prescriptive.

Mr. Llwyd: Does the hon. Gentleman know of research recently carried out in Scotland? I think that it is something to do with Edinburgh university. When all the planning students in a certain year were asked about their hopes, not one said that he or she hoped to work in a planning department.

Andrew Bennett: That is worrying. We need to give planning back its status. Nowadays everyone criticises planners rather than recognising their important role.

We need more resources and we need more planners, but it is also important for the planners to think in terms of enabling. The Select Committee took evidence from the City of London corporation, which is pretty well resourced, about its attempts to get its planners to talk to developers at an early stage and show them how they can deal with the regulations and the planning process. Many more local authorities should do that, especially when it comes to building control. Some of the criticism of the planning system is not about the allocation of particular sites, but about the nitty-gritty: how can extractor fans be installed so that they do not disturb local people, for instance, and how can it be ensured that in summer, when doors are left open, people on an estate do not suffer from the noise?

Mr. Drew: When people try to find out what decisions are being made, they are often frustrated by the absence of contemporaneous reports of meetings with developers. That means that people requiring information receive it only when a development is under way.

Andrew Bennett: May I suggest that my hon. Friend looks at the evidence that we took this morning, particularly the Minister's response on this issue about how far one can get greater transparency at the beginning of the process? To a certain extent, the Minister understood the problem, and was coming up with part of the solution.

Alan Simpson: In relation to his point about enhancing the role of planning officers and the authority that they carry with them, has my hon. Friend's Committee considered the points being made by the police? They are talking about not just where one puts the fans, but the role of planning officers in designing out crime. The point has been made that the Bill would be strengthened if planning processors were required to address section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which the Government introduced and which the police are saying has made an enormous difference to communities and to commercial interests in designing out the costs of crime at an early stage in the planning process.

Andrew Bennett: I accept that point. It is a question of bringing to bear on the planning process all the resources of the local authority—the police, planners and others—so that we get good developments that do not create problems but set out to solve them.

I have talked about the problems of training and I should like to press the Minister on compulsory purchase orders. The parts of the Bill dealing with CPOs are some of the most welcome. Part of the problem is that local authorities got out of the habit of using CPOs and now find them cumbersome. Some of those who worked for local authorities during the 1960s and knocked out a CPO almost every day would say that the legislation has not changed much, but that lack of familiarity is the problem. The problem that has been put to me by local authorities is that, often, one does not want to have to go right through the CPO process. They want to persuade people to settle so that they can buy them out without having to go through that process. The problem for some local authorities is that they put together a back-to-back deal so that the land is immediately passed on to a developer. If local authorities hold the land for only 24 hours, they can stand the interest charges, but if they buy six or nine months in advance of the CPO, they have a problem with the financing. I hope that we will look at the law relating to CPOs and at some of the issues about financing.

In the Select Committee this morning, the Minister gave us the valuable assurance that the regulations will be available before the Bill goes into Committee. That will make scrutiny much easier. I hope that at some point the Minister will explain the transition. One of my reservations about having legislation involves the transition. The present system can be cumbersome, but people understand it, and in three or four years we will have the new system that people will have got used to.

[Andrew Bennett]

Between those stages there is the transition and we do not want a hiatus so that obtaining planning permission is more difficult during the next couple of years.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for giving way. I do not agree with everything that he has said, but his speech has been thoughtful and well considered and he does seem to be asking for greater certainty in the planning system. Will he comment on clause 40, which abolishes outline planning permission and introduces a statement of development principles instead? That would be a far less certain procedure and would not give businesses the ability to plan their developments with certainty.

Andrew Bennett: One cannot say categorically yes or no to that. We will have to see how things evolve. That is very much in the area of guidance. If the Government produce clear guidance, such problems may be solved.

I was about to give a firm thank you from my constituents to my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister for turning down the development at Audenshaw, Waterside park, formerly Kingswater park. Having a business park beside the motorway would encourage people to drive around the motorway to work. I also thank him for his decision to turn down the proposal for a large IKEA store in Stockport, which would generate traffic. We should use the planning system to reduce the need for travel. Our society is far too fragmented and people are encouraged to do a great deal of travelling. For most people, spending time in a traffic jam on a motorway is not attractive.

It is important that the planning system works quickly. I hope that the Government will guarantee to set an example from the top and that Ministers will reach decisions quickly, setting that example for local authorities and the planning system. We should remember that our planning system was a jewel in the crown and, with this legislation, we should ensure that it continues to sparkle.

6.56 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): My hon. Friends the Members for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) and for Cheadle (Mrs. Calton) may not agree with the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) about IKEA, but I congratulate him on his speech and on his Select Committee's report on the planning Green Paper. I believe that the report influenced the Government's thinking and was the main factor in encouraging them to change their mind about some of the Green Paper's more distasteful aspects, such as its proposals on national planning decisions for major infrastructure projects. My hon. Friend the Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) served on the Select Committee and has told me about the hon. Gentleman's good leadership.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman about staff in planning departments. Staffing is probably the major weakness of the planning system, and he was right to dwell on it. I am sure that he is aware that undergraduate courses on planning are increasingly unpopular. The Government must work to reverse that decline. I am sure that he is aware of some research that was conducted by the Department that used to have responsibility for planning, which showed that, on average, planning departments across the country were short of four or five staff. That represents a huge national shortage. The research also dealt with issues such as the failure of local authorities to enforce some aspects of the planning system, which the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) mentioned. We need those staff so that such work can be done. The Government's announcement last July of £350 million was a welcome first step towards rectifying the core problem.

Sir Sydney Chapman: As I understood the Minister, she said that the money would not be ring-fenced. The memorandum says that it will go to local planning authorities that manage to deliver an efficient planning service, but surely it is a question of the chicken and the egg. Local planning authorities need part of that extra allocation to improve their performance, and, if they succeed, by all means, give them bonuses.

Mr. Davey: I agree about the chicken and egg, but I do not agree about ring-fencing. There is too much ring-fencing in local government finance and the Government are right to resist that temptation.

Only the Minister will realise what a great thrill it is for me to speak on Second Reading of this Bill. I last debated with her when she was a Treasury Minister dealing with a Finance Bill. It is a particular pleasure for me to debate planning with her.

Mr. Pickles: What a smooth talking young lad.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman suggests that I am a smooth talker, but I will let the Minister make that decision.

During the run-up to the Bill, the Government's thinking on planning has undergone many changes. At times, they appeared to be unsure about what they wanted to do about planning, and contradiction and confusion is reflected in the Bill. The Government talk about decentralising planning powers, but the proposed regional structures, which would give the Secretary of State extra powers, do not appear to decentralise a thing; if anything, they will cement the centralisation of the existing system.

The explanatory notes and all the rhetoric before the debate suggested that the Bill would speed up the planning system, but many aspects of the local development plans, to which the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) referred and which will doubtless be debated not only tonight but in Committee, will slow up the system and make it far more inefficient.

Those failures spring from the Government's lack of vision on planning. Sometimes, the Government are almost apologetic about the planning system, and the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish came close to suggesting as much. We should be proud of our planning system; it has a great role. It was the 1909 Liberal Government who first legislated for a planning system—an important move to ensure that development produced benefits for society. After the second world war, the

Labour Government introduced important planning legislation, which developed the system and bequeathed us our current procedures.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: If the hon. Gentleman studies his history carefully, he will find that Disraeli was the first to propose the establishment of a planning system and to set up slum clearance programmes.

Mr. Davey: I do not really want to follow the hon. Gentleman into a historical debate; there is a big difference between slum clearance and actual planning policies.

The problem is that the vision that the Labour Government showed in their Town and Country Planning Act 1947 is not reflected in the Bill. The present Government are torn between their new Labour instincts—to suck up to business and the reality experienced by Ministers, who understand how the planning system works in their constituencies and the tension in reconciling community interests. The Government do not know how to deal with that dilemma, so they have tried to split the difference and this unsatisfactory Bill is the result.

We welcome some aspects of the Bill, such as, its provisions that contain the germ of ideas that will give us a real vision for planning. It will be interesting to hear the Select Committee's views on such provisions. For example, clause 38 would make sustainable development a key test in planning decisions, which is welcome. However, although the Minister explained what she meant by "sustainable development", there is no such explanation in the Bill, and that could cause problems. The Government should have been braver and set out clearly what they meant by that welcome provision.

Clause 17 provides for a statement of "community involvement". That, too, is welcome as far as it goes, but it is vague and I shall develop that point later in my speech.

Andrew Bennett: If the hon. Gentleman is so worried about sustainable development, what definition would he table as an amendment?

Mr. Davey: As the hon. Gentleman may know, the Town and Country Planning Association has proposed an amendment that would give such a definition. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), who will serve on the Standing Committee, may table it.

We welcome other changes proposed in the Bill. There is already some agreement about compulsory purchase powers and about the extra flexibility in development controls. We especially welcome the proposals for Wales. As a result of the Bill, Wales will have a much better system than England, although we might ask whether the National Assembly for Wales should not already have the power to debate such legislation, rather than it being debated in this place. However, we shall let that point pass—at least Wales will get a better deal than England.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): People in Wales welcome the Bill—although, as my hon. Friend pointed out, many of its regulation-making powers should have been devolved to the Assembly. The proposed spatial strategies will allow Wales to take a much more strategic approach to issues such as renewable energy and wind farm development.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is right. I hope that the Assembly will seize the opportunity to create a much better planning system in Wales.

Our major problem with the Bill is the centralising tendency that underpins it. As has been pointed out, we already have a centralised system, although when I challenged the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar on that point he was not quite prepared to admit that it was the fault of previous Conservative Governments, who bequeathed us that system. However, the Labour Government have achieved what seemed almost impossible—they have made the system even more centralised. Instead of passing powers—such as those in the current transport and works framework—from Parliament down to regional planning bodies, or to the future regional assemblies, they have taken powers back from county councils, thus increasing centralisation.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The reasoned amendment tabled by the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues states that the House declines to give the Bill a Second Reading

"because it gives extra powers to unelected and unaccountable regional bodies".

I thought that the Liberal party was all in favour of regionalism and regional bodies. Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his party's policy?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me the chance to do so. We believe in elected regional assemblies. When we have accountable, elected regional assemblies, that will be the right time to give them real planning powers.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: But we are debating the Bill now.

Mr. Davey: My criticism of the Bill—if the hon. Gentleman will allow me to develop my argument—is that it would give some planning powers to unelected regional planning bodies, which would, in effect, be quangos. We oppose that. To centralise is bad enough, but to centralise power in unelected, unaccountable bodies is unacceptable. That is one of our reasons for opposing the Bill.

To be fair to the Government, we could say that the Bill and other measures, such as the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, are merely preparatory and that they precede regional devolution across England. We might be that generous if the Government were truly pushing ahead with regional devolution, but the caution and timidity with which they are approaching that key constitutional change mean that we cannot give them the benefit of the doubt. As the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar pointed out, under the Government's framework it may be years or even decades—perhaps never—before some regions have elected assemblies, yet the new planning bodies or quangos would take powers from county councils up to the centre, and that cannot be right.

[Mr. Davey]

We oppose not merely the centralisation proposed in the Bill but the way in which it is being pushed through. County councils will simply be agents of the regional bodies.

Our other major criticism of the Bill is that it will do the reverse of what the Government claim. It will not speed up the planning process. If the Government had gone for genuine decentralisation, they would have removed many of the Secretary of State's powers to intervene in each and every planning application; removing that upper tier of intervention and interference would be the best way of speeding up the planning process. However, the Bill proposes a set of local development frameworks, schemes, documents, statements of community involvement and optional action plans that together will not produce a simpler system or a speedier process.

The Government are the only people who seem to think that streamlining something means adding to it. The current system of unitary development plans and local plans is not perfect, as I am sure Members on both sides of the House will agree, but it has improved as it has gone along. A much better approach to reform would have been to build on those improvements rather than to tear up the system.

The current system passes an important test—my weekly advice surgery test. Constituents bring a lot of issues to our advice surgeries, many of which relate to Departments, the Government's tax and benefit systems and so on. It is often very difficult to give constituents the answers that they want to hear, and I have to refer them to other bodies. I am delighted to say that Members of Parliament do not have a central role in planning, but at least we can explain how the system works and where the constituent can obtain redress. I fear that that will become impossible under the plethora of new plans, schemes, documents, statements and so on. That is a backward step.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has the Liberal party considered community involvement? In an intervention on the Minister I stated that the Bill provides for community involvement in drawing up local development documents, but not in drawing up regional spatial strategies, which will, in effect, inform local development documents. That will circumvent any community involvement. Has the hon. Gentleman considered how community involvement may be improved in drawing up regional spatial strategies?

Mr. Davey: I have indeed. Liberal Democrats want elected regional assemblies so that elected representatives can help to provide that community involvement. As a regional planning tier has existed for some time, it is incumbent on the hon. Gentleman and his party, who oppose regional assemblies, to say how they would involve communities in regional planning.

The proposals on the local development process are many and complex. When one reads clause 37(6), one might think that things will be a little easier than I have led the House to believe because it says that only the development plan documents will be used to determine planning applications. That seems a lot simpler than the plethora of schemes and frameworks that I have mentioned, but the problem is that under another part of the Bill a local authority can decide what constitutes a development plan document.

Clause 17 refers to the statement of community involvement

"as if it were a development plan document",

as though the local authority does not have the power to determine that issue anyway, so there are many contradictions and much confusion in the new process that the Government propose. It is supposed to be clear, but I am afraid that it has the clarity of the mud bath.

I do not agree with many of the CBI's comments on the Bill, but it has touched on something in its briefing for today's debate when it says:

"This framework will be too multi-layered and complex and will increase the workload of local authorities. It is not obvious to us that the proposals will provide the clarity and simplicity that business needs."

That is absolutely right; the planning system needs to be relatively transparent not just for business but for members of the public. If it is not clear and Members of Parliament are not easily able to explain it at their surgeries, we lose the current system's element of accountability, which is so important. I fear that that complexity will get even worse by the time the courts get their mitts on the Bill. If the Government's intention is not obvious to us in Parliament as we debate it, I am sure that the judges will have quite a lot to say about it.

Mr. Llwyd: The judges are normally guided by what we think.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is indeed right, but the judges will have a problem because of the contradictions and confusion in the Bill.

With local development, we have change for its own sake. Rather than building on something that could be improved and enhanced, the Government have decided to tear things up. That is a mistake not only because of the resulting lack of simplicity, but because there will be many transitional costs. The hon. Member for Denton and Reddish touched on the point that high transitional costs are involved in moving from one planning system to another. A proper cost-benefit analysis would show that the benefits of the system, even according to the Government's own terms, would not outweigh the cost of the transition.

Another contentious issue is whether the Bill is business friendly. We can look at the CBI briefing and those of other business organisations and take our pick, but some of us are concerned about the core proposal on business planning zones—they are called simplified planning zones in the Bill—which is supposed to make the Bill business-friendly. Two arguments relate to simplified planning zones. People who share my concerns believe that they could result in the planning system being pushed aside, resulting in poor design quality, a lack of accountability and thus bad planning. If that argument proves correct, those zones will clearly be a bad thing. Other people argue that, in fact, the proposals will make little difference.

The legal framework for simplified planning zones already exists in planning legislation and all that the clauses on those zones will do is slightly change the

process in respect of regional planning bodies. I hope that the Minister will say whether she thinks that simplified planning zones will make a difference; many people's final judgment on the Bill will depend on her answer.

Andrew Mackinlay: May I join the hon. Gentleman in expressing caution? I represent the port of Tilbury—indeed, my constituency home is by the port—and, in essence, it is already a simplified planning zone. By and large, it is not subject to normal development controls, but, of course, it has residential neighbours, and developments in port technology have often caused problems with noise and light pollution. We need to be careful not to create problems for future generations; what may be a superficially attractive scheme to help business could present other people with problems in the future.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman is right. My worry is that the thinking behind the Bill comes from the Treasury, not the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. Perhaps that is why the measure had been cut slightly by the time it had reached that office. A few months ago, the Chancellor was very keen to respond to the business community's argument that the planning system was a real drag on competitiveness and productivity, and a few soundbites and press releases came from Great George street. The proposals look like a sop to the Chancellor. If they are as effective as some Ministers claim, that will be a worry and the hon. Gentleman will be right in what he says.

My final major criticism of the Bill relates to community involvement. At the start of my remarks, I said that clause 17 might prove to be a welcome development, but the problem is that it is difficult to tell whether that is so from that clause, the explanatory notes and all the other related documents that the Government have issued. The Government have phrased community development in a very non-prescriptive way. That may be a good idea, because such involvement needs to reflect the communities in different parts of the country and one size clearly will not fit all of them.

Not being over-prescriptive is perhaps the right approach, but the danger in not providing clarity is that the power might become a damp squib and community involvement in planning might become superficial rather than profound. I hope that the Government will either be more specific in their guidance on community involvement or accept amendments to clause 17.

Mr. Drew: I have some reservations, but the danger is that we try to pretend that we can legislate in an all-embracing way. Some of the work done in rural areas in respect of village appraisals and village design statements speaks volumes for what communities can do. I would never pretend that we can legislate to make every community do that, but surely that is how we should take this forward.

Mr. Davey: I am interested to hear about the good practice in the hon. Gentleman's area. I have seen examples of good practice in other areas, and he is right to say that we cannot be over-prescriptive, which was my point. Perhaps we can be prescriptive, however, about what will be some of the features of good community involvement—for example, in relation to information provision and the advice that might be available to members of the public or to applicants, to make sure that there are clear standards by which to judge whether planning authorities and applicants have involved the community. Perhaps we could go one stage further—this would be controversial—by making it a statutory requirement, before applications are put to a planning authority, that developers have engaged in some early community consultation. That might promote good practice within the private sector, as there is certainly a need for that.

There are many aspects of the Bill that I have not been able to cover in my short remarks. I hope that I have made it clear to the House that the Liberal Democrats are concerned about the centralisation and complexity in the Bill and its lack of clear vision for the planning system. What we need is a planning system that is more accountable and that has sustainability built even more firmly into its foundations. Through such features, we can have a truly efficient planning system.

7.21 pm

David Wright (Telford): I am grateful for the opportunity to take part in this important debate. I get more letters about planning applications than anything else, as I am sure many other hon. Members do. That is a sign that local people do not understand the planning system as it operates in this country, contrary to what some Opposition Members have suggested. Many people think that their MP has a veto over planning applications, and often we have to point them in the right direction in planning terms.

The Bill is particularly welcome because it sits alongside a raft of proposed legislation to make regeneration effective and give local people the opportunity to influence change in their neighbourhoods. Contrary to the comments of some Opposition Members, the Bill has had a broad welcome from several quarters, including the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. Mr. Mike Haslam, president of the Royal Town Planning Institute, has said:

> "The bill gives the planning system the power and new measures to achieve sustainable development and to influence private and public investment. It places planning and people at the heart of decisions about the futures of our towns, cities and rural areas".

I endorse those comments because I believe that the planning process is at the heart of regeneration.

I am conscious that many Members want to speak, so I shall try to be relatively brief. I want to focus on four key areas: regional planning structures; local planning arrangements; development control matters; and compulsory purchase issues.

First, on regional planning, the Bill envisages the replacement of regional planning guidance with regional spatial strategies. That is more than just a change in name: there will be a change in style with more focus on the spatial form of the region and a move away from a policy-based document. It is important that the new strategies give spatial expression to, among other issues, regional transport and economic and environmental plans. All that is to be welcomed. In one sense, it repairs the damage inflicted on strategic

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planning throughout the 1980s by the Conservative party. In another sense, it is a new, modern planning agenda that reflects best practice across the whole European Community.

As we have heard, the new strategies will be led by a regional planning body, and, in the interim period, the regional assembly. I accept some of the criticism that that interim arrangement, prior to the establishment of an elected structure, takes away some democratic accountability in relation to county councils. There is a danger that the larger planning authorities will continue to drive the regional spatial strategy and base their decisions on what is best for their authorities rather than for the region as a whole. However, that is what happens now through the current regional planning structure. The counties often fail to engage fully in the regional planning process, which is a significant weakness across the country.

It is important that the regional planning body has the appropriate level of staffing to prepare the regional strategy statement, and that the skills and views of the counties are taken fully into account. I accept that there is a danger that the proper functioning of sub-regional planning will become too dependent on regional government and the subsequent local government reforms. However, the system is not working well at present. In relation to housing target figures in particular, across many county areas, there is no coherence between what is being planned in metropolitan areas and what county councils are delivering on the ground, especially in large rural counties. We must understand that there is interdependence between housing target figures in metropolitan areas and large towns and what is being provided in rural areas.

We need to ensure that sub-regional planning is given a dedicated role within regional planning to deal with important issues such as housing. Of course, the more quickly we can move to a comprehensive structure of regional government, the better. A key issue in the development of regional spatial strategies will be the interrelationship with regional development agencies, which has not been covered in much detail this evening. It would help if that could be more clearly defined in the Bill, which is light on comments about the role of regional development agencies, particularly in relation to economic development and transport.

Secondly, on local planning arrangements, local plans, unitary development plans and structure plans are to be replaced by local development schemes, and every local planning authority must prepare a local development scheme that will set out what local development documents the authority will produce and a time scale for publication. I hope that that will enhance local priority setting and enable local planning authorities to focus on trying to build character into the urban form in many of our towns and cities—something that is very much absent in the current unitary development planning framework.

Each development plan document will be subject to independent examination, with the emphasis on testing the overall soundness of the plan. The process is intended to be less formal, and that is welcome. Regulations will need to make it clear what role, if any, legal representatives will be able to play in any examination process. In general, anything that helps to engage local people through more informal debate on planning issues will make the planning system more accessible and user-friendly.

I particularly welcome clause 26, which requires authorities that are currently incredibly slow to produce their development plans in good time. It is not acceptable that 10 to 15 per cent. of authorities still do not have effective unitary development plan structures some years after the relevant legislation came into effect. That means that developers in many areas cannot plan effectively, and local communities cannot interact with their local authority in understanding how the planning regime is going to work in their area.

The Bill contains a statutory duty for all development plans to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development. That is an important and welcome statement, and I join the Liberal Democrat spokesman in calling on the Government to define their objectives on sustainable development more clearly. I would like some comments not only about design matters and enhancing the quality of the urban form but about sustainability in rural communities, especially in relation to providing affordable housing for people in need in those environments.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Has the hon. Gentleman noticed that the Bill requires simplified planning zones to have environmental impact assessments, which will undoubtedly require details of design to be submitted, yet, for all other planning, it does not require design details to be given before the application is submitted? Does not he think that that is an inconsistency?

David Wright: No, because I imagine—I certainly hope—that when local planning authorities look at the contents of their local scheme and their local development framework, they will take on board those issues. When responding to applicants, they will be able to say clearly what they expect in terms of design and quality. I do not, therefore, see a problem in that regard. In fact, the process enhances the current arrangement.

My third point relates to development control, the key issue in which is certainty for applicants. The proposed statement of development principles is a major step forward. Many local planning authorities need to be much more open in dealing with applicants and they should give better professional advice. At the moment, many authorities do not meet applicants about submitted applications and the first thing that the applicant hears is when the authority says yes or no to the application. That is not acceptable.

I strongly welcome the Government's change of mind on major projects of national or regional importance. The Bill's proposals offer a much better solution. I was on the Procedure Committee, which recently began an investigation into the major infrastructure project process, and it concluded that the Government's previous proposal would not have been effective and would have bogged the House down with an enormous amount of work on planning matters. The proposal in the Bill is a good compromise.

Finally, I should like to discuss compulsory purchase. Land assembly issues and land assembly for regeneration are incredibly important. The present system is

cumbersome and many of the skills that have been used over the years in compulsory purchase cases have been lost. In the 1980s, the then Government's view was that the market could deal with most regeneration issues and authorities were encouraged not to use compulsory purchase powers but to try to let the market dictate the system. Unfortunately, as we have seen in many areas, that does not work. We need the effective and smooth power of compulsory purchase to deliver major regeneration projects. We have failed, in many senses, on that agenda in the past and I would like to think that the Bill will start to put some of the problems right.

The Bill will enhance the power of local planning authorities to obtain land by compulsory purchase by widening the definition of the objectives that compulsory purchase must achieve. There is now a need to prove that the project will contribute to the economic, social or environmental well-being of an area, and that must remain a feature of the compulsory purchase process. As we have heard, the Bill will introduce a fairer compensation scheme, covering a wider range of owners and occupiers. There is a need to ensure that the benefits of compulsory purchase orders are fully understood at the local level and that capital resources are available to enable authorities to take positive action. Flexibility for local authorities will be critical.

I hope that, over the next three years, some of the Government's resources for investing in skills in planning will go into enhancing the skills needed to implement compulsory purchase orders and that that will link across into wider regeneration activity. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will comment on that when he winds up.

7.32 pm

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Telford (David Wright). The Bill's purpose is put plainly and simply in the explanatory notes. It is designed

"to speed up the planning system".

My view is that the planning system can be speeded up by making relatively few amendments to the existing legislation.

I share a certain disappointment that the Bill does not contain a clearer and stronger statement on the purpose of planning. The public perceive planning to be a negative instrument when, as someone said earlier, it should enable people to get the right development in the right place at the right time. I commend the Town and Country Planning Association's definition, which states:

"The purpose of planning is to help ensure that suitable land is available for development in ways that accord with economic, social and environmental goals and that such development is consistent with the principles of sustainable development."

I am also slightly disappointed that there is no definition of sustainable development in the Bill. I know that it is difficult to come up with one, as I am chairman of the 44-nation Council of Europe committee on sustainable development. I offered a prize at the world summit in Johannesburg recently to the person who could give the simplest and shortest definition of sustainable development. I was speaking globally, but I got the definition down to eight words. It is "conserving finite resources of Earth for future generations". However, a more homely definition of sustainable development—exactly what the Government are trying to achieve—could appear in the Bill.

It may be appropriate to declare what I might best describe as a reverse financial interest. I have been a member and fellow of the Royal Town Planning Institute for 40 years. Unfortunately, the requirements of continuing professional development have caught up with me, and I have been advised that it might be a good thing if I applied for retired membership status. That would save me a considerable amount of money, but I thought of sending the institute 28 years of *Hansard* to try to show what I have been doing and the interest that I have continued to take in town and country planning issues. None the less, I declare a possible interest as a member of the institute.

The detail of these 90 clauses and six schedules is, of course, best left to discussion in Committee. I want to speak about a few of the broad themes of what the Bill seeks to do. I share the anxieties about the rather radical changes and the introduction of regional functions, with the regional spatial strategy and the regional planning bodies. I share the criticism that my hon. Friend the Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) made. The Bill puts the cart before the horse. It should not apply unless and until regional assemblies have been set up and are directly elected. In that sense, there is a democratic deficit in the Bill.

I also regret the severe curtailment of the present powers of county councils. Even the powers that will remain underline that there will be yet another layer of bureaucracy in the town and country planning system. I read the Bill in a way similar to that of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). It will hugely increase the powers given to the Secretary of State and lead to their centralisation.

The hon. Gentleman understands the current position in London. The Mayor has been given certain powers to call in particular applications. I will not go into detail, but they are not necessarily the largest applications. However, the Mayor has been given considerable powers. Once an application is submitted to the local planning authority—in London, it will be one of the London boroughs—it has to be referred to the Mayor, who has the power to direct the local planning authority to turn the application down. If he does that and the application is turned down, the applicant can quite properly appeal to the Secretary of State. If the applicant does not appeal, or the Mayor does not intervene on what he considers to be a good application, the Secretary of State can still call in that application. Precisely that has happened in my constituency. I ask the Government to reconsider. The powers for the regions should not be implemented unless and until directly elected regional assemblies—irrespective of our view of them—are set up.

I welcome the fact that the Government have dropped the idea mentioned in the Green Paper that Parliament might decide on major planning cases and infrastructure projects. A local public inquiry is essential. The problem occurs when that process takes as long as it did for Sizewell B and Heathrow terminal 5. That was the Government's fault and not that of the system.

I agree with the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). Clause 43 deals with major infrastructure projects. When major infrastructure projects are of

[Sir Sydney Chapman]

national or regional importance, the Secretary of State will be able to call them in and he must appoint an inspector to consider the application. New subsection 76A(6) under clause 43(6) adds:

"The Secretary of State may by regulations make provision as to the procedure to be applied in considering an application under this section".

I want the Bill to stipulate that there should be a local public inquiry in such situations. I find it inconceivable that there might not be and I hope that the Government take that on board.

Local development frameworks, by which I mean local development schemes and documents, will replace the local plan system, which includes structure plans, unitary development plans and local plans. I agree that there will be confusion and complication. Although I fully accept that the Government want to streamline the process, the proposal will have the opposite effect. Of course I welcome clause 22, which allows modifications to be made to draft unitary development plans and other plans without having to repeat consultations and reopen inquiries.

I am worried about the business planning zones and must caution the Government on them. Simplified planning zones already exist and in the old days, we had enterprise zones. We do not need the new scheme. Instead, we should use the existing simplified planning zone technique. It might be right not to require an outline planning permission if a development is proposed in an area where the land use is in conformity with the proposal. That could apply to many other areas. However, we need to continue the general principle of requiring outline planning applications because they give certainty and assurance to the planning process.

I read the comments in the White Paper on speeding up decisions. It proposes that 65 per cent. of minor commercial and industrial applications, and 80 per cent. of other minor applications, should be determined within eight weeks, but why not 100 per cent.? I do not think that 65 and 80 per cent. are appropriate figures. One way to speed up the planning process for minor, not major, applications is to deem them granted if a determination is not made in eight weeks.

On the rights of third parties, I hold what must be defined as the publicly unpopular view. Third parties have rights when the Secretary of State calls in an application for a public local inquiry and they can give evidence before the decision is made. I recognise that, at the other end of the scale, local planning authorities consult on other applications, although whether they do that adequately is a matter of subjective judgment. I fear that if the rights of third parties are expanded, the whole system will grind to a halt.

Mr. Llwyd: I am listening carefully. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that, in the Republic of Ireland, a gateway gets rid of the chaff to leave only the wheat? Genuine complaints go forward and there is no delay. If it is possible that a bad neighbour will impinge on an individual, it is right for that individual to have redress.

Sir Sydney Chapman: In a sense, the hon. Gentleman nicely anticipates what I am about to say. For certain applications and to a limited extent, a case can be made to enhance the rights of third parties, but if the gateway is too wide, the whole system will grind to a halt.

Peter Bradley: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify his position on the eight-week rule? He suggested that it might accelerate the process if an applicant is deemed to have consent after eight weeks. Is he advocating that as part of the planning process? If so, what consequences would that have for the rights of third parties?

Sir Sydney Chapman: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. I am not saying that that principle should apply throughout. All I am saying is that there should be a back-up for some relatively minor cases. For example, if a decision is not given within eight weeks, deemed consent might be considered appropriate. I hope, however, that on simpler and minor applications eight weeks will not be needed. The planning officer should ring up the applicant and say, "We've got this. It is in conformity with land use. You've got the right density, which we approve of. We are just a bit worried about vehicular access to the site or housing estate and think that it should be pushed 20 ft along the road." Such problems could be dealt with over the telephone, modified on the plan submitted and stamped by the local planning officer. In those minor cases in which planning officers are allowed to make a decision, it could be given within a week. We want to encourage that approach.

On section 106 agreements—I suppose the section number will have to change if the Bill is accepted—I welcome what the Minister said about the need for transparency. Frankly, many section 106 agreements are uncertain. They consume time and are anything but transparent. Indeed—I choose my words carefully—some of them could be seen to border on perceived corruption because the impression is given that people can get what they want provided that they give a certain amount of money. That unsatisfactory arrangement should be changed.

I welcome the power not to accept repeat applications and twin-track applications. People can use and abuse the system. They go through the process. As soon as they are turned down, they appeal and put in another minor variant. I would welcome the time for appealing against refusals being cut from six to three months. I think that that is proposed, although I am not sure whether it is in the Bill. I very much welcome the ability of the local planning authority to expand permitted development rights.

We have moved a long way on compulsory purchase and I have a suggestion that may help us move a bit further. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947, which was great in many respects, had one fault: it was deeply unfair to people whose land was confiscated in compulsory purchase orders. I say confiscated because they did not get anything like the full market value of their land. All they received was an imagined piece of a £400 million pot. Over the years, we have gradually moved to the market value, although many people do not think that the amount set by district valuers is enough. There is a case not for 100 per cent. compensation, but for 110 per cent. compensation provided the owner agrees within a specific period. That would provide an incentive, and it would be possible to

get the land and to carry out the development. That would be especially useful when we need to widen roads or construct new ones.

Dr. Whitehead: That sounds remarkably like giving someone money for doing what one wants. I thought that the hon. Gentleman rejected that principle.

Sir Sydney Chapman: If we give 110 per cent., we are not giving people more than they deserve. It is not a case simply of buying the land, but of accepting that they have to move, which causes expenses. I accept that the Bill deals with loss of payments, but still think that, for the Government and the taxpayer, my proposal is good value for money, as the land would be obtained earlier—the longer it takes to get the land, the more it costs to carry out the development.

Peter Bradley: That is an interesting idea, but will it not have the opposite effect to that desired by the hon. Gentleman? Compulsory purchase comes into play only when the private or public promoter of a scheme has failed to negotiate the acquisition of land with the owner. He is providing the landowner with an incentive not to deal with the applicant but to hold on to the promise of getting 110 per cent. of the value that could be obtained much earlier and more constructively through negotiation.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I understand the hon. Gentleman's argument, but I am not proposing that such a scheme be implemented in every case. I do not have time to develop this argument, but there are cases in which putting in an early, favourable offer with a time limit will help people to achieve what they want. The present method provides every incentive to delay and hang on.

I doubt whether the Bill, as drafted, will speed up planning. It is possible, but not probable. There is no doubt that the Secretary of State will be given many more and greater powers. I am concerned about county councils' loss of statutory powers, and believe that local development frameworks are unnecessarily complicated. Decision making could become more remote and local people would have less say if the Bill goes through unamended. To return to my central point, while the Bill is good in parts, its approach is wrong, and the Government should have sought to amend the principal measure—the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. I therefore feel obliged to support the reasoned amendment tabled by my right hon. and hon. Friends.

7.52 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I shall speak briefly about county planning functions and the Bill's proposals to change them.

I was interested to hear Opposition Members mount a thorough defence of county councils. That has not always been the Conservatives' position. The previous Government, I recall, instructed the Banham commission to assume that county councils would be abolished in the early stages of its deliberations on local authority structure. Indeed, one hon. Member who is in the Chamber today was a commissioner and succeeded in abolishing Berkshire, of which he may be proud. Such a development is at odds with the thorough historical defence mounted by some hon. Members today.

Counties' function in planning is mainly to produce structure plans which, unlike local plans, do not relate directly to communities—they are general devices that sketch out broad areas of use, defend areas like the strategic gap in Hampshire, show where population growth may occur, and so on. The Conservative defence of county councils, which, as I mentioned, is relatively new, is not based on that function but, bizarrely, on the idea that counties are bastions of communities. In the debate on the Loyal Address, the king of the Tories over the water, the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), called them "organic communities". They are lots of things, but they are not organic communities. If we take a look at local authorities in the round, we could say that counties are providers of generic and strategic services. They do not have a specific community function, but plan and co-ordinate county land use, mineral extraction, waste disposal and so on. Some of those functions, as hon. Members have said, will be retained by counties in the Bill.

District councils have a clear community function in the proper sense of the word. The Bill makes community input a requirement for local plans in the shape of the new local development frameworks, which must include a statement of community involvement, as set out in clause 17. The process of community involvement is pitched at the right level, as communities will be able to make more decisions that affect their daily lives through the local development framework than has hitherto been the case. They will have input in the planning of their streets, their neighbourhood and the local shopping centre. Moreover, that input will have to be demonstrated by the local authority before the local development plan is finalised.

Contrary to claims by Opposition spokesmen, that is in line with recent pronouncements of the current Leader of the Opposition, the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith), who made a speech about returning power to local government, quite improbably on the occasion of the Nicholas Ridley memorial lecture. As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) said, as a Minister in the Thatcher Government, Nicholas Ridley was probably more responsible for damaging and disabling local government, and its representative, community and, significantly, planning functions, than any other Minister in living memory. However, I will let that pass.

The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green did not equivocate or attempt to pretend that counties were local communities or even organic communities. He said, among other things, that

> "we need more responsibility exercised at a local level . . . I don't just mean by that giving back more powers to local government . . . I mean enabling people to take power themselves . . . it's what I call community government".

I would have thought that Opposition Members would be in favour of the provisions on local development frameworks, but apparently they are not—I guess that relates to their hang-up with counties and their defence. They do not want county functions that relate to communities passed to communities nor, on the other

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

hand, do they want functions that relate to strategic planning and regional co-ordination passed to regions. They want to keep things just as they are.

If we step back and look impartially at the logic of the counties' function as the unit of strategic planning, we must ask why we should plan strategically on that basis. The only answer, frankly, is that we plan like that because that is how it has always been. I do not mean that that is how it has been since counties were established as elected bodies in their current form at the end of the 19th century, or even since the modern planning system came into being. I really do mean that that is how it has always been. If we look at a historical atlas, a remarkable fact emerges—counties have always had roughly the boundaries that they now have. A time traveller departing the earth in 1390 and returning today would have no idea that he had landed back in the same country until his eyes lit upon a map of the English counties, after which he would be certain that he had.

That may be good news for cultural integrity—counties are certainly a deep cultural implantation in the English psyche, as the polling during the local government review of the early 1990s demonstrated. However, I wonder whether a structure whose boundaries have withstood the black death, the depopulation of mediaeval centres of industry, the enclosures, the industrial revolution, the rise of urban ribbon development and the suburbs, has the best boundaries on which to base strategic planning considerations for the next 100 years. Planning strategically at regional level therefore makes sense, as it allows a structure plan to look at the deployment of land use overall; how uses cohabit with each other; how transportation systems work; and how urban, semi-urban and rural areas may be mutually defended to come into their own. Over time, Opposition Members' objection that regions are not democratically accountable—whereas counties, whatever their flawed planning function, are—is likely to be overcome as regions establish elected assemblies and as regional spatial strategies come under their purview.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman think that the people of Southampton, let alone Hampshire, are likely to vote to join the regional assembly of the south-east? If he does not, is he happy that the regional spatial plan will be prepared by some unelected regional body that will dictate to his own unitary authority exactly what it must have in its local development document?

Dr. Whitehead: I have said in the House and on previous occasions that, in my view, we are engaged in a process. We recently had a Bill before the House paving the way for people to take a decision on whether they wish, at this stage or later, to have a democratically elected regional assembly looking after the regional strategic interests that I described. My personal view is that the process whereby that transition will be completed will be much shorter than some hon. Members currently believe. The process will speed up, as has happened in other countries of Europe, as people come to see why an elected regional assembly is useful and advantageous to their region.

My personal view, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is that whether that will finally result in a body covering exactly the boundaries of the south-east region and having full regional accountability is a matter for further discussion, but the principle that democratically elected regional assemblies will come to England over a relatively short period can certainly be argued. *[Interruption.]* The answer is that we are engaged in a process, as I have just told the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown). Opposition Members ought to understand the difference between something that is static and something that is a process. Their failure to understand that may explain why they are in the position that they are in.

It is imperative for regional planning to be sustainable, as hon. Members from all parties have said this evening. We in the House have rightly committed ourselves to targets for emission reductions to combat climate change, targets for biodiversity, indicators on the quality of life, the establishment of targets for the proportion of housing to be built on brownfield sites, and so on. All these are important targets and indicators, and their achievement or failure will depend to a great extent on our use of land.

If we agree to a free-for-all on urban ribbon development, if we go back to the days of the aforesaid Nicholas Ridley and rubber-stamp out-of-town shopping developments, if we agree to massive house building on greenfield sites, or if we develop settlements that increase commuting time and car use, those indicators and targets will fall by the wayside. Strategic land use planning and planning for strategic economic development must be co-located with sustainability. In this respect, I am not sure that we have made a brilliant start.

I read the first published economic development plans for each of the new regional development agencies some while ago, and also the regional policy guidance that then ran alongside them. Without exception, the stated ambition of each of the regions was at that point

"to drive the region to perform economically at 'above the national average'".

We could suggest kindly that that sounds rather similar to statements made by premiership football managers at the beginning of each season that their ambition this year is "a place in Europe"—an ambition which, for many of them, rapidly becomes obviously unachievable, although this season, remarkably, not in the case of Southampton football club.

A series of RDAs aiming to perform economically at above the national average is bound to conflict with regional planning guidance and, if the Bill is agreed by the House, with regional spatial strategies, if the latter are to unfold in line with the imperatives of sustainability in land use planning. The fact that clause 38(2) states that the regional spatial strategy should be undertaken with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development will not resolve the problem entirely. In the legislation setting up the RDAs, it was stated that one of the five primary purposes of each RDA was to

"contribute to the achievement of sustainable development in the United Kingdom where it is relevant to its area to do so".

To date, the potential conflict of outcome between what an RDA does, and what regional planning requires, remains unresolved.

We need better to define the term "sustainability" in the Bill. We need to make sure that that clause is substantially strengthened if a logical and progressive new system of planning, which I heartily endorse, is to become meaningful in terms of the needs of sustainable planning in England.

8.5 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): An article about the Bill in the *Financial Times* on 25 November stated that 60 per cent. of local authority planners believed that the Bill would be a failure, and that it would

"fail to speed up applications as the Treasury wants, according to the PPS Group, the consultation specialists who conducted the survey of 129 planning officers across the country. Stephen Byfield, of PPS, said: 'The government has promoted the new bill as the way to streamline the planning system. Our research shows that the people who actually make the decisions—planning officers— believe the precise opposite will happen. The system"—

[Interruption.] I am quoting, not necessarily expressing my own view. I shall develop the idea presently, if hon. Members will bear with me. The article continues:

"The system is in fact about to become still more cumbersome, time consuming and, therefore, expensive."

Those were the views of 129 planning officers—not necessarily mine, as I said. I am starting with the blackest part of my remarks.

It is my belief, since I have been in this place, that there is a certain ambivalence towards local government at Westminster. Over the past two decades, more than 120 Acts have been passed, gradually scraping away local government powers. There is a distrust of local democracy here, despite lip service being paid—we have heard it this evening, and we will hear more later this evening, I am sure. The bottom line is that this place does not want local government to become over-mighty. That is a bad thing.

If we are serious about local democracy and empowerment, surely we should do more than merely pay lip service to that notion. The apparent readiness to find fault with local government is not confined to this place. Recently, Margaret Curran, the Minister for Social Justice in the Scottish Executive, put all the blame for planning shortcomings squarely on the shoulders of local government and no one else.

In the Welsh context, clauses 56 and 59 deal with the necessity for local development plans. That is a good idea. We should have local development plans that are overseen, in this case by the National Assembly. One hopes, of course, that the National Assembly will not play the role of big brother, as Westminster has done with local government. Hitherto, that has not been the case, and the hope is that it will not happen. On the face of it, the proposal is acceptable, provided that it is not shorthand for the Assembly and, in England, the Department, usurping the planning functions of local government.

After all, the thrust of the Bill is to speed up the planning system. There has already been a move to involve Whitehall in too many planning matters—for example, the larger wind power schemes need the approval of the Department of Trade and Industry, over the head of the National Assembly. With that caveat, it is right that there should be an input from the Department, and in the Welsh context from the Assembly.

Ceredigion council in central Wales recently came up with the idea that it needed 6,500 new homes. The research basis for that figure is non-existent. It was arrived at on the whim of a group of independent councillors. There is, sadly, no proof of local need. No methodology has been applied. The idea is being driven by independents on the council, some of whom stand to gain considerably from it. The figure of 6,500 homes seems to have been plucked out of the air. The driving force behind it is questionable. The independent councillors are adamant about the issue, and I might add that they are strongly supported by the Liberal Democrat councillors. At stake is the potential for extreme dilution of the Welsh language and culture because of the building of houses for which there exists no proven local need. The result would be a further influx of people who can pay higher prices, ensuring that the housing market spirals even further out of the reach of local youngsters. That stark scenario is a current one and I welcome the fact that the National Assembly for Wales will have a pivotal role in preventing such abuse from recurring.

I welcome the spatial plans as, in the Welsh context, the National Assembly for Wales will be doing the work. I think that the proposal is sensible and, in England, it is a step towards true regional economic planning. The same is equally, if not more blatantly so in Wales. Several hon. Members have pointed out that planning might be working slightly better in Wales than in England. I am very pleased to hear that. It proves that we can do some things right. Indeed, I hope that before long we will also legislate well in Wales, although that is a debate for another day—or perhaps I should say other days.

What will be expected of planning authorities in their local development plans, which are dealt with in clause 56? I hope very much that the authorities will consider in their plans health impact assessments and the Welsh language impact. Those are bread-and-butter issues in Wales and I hope that they will be dealt with in due course by being included in the Bill. Furthermore, I hope that it will be made clear that the plans should have due regard to housing strategy and mineral development strategy, which should be linked. Indeed, the National Assembly has recently done some very good work in that regard.

I continue to be dismayed by the fact that local authorities do not as a matter of course undertake audits to survey local housing needs, concentrating on affordable housing. That was a strong recommendation of the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs back in 1995 or 1996, but unfortunately precious little has been done, despite the fact that the need for social and affordable housing is even greater now than it was at that time.

The idea of limiting the duration of planning permissions from five to three years is good and I welcome it unreservedly, but I regret that the Government did not bite the bullet fully and provide a time limit within which the development has to be completed or referred back to the planning authority so an explanation can be given as to why an extension is being sought. Hon. Members will know that far too many developers use land as a resource and pension policy. In so doing, they skew natural and proper development in any area. Development can mean as

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

little as a few pegs in the ground. In dealing with development, Sweet and Maxwell's "Encyclopaedia of Planning" refers to

"any work of construction in the course of erecting a building".

It seems to me that simply marking out a plot is enough.

If the House will bear with me, I should like to cite one example. Aberdyfi in the south of my constituency is a small and fascinating maritime village with a year-round population of approximately 400 to 500. In the 1960s, a developer decided to submit an application for 200 houses on Copper hill above the village. There was no local need for the houses at that time and there is no such need now, but the mere fact that those permissions have existed for more than 30 years without a single plot being built upon has created terrible problems for small-scale local developers who have an eye on building affordable and social housing and on the local need. The obvious problem is that whenever a developer applies for planning permission in the locality, it is deemed that housing numbers are sufficient, but the parcel of 200 houses up on the hill has yet to be developed. Of course, if it is ever developed, it will result in the ruination of the wonderful little village of Aberdyfi.

The irksome aspect of that situation is that it has caused a planning blight in about a third of my constituency, as people cannot build a few houses to meet the local need because of a development that was allowed previously. I think that we should grasp that nettle. In saying that, I am sure that I speak for hon. Members and other people who have encountered the same problem. I believe that the situation that I have described is wrong and skews the planning system altogether. I do not think that land should be used a resource for investment for the future if that is to the detriment of those who need places to live in the foreseeable future.

Peter Bradley: The hon. Gentleman is reading from my script and, I am sure, that of many other hon. Members. Is he aware that his local authority would have the power to extinguish the planning consent that existed on the site to which he referred for 40 years, but in exercising it, would have to pay compensation at market value for houses that had never been built in that time? Does that not underline the importance of ensuring that those on the Front Bench, whom I am sure are listening very closely to this exchange, consider the Bill and find some way of accommodating the view that he advanced, which I support?

Mr. Llwyd: Yes, I was aware of that point. I am by no means a know-all, but I am aware of the issue, and I shall tell the hon. Gentleman why: in the Caernarfon constituency, the same thing happened in a little village called Morfa Bychan—*Hansard* is going to have a fun day today—outside Porthmadog, where the council opted to do just what he described. However, the process cost millions of pounds. As we well know, money is not in huge supply in local government. I appreciate the point that he makes and sincerely hope on behalf of not only my constituents, but all our constituents, that the matter is readdressed in Committee.

I read with interest the references to community consultation, which are welcome as far as they go. How is it intended that that consultation will take place? In other words, what will be the proposed avenues for dialogue? I welcome the idea, but how will it work? Anybody can see that the community council will have a role, but there will be other aspects and I would be grateful if the Minister could enlighten me about them.

Another matter that has concerned people in Wales is second homes. Concern is felt not only in Wales, but in Cumbria, Cornwall, the Cotswolds and anywhere else that anybody would like to name within reasonable commuter distances of towns and so on. The problem with properties that are used as second homes is that they undermine the viability of villages. I can speak of a village called Rhyd in my constituency, where only one or two local families are left all year round and the village shop and post office have gone. *[Interruption.]* I shall, no doubt, assist *Hansard* in due course; I promise to do so. The point is that the local shop has been undermined and the post office and village pub, church, chapel and school have all gone. The infrastructure has completely disappeared.

We need to consider how to tackle that problem, which affects many areas throughout the UK, but is of particular moment in Wales. Very often, the areas where it happens most are the economically inactive ones—rural areas where there are houses to be bought and some people can afford to buy them, while youngsters cannot necessarily do so. My hon. Friend the Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) last year introduced the Housing (Wales) Bill in an attempt to deal with that problem among others, including homes in multiple occupation. One of the notions that struck us was a use classes order. We could consider introducing such an order and the question whether a property that is not occupied all year round should be deemed to be in a different use class from that of a full-time residential property. That might be one way forward.

I went to see Ministers about that issue before the White Paper was published. No names, no pack drill, but one Minister in particular was fully on board that it should happen. He said that he would put the matter in train, but unfortunately when the paper hit the Cabinet table, or a table slightly above his, the matter was stamped on and mysteriously disappeared. We were left with the odd and soppy suggestion of doubling the council tax. That does not go far when one is dealing with economic inequity and when the people buying the properties have more money to spend than the locals.

Peter Bradley: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the Rural Housing Trust, an extremely respectable and authoritative organisation in this field, believes that the receipts from the doubling of council tax could meet the shortfall in the funding of affordable housing? That would make a significant contribution to addressing the needs and problems to which he referred.

Mr. Llwyd: I have no doubt that the doubling of council tax will be beneficial, but it will not crack the problem. Perhaps I was wrong to call it a sop, because it is more than that. Clearly, however, it is not the absolute answer.

Interestingly, the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs said eight years ago that it would like a quota of, for example, 10 per cent. development allowed in any given

community, and that that should be decided locally. If only 10 per cent. were allowed in a locality, that would, I hope, assist sustainable communities. However, that is a debate for another day. I am pleased to see that I have struck a chord with Labour Members. The subject can no doubt be revisited in Committee.

I wish to make two quick points. It is important to have a third party right of appeal because of potential bad neighbour applications. There should be a gateway to sift out the wheat from the chaff, and genuine grievances should be heard. Indeed, I am beginning to think that this may have a human rights aspect. I commend to hon. Members the way in which the model works in Ireland. It is a good model that does not create delay, and it is worthy of examination.

We have all got terribly worked up this evening about how good compulsory purchase will be. I wonder where the money will come from to effect compulsory purchase; my local authority can hardly pay for social services, let alone compulsory purchase. Of course there are resource implications, but in principle, the idea is good and should be welcomed.

There are some good aspects to the Bill, but many things need correcting. I hope that I am wrong in thinking that the dead hand of Westminster and over-centralisation are in the background. I hope that the Bill will be improved in Committee.

8.22 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Had the Government proposed today a Bill that embodied the suggestions in their Green Paper, I would have been making a very different speech. I would have attacked the idea that we could have a planning system without plans and a local development framework that would at best have been described as woolly, with no opportunities for the public to engage in its formulation. I would have said that the infrastructure project proposals were unworkable, and that plans for tariffs or taxes were at best only half considered. However, the Government listened to the objections and concerns that the Select Committee and others raised, and made fundamental alterations. They should be given credit for that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) said earlier, we should be proud of the planning system in this country. When it was born in 1947, it was a radical measure. Its fundamental principle was that the legal right to develop should not rest with the owner of the property. Effectively, it transferred the power of development from the individual to the community. Labour Members should have great regard to that and always make sure that we comply with it when considering changes to the planning system.

My hon. Friend the Minister for Social Exclusion, who introduced the debate, spoke about a step change. In reality, the Government should be saying that they are taking a small number of steps, mainly in the right direction, along the lines recommended by the Select Committee.

Some criticisms have been made of the local development framework. When I first read the legislation, with its framework, documents and plans, it appeared a little confusing and not quite thought through. The proposals for Wales are slightly simpler and easier to understand. In response to the criticisms of the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), I can say that the other day I spoke to the chief planner in Sheffield, Les Sturch, who was quite content that the proposals were workable and could deliver in time the ideas, procedures and throughput that the Government seek.

I particularly welcome the fact that we are to have public inquiries and community consultation and involvement in the local development framework. As I told my hon. Friend the Minister earlier, the requirement to have maps is important because it provides a degree of certainty and understanding to the community about what is intended in the area. Most of the development in Sheffield in the past 10 years has taken place in my constituency. People come to my surgeries asking me to stop development on fields next to their homes. I tell them that something called the unitary development plan for the whole city shows the acceptable development on any piece of land. They complain that they did not know about that, and I answer that the whole city was consulted at some point. They argue that they did not live in their house at that time, and I say that, had they gone to the local library or town hall before buying their house, they could have seen a copy of the plan and the likely development on the land.

People then begin to understand that there is a degree of fairness. They may not like the fact that houses will be built, but they at least understand that the system is fair. At that point, it is convenient for the local Member of Parliament to say that he can do nothing about the matter, but that consultation took place in the past. The measure gives certainty to the community because people can know what is likely to be built on land near their home and developers can know whether planning permission is likely to be accepted in principle.

Clearly, any system can be reformed. I welcome the changes to stop serial repeat applications and to reduce the life of planning permission from five years to three. If I heard the Minister correctly earlier—this is an important point of clarification—she said that in future planning permission would not automatically be granted again once the expiry date had passed. That is important because, as the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy said, many permissions hang round for years and years, and they cause a perverse form of planning blight. If people know that once the planning permission has expired, it will not automatically be renewed, the system will become more certain, and I would certainly welcome that.

I wish to pick up an important issue that was referred to earlier: enforcement. It is not in the Bill, but if local authority decisions are to be carried through, enforcement is necessary. Developers will always try to get a bit more out of the scheme than they are entitled to.

The Mosborough village action group is an active body in my constituency whose members take a great interest in planning matters. They said that they knew that planning officers would always fundamentally be engaged in considering new applications and had no time to look for breaches in developers' conditions. However, as interested members of the community, the group could do that.

[Mr. Clive Betts]

In neighbourhood watch, interested members of the community help their local police officers and are recognised for the role that they fulfil. Why could not we develop planning watch, so that interested members of the community could be formally recognised, have a direct link to planning officers, receive some formal training and thus play an important role in enhancing enforcement? That would help to ensure that developers did not get away with breaching conditions. It is an interesting idea. I accept that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary may not be able to respond officially to it tonight, but perhaps he could consider it. Involving the community positively and engaging it with the planning process could have great benefits.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): A simpler method might be to ask the building control officers to do the final check on whether a building had been constructed according to the requirements of the planning application. Building control officers are there at the end of the process.

Mr. Betts: Perhaps my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary would like to respond to that. It is right to involve more people in the enforcement process. People who are involved in the community, interested in such matters and who often walk around on site could be engaged slightly more formally. My idea has merit.

I want to deal with two criticisms of the current system that have been exposed to some extent. First, it is alleged to be slow. Secondly, it is alleged to be anti-business and anti-competition. The system is sometimes slow, but evidence to the Housing, Planning and Local Government Committee showed that resources and lack of staff have been a major problem. I am delighted by the Government's commitment to the extra £350 million. It is right not to ring-fence the money; it should be up to local authorities to determine their priorities. However, they should be held to account for the way in which they deal with planning applications.

It is often said that urban authorities' unitary development plans are adopted when they are due for revision. Clearly that is nonsense, but the responsibility ultimately lies with Ministers. If we set up a system—unitary development plans now or local development frameworks in future—that requires local authorities to act, Ministers must set out time scales and spell out clearly the consequences of not complying with them. There are currently no sanctions against a local authority that does not want to adopt a set of local plans. That must be examined if we are serious about the matter.

Mr. Truswell: My hon. Friend is right to stress the importance of placing the responsibility on local authorities, but should not the Government bear some responsibility? Many delays in finalising unitary development plans fall between holding the public inquiries and inspectors furnishing local authorities with their reports.

Mr. Betts: That is a fair point. If there is a requirement on local authorities, perhaps the Government should also set themselves a clear timetable so that they can be judged against it.

Do we always want speedy decisions? We certainly want the right decisions. Speeding up the process can sometimes lead to decisions that are not in the best interests of the whole community. Sometimes the problem lies with the quality of the applications, which cannot be determined because the developer gives insufficient or incorrect details. The responsibility does not always lie with the planners. We must accept that although better public consultation will slow down the process, it may mean that the decision is ultimately better.

I welcome the Government's commitment to community involvement by providing for each local authority to devise a statement of their method of operating the policy. I hope that we have seen the last of the notice on the lamp post as the only method of telling or consulting the public about a planning application. However, speed for its own sake can be wrong. An element of caution is therefore desirable.

Let us consider the second allegation that the planning system is anti-business. We heard much rhetoric, but it was accompanied by little evidence. I am not happy about the simplified planning zones. I do not know what they are supposed to achieve. I hope that one or two will be dotted around the country, shown to be ineffective, and thus the idea, like that of enterprise zones, will go away, enabling local authorities to get on with the proper planning job that they are supposed to do. Sheffield asks Ministers for many things, but please do not give us a simplified planning zone; send it somewhere else if it must exist.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Does the hon. Gentleman know that simplified planning zones already exist under the Planning and Compensation Act 1991, and that since that time, only 20 have been designated? Given the enhanced threshold of an environmental impact assessment that the Bill requires, is it likely that many more will be designated?

Mr. Betts: Either an explosion of uncontrolled development, which would be wrong, could happen, or nothing much will occur because there are few benefits. I hope that the latter is the case, and that the zones are simply someone's idea of a sop to appease the Confederation of British Industry, which is wrong about such issues and cannot substantiate its comments with evidence.

The planning process gives certainty not only to communities but to business. Someone who invests in a high-quality business park or office development does not want a scrap yard next door. The Select Committee visited Sheffield and saw the regeneration of the city centre. Alison Nimmo, who heads Sheffield 1, said that the reason for retailers' interest in developing the town centre was that they knew that the local authority, backed by the Government, would use its planning powers to stop out-of-town shopping developments. It is as simple as that. Such certainty is important to business as well.

The only bit of evidence that I could see was from the Competition Commission, which managed to hold an inquiry and conclude that the lack of competition among British food retailers was due to the restrictions on their developing out-of-town shopping centres,

which were put in place through PPG6. I find that bizarre, because I did not notice a great deal of competition springing up when we had a free-for-all on out-of-town shopping developments or new firms moving in to ask for developments to be created.

The Competition Commission has spoken about trying to create more competition by encouraging more out-of-town shopping developments, but if that were to work it would set up competition only for those with cars to get them there. There would be no competition, and no shops in many cases, for the poor in our deprived communities.

I refer to what has just happened in Darnall, which is one of the poorest parts of my constituency. Incorrectly and in contradiction of PPG6 in my view, the neighbouring authority, Rotherham, renewed a planning application for an out-of-town food superstore, which was taken up by Morrisons. Surprise, surprise, 12 months after the decision was agreed, Morrisons decided to close its Darnall store, which effectively removed the heart from the shopping centre.

Worse still, I understand that Morrisons is refusing to sell its store to another interested retailer that wants to buy it up. It is therefore depriving my constituents, many of whom are elderly, on low incomes and without a car, of a supermarket in which to do their food shopping. In view of such proposals, I am much more content with a planning system that looks after community interests than one that mistakenly tries to develop such competition. The certainty given to British business by the planning system is worthwhile indeed in terms of competition and something that we should protect.

There are many good things and many things that I agree with in the Bill. I am happy to support it in total, although there are issues that we must consider in more detail, as they need to be subjected to further scrutiny. In general, I give the Bill my strong support.

8.36 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): I want to develop a theme that was mentioned by the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), who is not in his place. He referred to the role of county councils, although the House will perhaps not be surprised if I do not follow exactly the same line of argument.

We might all agree that a key question for decision making in a democracy is the level at which decisions should be taken, so I want to address planning in general and the Bill in particular in the light of that question, although I have no doubt as to the answer that most of my constituents in Wycombe would give: ideally, decisions should be taken locally and as close to local communities as possible. They should be taken wherever possible by institutions with a claim on the loyalties and affections of those governed by them, which, in short, have legitimacy.

The hon. Gentleman said that the counties have a deep cultural resonance in the English psyche. He is right about that, which is why my hon. Friends and I think that he is wrong in the rest of his argument. The background against which the Bill is set is not one where decisions are always, or even usually, made locally. Indeed, the trend in Britain since the war, under Governments of both parties, has been for more and more decisions to be made in Westminster and Whitehall—a process that has accelerated under this Government. That, of course, applies to planning as well as to many other examples.

Local representatives in the High Wycombe and Marlow area from many political parties, not just my own, have told me that they believe that there is now no effective local control over important elements of the planning system, especially in relation to house building. They feel that Westminster and Whitehall are creating a damaging spiral in the south-east whereby development is approved from the centre, thus encouraging a further movement of people to the south-east from other regions, thus creating further housing demand, thus bringing about in turn more development approved in the south-east from the centre. So, a vital question for them and for my constituents is the degree to which the Bill will make planning more local and accountable.

There are good aspects to the Bill. Few Bills, perhaps, are entirely bad. I welcome, for example, the Government's intention to eliminate repeat applications and twin-tracking—a point made by my hon. Friend the Member- for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman). However, the main argument of Opposition Members is that the thrust of the Bill is to make planning less local, less accountable and less democratic.

One of the principal intentions of the Bill is to dynamite the present planning architecture and replace it with a new structure, at the apex of which will be the new regional assemblies. That may be adequate where there is real demand for a regional assembly, such as in the north-east—although there is scope for argument about that—but what about areas such as the south-east, where even Ministers concede there is little demand for a regional assembly? The Bill proposes to take power away from directly elected representatives and to give it to people who are not directly accountable to voters, if at all.

Buckinghamshire county council argues that, if the Bill as presently drafted becomes an Act, county councils will have no statutory powers relating to strategic or sub-regional planning; regional planning bodies will decide whether it is desirable for county councils to have a function at regional or sub-regional level, which means that the regional planning bodies may decide in a particular instance that it is not desirable; and district councils may agree to the involvement of county councils in the production of local development documents through the establishment of a joint committee. Therefore, district councils may not agree in a particular instance that county councils should be involved in the production of local development documents.

Buckinghamshire county council also argues that county councils need to have planning powers to fulfil their duty to secure the social, economic and environmental well-being of their areas. County councils throughout England are putting similar arguments. My hon. Friends and I support them. That is the democratic deficit that has been alluded to by many speakers in the debate—not just Conservative Members, but Liberal Democrats. Without a statutory planning duty in the Bill, county councils will be unable to maintain a strategic planning function and a skills base, which will be to the detriment of the regional

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

spatial strategy and local development documents. If the remit of county council planning experts is merely to advise other bodies, to assist them and to provide them with technical expertise, county councils are unlikely, given the pressure on them from education and social services, to retain that expertise unless they have a statutory role in the planning system.

The Minister will be aware that Buckinghamshire county council's view is supported by the Local Government Association, the Civic Trust, the Planning Officers Society, the Town and Country Planning Association, the Council for the Protection of Rural England and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, to which reference was made earlier. Even the Minister would have to concede that that is a formidable list.

Under the Bill, county councils in areas such as the south-east are to be squeezed between elected district councils and groups that are not directly accountable to voters at regional level—or quangos, to use the word used by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey). District councils are also unhappy about the tensions that will result. Wycombe district council has said:

"Without a fully resourced sub-regional component, the gap between the local district level and the regional level is too remote . . . The Bill should therefore more clearly set out the extent to which county councils must be engaged in spatial planning at the regional and especially the sub-regional level."

The Government's intention was to simplify planning. However, the Bill may make planning more complex by setting no fewer than four levels of government against each other—regional government, the new sub-regional level, county councils and district councils. Two of those tiers of government seem to have little or no legitimacy in the eyes of local voters, and it has not escaped the House's notice that the Bill increases the already considerable powers available to the Secretary of State.

Despite all this, I want to end on a positive note by quoting with approval a Minister. At the recent Local Government Association conference, Lord Rooker said:

"The Bill is not our last word. We will listen to what's said and will be prepared to seek a consensus."

On the basis of tonight's debate and the points made by Conservative and Liberal Democrat Members, the Minister must surely be aware that there is no consensus whatever for dynamiting the current planning architecture in which elected county councillors play a crucial part, and replacing it with a system presided over in large tracts of the country—and certainly in the south-east—by those who are less accountable to local voters, if they are accountable at all, and who therefore have less, or no, democratic legitimacy. If Ministers are truly seeking consensus during the Bill's passage, they will achieve it only by reconfirming the statutory planning duties of county councils, rather than by seeking to strip them away. Until and unless they do, I and other Opposition Members will continue to oppose the Bill.

8.46 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): Given the number of Members who wish to speak, I shall try to keep my remarks brief. I do not necessarily share the views of the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) about counties, but during consideration of the Bill some clarification of the new relationships will be necessary.

I start from the premise that the current planning system is unfair, inaccessible and unpredictable. I do not mind the idea of dynamiting the system, because people are genuinely distressed by it and feel that it needs radical change. The Town and Country Planning Act 1947 was undoubtedly radical and pushed things forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) made it clear that it put in place the community basis of individual demand. It was right to do so at that time, and we need to reinforce that principle. The regional level makes increasing sense to people, and I see no reason why we should not enforce that through the planning system.

I want to devote my remarks to the rural dimension. As chairman of the Labour rural group of MPs—I followed my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley)—I know that we must recognise the importance of the rural dimension. We must face up to the fact that there is a crisis in housing provision in rural areas. We must do something about it and learn how to move matters forward quickly. With that in mind, the rural group held a recent seminar at which virtually all the main players in the delivery of rural housing were present, including the Countryside Alliance. Those present were able to display the degree of consensus that exists. They emphasised the importance of planning to the system; along with transport, planning is undoubtedly the major issue in terms of changing rural life for the better. The belief was expressed that parish and town councils have an important part to play, that there is a need to streamline the decision-making process, that we must get more low-cost housing into our villages and market towns, and that we need to recognise the interrelationship of urban and rural areas. However, the difference is that planning in rural areas requires greater sensitivity and a recognition of the scale of the changes. It was also noted that there is much good practice, but that, unfortunately, a lot of it is not being disseminated throughout the system, so something must be done to improve matters. It is in those terms that I shall consider this Bill: does it move forward the rural debate, and, if so, how will that be achieved?

Urban and rural areas have much in common. Pleasingly, we have a rural agenda, but we need to consider how to bring about brownfield development and the delivery of sequential tests in rural Britain, just as they must be delivered in urban Britain. In the time remaining, I shall briefly consider the Bill's provisions and how they can be delivered in the rural domain.

I start with the debate about counties and regions. I may not come to bury counties, but I certainly do not come to revive them. There is much to be said for unitary government, which makes sense if we are to form regional assemblies in due course. We already have the economic drive of the RDAs, and that must be enforced through the planning system. We should be honest and open and say that it makes a lot of sense to assimilate policies on minerals and waste to the regional dimension.

Peter Bradley: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the things that attracted people to vote for the establishment of unitary authorities, such as the Telford

and Wrekin authority in my constituency, was the fact that such authorities would be closer to the community and more responsive in their decision-making processes? By the same token, people felt that shire hall was far too remote from their interests.

Mr. Drew: That is the point. We are trying to keep in place archaic institutions that bear little resemblance to what people want in local democracy. Structure plans are a thing of the past. The hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) is sitting on the Opposition Front Bench, and he will know that we in Gloucestershire have not had much success with structure plans. The last one had to be rewritten by the inspector because what it proposed was so bad. That is our experience locally, and other areas may have gone through something similar.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my constituency neighbour for giving way. Does he think that the people of Stroud will consider the planning process more or less democratic, given that under the Bill a regional body in Bristol, Taunton or Exeter will determine the regional spatial strategy? That will inform what has to be put into the local development framework plan prepared by his local authority.

Mr. Drew: I was going to say that I believe that we must make the process more democratic. I am interested not in a top-down process, but in a bottom-up one. There will be evolution, but it must allow public participation. As I shall make clear, the emphasis should be placed on parish and town councils.

Mr. Truswell: Does my hon. Friend agree that an important part of the democratic deficit is not so much the removal of county council involvement but the fact that communities and individuals do not have the right to challenge strategic plans at that level?

Mr. Drew: If my hon. Friend is referring to third party rights of appeal, I am at one with him. A weakness of the Bill is that the Government have not grasped the nettle and taken the opportunity to introduce a proper framework for third party appeals.

Town councils and, in rural areas, parish councils have a crucial role to play in public participation. Giving them greater capacity will mean that they will have the chance to plan how they want their communities to develop. Responsibility will follow if we are able to give them the necessary powers, and I look forward to doing that with this Bill.

My hon. Friend the Member for Pudsey (Mr. Truswell) spoke about third party rights of appeal. I should like such rights to be enshrined in the Bill. In that respect, I disagree with the Government. There would have to be clear checks and balances on the operation of such appeals, but the Labour party embraced the proposal for years in opposition. We supported its inherent fairness and justice, and it is sad that certain people have been able to persuade a Labour Government not to adopt. We should resist that persuasion and do the decent thing. We should see how the planning system could be made fairer by allowing people who feel that they have been treated unfairly by it a right to put across their point of view.

I very much welcome the fact that repeat applications will not be allowed, and the reduction, from five years to three, in the period for which a planning permission remains valid. I am concerned about how the permitted development rights will operate. I hope that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary will say something about that. If we are to give local authorities more powers according to those rights, I want to know exactly how they will operate. Let me also say to my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe that I am not sure how the business planning zones will work. I am not sure that they are not a gimmick rather than a measure that could make a real difference.

As important as the Bill will be the tremendous funding boost. We all accept that the main problem is a failure to change the mindset of those involved in the planning process owing to underfunding, which may lead to a lack of planning officers or, indeed, stymie people dealing with applications. I hope that using the new funds appropriately will lead to what my hon. Friend described as a step change.

I am still not sure what will emerge from the changes in the section 106 agreements, and I think that in Committee we must tease out ways of improving the situation. I agree with the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) that there are ways in which it could be seen as a form of corruption. We should also think carefully about poverty and social exclusion. I hope that in Committee we can make clear how the less privileged can have better access to the planning process.

8.56 pm

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Let me begin with an apology. As you know, Mr. Deputy Speaker, my hon. Friend the Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and I could not hear the opening speeches because we were in the Standing Committee considering the Communications Bill. Not least for that reason, I shall be brief. I shall also try to confine myself to personal observations arising from my involvement in planning, as they are unlikely to duplicate what has already been said and are relevant to one of the main issues.

There is clearly a theoretical argument to be had about the desirability of regional spatial strategies supplanting the county structure plan as a mechanism for securing strategic planning, but in this context I would prefer not to deal with the theory. We can discuss elsewhere the likelihood or otherwise of the establishment of regional assemblies. I think their establishment extremely unlikely in the east of England, certainly, and I therefore believe that the current democratic deficit and lack of accountability in regional planning is likely to persist for a long time. What is more relevant to this Bill, however—as opposed to the Regional Assemblies (Preparation) Bill—is the question of whether regional spatial strategies will deliver, in practice, speedier and more effective plans. I do not think that they will.

During the last few years, I have participated in public examination of RPG6 relating to East Anglia. Last month, I spent three days taking part in a public examination of the Cambridgeshire structure plan, which is pursuant to RPG6. One of the perversities of

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the present situation is demonstrated by what was happening during the four weeks in which I—along with many others—considered the plan. The East of England local government conference, which for our present purposes is the planning body, is moving towards the establishment of RPG14, which it thinks may well be one of the first regional spatial strategies produced under the new legislation. During our consideration, the conference produced a document purporting to be a pre-consultation draft document relating to that regional spatial strategy for the east of England—which was quite separate from the preceding RPG6, although intended to carry forward some of its principles. On the face of it, the consultation draft for the regional spatial strategy was not seeking to cut across the county structure plan, which will set the framework for Cambridgeshire for the next 14 years. It said that the sub-regional strategy for the Cambridge sub-region would be as reflected in RPG6 and as determined in the county structure plan. Even the regional spatial strategy is more or less saying that the county structure plan is the right place for that to happen. Of course, that plan will not be there in the future.

At the same moment, the regional spatial strategy was contemplating scenarios that cut across all that. For example, the local government conference had gone to consultants based in Birmingham—it must have been somewhere outside the region as they did not seem to know much about Cambridgeshire—in order to produce scenarios on how large numbers of new houses could be accommodated in the east of England. One of those scenarios was for a large new settlement on the scale of Milton Keynes. One of the areas of search identified for that was south of Cambridge and in my constituency. People in my constituency, including me, might well conclude that the regional spatial strategy did not understand the nature of what was already happening in terms of a sub-regional strategy for the Cambridge area. At the same time, South Cambridgeshire, which is the district authority responsible for that area, did not even have a representative on the regional planning conference. The distance between those who are affected by this major issue and the body concerned is so enormous as to make it quite unreasonable.

One of the principal arguments behind the proposal for a large new city is the proposition that there should be east-west rail links and that Norwich, Cambridge, Bedford, Milton Keynes and Oxford should all be linked. Fine, let them all be linked, but the Strategic Rail Authority is pretty clear that the line will not travel along that route and will not go anywhere near the area of search. The pieces of the jigsaw are not being linked together. The regional planning body is transparently so divorced from understanding the nature of how these issues interact in the Cambridge sub-region that it is difficult to see how the regional spatial strategy will ever be anything more than a process by which all the strategies—the waste strategy, the transport strategy, the cultural strategy and the economic strategy—are reflected in the document, with the balances, in practice, being struck somewhere else.

The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) said that this is a dynamic process and that we have to think about how it all works. I agree that it is a dynamic process. Conservative Members are not simply saying that county structure plans are the be-all and end-all because, clearly, there will be sub-regional strategies, such as the one around Cambridge, that ought to include contributions from other local authorities such as Essex, Hertfordshire and even Bedfordshire and Suffolk. All those authorities can be involved. The idea that it will be done by the regional spatial strategy is utterly misleading. It is clear that, in practice, it would be better to work on a reform that is geared to the development of county structure plans in a manner that is able to take account of cross-border issues and to link related strategies. That would be better than trying to work through the regional spatial strategy, the effect of which would be to create a bureaucratic process that would be divorced from reality, subsequent to which sub-regional documents would have to be drawn up that, perhaps on different boundaries, would be akin to county structure plans in the manner in which they tried to integrate the various strategies.

9.4 pm

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): I welcome this long overdue reform of the planning system. Before entering the House, I spent years as an adviser to some major developers, advising on their community relations and promoting some significant schemes up and down the country. My job was to help them to ensure that communities were consulted and that, as far as possible, their support for major schemes was secured. I know that the most important issue for the developer and the community alike was certainty. Major development drives economic and, to some extent, social progress. However, many schemes that could have made a significant contribution to the local, regional and national economy stalled because, during the prolonged decision-making process, the market changed, the scheme was no longer viable and the developer had to go back to the drawing board.

I welcome any move away from the adversarial approach to planning and development towards a more co-operative system in which the developer, the planning authority, elected members and local communities can together secure certainty. Communities that support a scheme need to know whether it will generate jobs from which they can benefit. If they oppose a scheme, they will want to know whether it will have negative impacts—for example, on the value of their homes.

Communities want certainty about how and when decisions will be made and about their right to information—a point made earlier in the debate. They want the right to participate in and inform the decision-making process. I welcome changes that will improve consultation and participation and, in so doing, remove the blight suffered by communities where development is not welcome and accelerate the benefits where it is.

We need to go beyond simply changing the system: we also need to change the culture. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd)—the name of whose constituency set me the double challenge, first of remembering it and, secondly, of being able to

pronounce it; I think that I made a reasonable fist of it—mentioned the survey undertaken by the PPS Group that found that planning officers opposed change and thought that the Bill was unnecessary and unwieldy. I wager that whenever members of any profession are consulted about any change to their working practices they come to the same conclusions. Talented, highly skilled and motivated as many planning officers are, and however committed they are to their communities, they need to change their culture. We need to help them to do that. Planners need to get out more. They need to lift their eyes to a further horizon—whatever that means. When I wrote it in my notes I thought that it was a striking phrase.

Planners should raise their game. Planning should be entrepreneurial as well as regulatory. Too often, we encounter planning as development control that has forgotten that it can play a creative role in our communities. Planners should not merely prevent or control development but look out for opportunities to improve housing provision, generate employment and enhance local services. They should improve the environment as well as conserving it.

Planning is a potent engine for social change. When I was a member—

Mr. Drew: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Peter Bradley: I can give way only briefly as I am anxious that other Members have the chance to speak.

Mr. Drew: There is no better example of the points that my hon. Friend was making than when planners are faced with the redundant barn syndrome. They always want to turn down proposals to develop such buildings instead of seeing them as enabling employment or proper housing in rural areas. Does my hon. Friend agree?

Peter Bradley: Perhaps my hon. Friend will allow me to deal with that point in a moment.

I was about to give an example from my experience as a member of Westminster city council during the heady days of Shirley Porter's regime. The Conservatives on the council certainly understood the importance of planning. In promoting their scandalous and illegitimate homes-for-votes scam, they achieved more through the planning system than they ever did through manipulating housing provision and selling off council flats through the designated sales policy.

Major developments such as Bishopsbridge in Paddington and Westminster hospital, just around the corner in the ward that I represented, did not provide even one unit of social housing, yet such projects could have met acknowledged need in our community. I do not cite those examples to make either a rhetorical or a political point, but there are huge opportunities, especially in commercial centres such as Westminster and the City of London. A force for something that was ultimately unlawful can also be a force for good. We need to return to the concept of planning as a creative engine of social change.

Let me cite another example of my experience as a member of Westminster city council's planning committee. A plausible policy was adopted to resist the development of tall buildings around the royal parks. Most people would accept that that is a very sensible policy, but I think that it is a counsel of despair. We should tell architects that we value sensitive landscape as a precious resource but then challenge them to come up with excellent architecture that will overcome our objections.

We should challenge planners, architects and developers to extend themselves, meet local needs, devise original schemes and design buildings whose architecture we can be proud of and which will be landmarks for years to come. We should not simply say to them, "I'm sorry mate, but don't even bother to put in a planning application for this site because it won't be accepted."

I commend the emphasis in the Bill on the rights, interests, needs and participation of communities. I have concerns about rural development, not because I am against it—far from it. I favour development in and for rural communities. The Government have rightly supported parish councils, and £16 million has already been distributed by the Countryside Agency's vital villages programme to develop parish plans. The Government are committed to sustainability, but my plea is that the planning system must help more and hinder less. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made that point in his intervention.

The biggest complaint that I get from those in the rural part of my constituency—particularly from farmers, as we are urging them to diversify within and beyond agriculture—is that when they go to the planning department with a proposal to develop a redundant farm building or change its use, the planning officer says, "I am sorry; our controls are very strict, so don't waste time and money on a planning application."

Some businesses that started in farm buildings, have succeeded and are now ready to expand, creating jobs and investment to the benefit of the local community, have their plans stalled before they even get off the drawing board. That problem should not be underestimated. We have to encourage planners in rural settings to understand that, yes, the landscape must be protected, but not always at the expense of the people who live in it.

I want to touch on an important flaw in the Government's policy on the provision of housing for rural communities. The sequential test is fine in principle, but, in practice, it drives young people from their villages into market towns or, worse still, into the nearest urban centre. It does not arrest that migration from which rural communities have suffered for decades; it drives people further away.

Earlier today, hon. Members talked about the need for housing needs surveys, and I fully support that principle. Every district council should be required to undertake a housing needs survey, and those surveys may well be supported by the parish council and village community groups because their village needs affordable housing to sustain community life, despite the fact that it has to be built on green fields or in the green belt.

When young people are driven away from their villages—some go through choice and some because they cannot find jobs, but many go because they cannot find affordable housing—the village shop is undermined

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because there are no customers, the school is undermined because there are no children to go to it and the pub begins a downward spiral towards closure. People are not there to use those facilities. If we provide homes and jobs where they are needed, we begin to reverse that process and, incidentally, we reduce the dependence on public and private transport.

My plea is that we look at where housing is needed. Let us not drive people to the nearest market town just because that is where the railway station or the motorway connection is. That has a role to play, and we should stimulate economic development in market towns, but not at the expense of the village communities, where people need to live and often have a right to choose to live.

I am very pleased about the reduction in the life of planning consents from five years to three, and about the bar on repeat applications. We should, however, consider the need to abbreviate the life of planning consents when work has begun on them. That problem is far more widespread than may be recognised, and we need to plug that loophole. We talked about certainty, and people need to know what, if anything, will happen on a site in their neighbourhood. That is an anomaly, and I hope that Ministers have heard the comments of hon. Members and will act to plug that loophole as the Bill progresses.

9.16 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): I apologise to both Front-Bench spokesmen for not being present for the opening speeches because of duties elsewhere in the House, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) mentioned.

Planning is a major issue in my constituency. It has been a running theme in my postbag since I was elected, and it was one of the key themes in the general election in June last year. It is a major issue because of the way in which Fareham has grown over the last 20 to 30 years: what was once strawberry fields and market gardens is now densely populated housing, particularly in the west of the constituency where I live.

When I talk to local people about their planning concerns, they do not focus on somebody's extension or putting dormer windows in roofs. Their concerns focus on the density and scale of housing development in an area that is already densely populated. Many local people were given heart by the words of the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) in introducing the Green Paper just over a year ago, when he said:

"This is a radical change in the way we look at planning. Instead of being led by plans we will be led by people. We want a planning system in which the values of the whole community are allowed to prosper and develop."

He went on to say:

"This is a new community-focused approach. It underlines our commitment to giving people a real voice in deciding the future of where they live".

Those are sentiments that many people in all communities share. People in my community, when asked whom they would prefer to take planning decisions, said that they would prefer county and borough councillors to take those decisions, not regional bodies, and certainly not the Secretary of State.

It appears from the Bill that the voice of local communities will be strong. We have already heard about the requirement for a statement of community involvement. That sends out a powerful signal to people that they should participate in the planning process. In reality, however, I fear that their voice will not be heard fully. Because of the way in which the planning structure has been changed—with the abandonment of county structure plans and the insertion of regional structure plans—their voice will be diminished. In evidence to the Select Committee in relation to the structure of the plans that will be in place, the County Councils Network said:

"The system of Regional Planning Guidance—Structure Plan—Local Plan will be replaced by Regional Spatial Strategy—Sub-regional Plan—Local Development Framework—Action Plan."

Many more layers of plans are being put in place and they will serve to reduce, not strengthen the voice of local people.

The abolition of the county structure plan and the end of a statutory role for county councils in the development of plans is a great loss, as I do not believe that any regional body set up to give guidance on the spatial plans will in any way represent the needs of constituencies such as Fareham. Any regional body in the south-east, whether elected or unelected, will be dominated by the representatives of the large conurbations—places such as Portsmouth, Southampton or Brighton. The voices of people in constituencies such as Fareham will not be heard loudly enough in the regional bodies. However, those voices are heard very loudly in the county council, where Fareham has six councillors to represent local people. The councillors can express people's views and concerns about how planning has developed in Hampshire and how development should take place.

Hampshire county council provides an ideal forum for the creation of its own sub-regional strategies. It met the representatives of local councils recently and identified two needs for sub-regional policies in Hampshire. One was in the south of Hampshire, where Fareham is, and the other was in the north, where the county felt that it could work well within the existing structures with Surrey and with unitary authorities in what was Berkshire. There is a framework for local people to feel involved and for sub-regional strategies centred on existing planning structures.

Mr. Love: I have been listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's contribution, which has focused on the needs of local people. However, does he recognise the regional and, in many cases, national dimension, especially in relation to housing? If we do not build houses, we will have house price inflation and rising homelessness. We have to find a balance that reduces homelessness and house price inflation, but allows people to live in sustainable communities.

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman makes a point that many people raise when talking about housing in the south-east. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) mentioned it. When we build more houses, all that seems to happen is that more people migrate from the north-east, where I came from, and the north-west to the south. That is not sustainable. Rather than sucking economic development and prosperity out

of those regions and into the south-east, we should try to ensure that those regions prosper. By continuing to predict housing growth over the next 10 to 15 years, we will create a situation in which more people will come to the south-east and more houses will need to be built. Because the prosperity is in the south-east, more people will still want to move here.

I have yet to be convinced that regional guidance, housing targets and housing development work. They do not take sufficiently into account the needs of local communities.If we place more emphasis on regional planning, the housing development that the regional planning bodies believe is needed will be pushed into the areas that are not well represented on them.

Compulsory purchase is another aspect of the Bill, and I wish to raise an issue that relates to my constituency. I refer to the way in which land for compulsory purchase is valued. There is a ransom strip in my constituency that is holding up a major road that could improve the lives of many people in the area. That land is not currently scheduled for development, but its owners have said that, if it is subject to a compulsory purchase order, they will fight to make sure that the land value that they receive reflects not its current worth as agricultural land but what it might be worth if it is used for development. The Government need to introduce more certainty into how land values are calculated for compulsory purchase orders, so that they can prevent landowners from holding communities to ransom by extracting too high a price for their land even if it is not scheduled for development. I am disappointed that the Bill does not move the system any closer to clarifying how we should value that land.

The right hon. Member for Tyneside, North said that we needed to give people a real voice in deciding the future of where they live. The proposals in the Bill will diminish the voices of local communities in deciding their future. It is right that we should oppose it.

9.24 pm

Mr. Paul Truswell (Pudsey): I shall truncate my comments drastically, having been robbed of time by my colleagues, and try not to impinge too much on the time left for Front-Bench spokesmen.

When I first read the Bill, I tried to put myself in the position of my constituents who are interested in and affected by planning matters. I asked myself a few simple questions. First, is the process in the Bill more intelligible than the present system? The answer is probably that it is just as impenetrable unless there is a determined effort to achieve the contrary. Secondly, does it give my constituents further rights to assert their interests? Again, probably not. Thirdly, does it improve their ability to challenge planning applications and permissions that they believe will damage their communities? The answer to that is a firm no.

I regret the absence of even an attempt to provide a qualified third party right of appeal. However, it is interesting to hear the Conservative party's sudden conversion to that when it did not lift a finger to do anything about it in its 18 years in government. I welcomed the comments of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles). They seemed to be an unequivocal apology for the planning system that his Government inflicted on communities, like those that I serve in Leeds.

Unless drastic changes are made to the planning process, I regret that it may continue to exist in its present form. The problem is that it militates against public involvement, as does the impenetrable jargon, which we could refer to as planning-speak. Perhaps planners and Ministers should be encouraged to take courses run by the Plain English Campaign or involve that excellent organisation when they draw up documents. I am sure that Chrissie Maher and her colleagues would receive that challenge with some relish and, I have to say, planners deserve it.

My fear about the local development scheme is that it replaces the maze of the unitary development plan with a labyrinth of various documents. It will take a real Theseus, or his female equivalent, to find his way in or out of the labyrinth, with or without a ball of twine. Several references have been made to the simplicity of the Welsh model, and Ministers should take that on board.

On the statements of community involvement, will the Secretary of State lay down minimum standards or will it be a moveable feast? Can Ministers be more specific about what they want the SCIs to include as a minimum? Part of the problem is that SCIs will be drawn up in conjunction with the rest of the documents in the local development scheme. Although it does not exactly put the cart before the horse, it does put the horse in the cart. If we are talking about generating true, real and dynamic community involvement, surely we need to set the ground rules at the outset rather than as part of the overall process. There is a lovely juxtaposition in subsections (3) and (4) of clause 18. They say:

> "In preparing the other local development documents the authority must also comply with their statement of community involvement . . .
>
> But subsection (3) does not apply at any time before the authority have adopted their statement of community involvement."

That demonstrates my point.

It also appears that the SCIs do not have a clear status. That indeterminate status means that they will not have the same force as the development plan. Instead, they will be seen very much as guidance. Part of the problem with that is that guidance is much easier to circumvent than something that is laid down in the development plan.

I have other concerns, which I shall list quickly. I agree with many of the comments on local development orders, statements of development principles and simplified planning zones. Each of those, in their own way, appears to militate against community involvement in, and understanding of, planning processes.

I shall use the short time left to concentrate on the third party right of appeal. It is clearly unsustainable to argue that local authorities are always right when they grant planning permission, but sometimes wrong when they do not. In the past, Ministers have said that it is difficult to define applications where a right of appeal may operate. What about local authorities giving themselves planning permission? What about permission being granted for a clear departure from a structure plan? What about where an environmental impact assessment is required as part of the process? The

[Mr. Paul Truswell]

need for a right of appeal in such cases is clear enough—I do not buy the argument that it is difficult to define exactly where a qualified right of appeal may exist.

It is simply not enough to suggest that people have redress through a judicial review, as that is expensive and tests only the process, not a decision. I appreciate that much of what I am concentrating on in the few remaining moments is negative, but I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister accepts that that is born from the frustration of grappling with the planning system on behalf of my constituents for over 20 years and the disappointment that, on the face of it, the Bill does little to make that task easier. However, I still live in hope. We must ensure that the process is engaging and properly publicised. It is important to the public and their need to become involved is crucial. The planning process must have a welcome mat at the door, rather than the combination lock or guard dogs that are sometimes there. If, through regulation or guidance, Ministers can reinvigorate the planning process so that community involvement is a fact rather than something achieved in passing, they still stand a chance of bringing a smile to my face.

9.31 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful for the chance to participate in this important debate on whether the House agrees the Bill's Second Reading.

This has been a good-tempered debate. Even if attendance in the House is rather thin at the moment, it is worth putting on the record the fact that this will be the last Tuesday on which we will have 10 o'clock vote. Let us hope that modernisation produces a better attendance in the Chamber, as that will be to everyone's advantage. I congratulate, in no particular order, my hon. Friends the Members for Chipping Barnet (Sir S. Chapman), for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley), for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) and for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) on their excellent speeches and pertinent comments.

Much has been said about the Bill, and it is worth looking at what outside bodies have said about it. For example, the Council for the Protection of Rural England said:

"This is an unacceptable and unworkable centralisation of strategic planning. The Government wants to take powers from elected county councils and unitary authorities for itself and for remote, unelected regional bodies."

The Law Society believes

"that this Bill is a missed opportunity to improve the efficiency of the land use planning system to deliver quicker decision making while preserving the rights and ability of individual members of the public to contribute to that process."

The CBI says:

"As the bill stands we don't believe that these proposals will produce a system that better serves the needs of the economy and society."

Even Friends of the Earth says:

"The planning system cannot survive an ill-considered reform package which fails to deal with the central issue of fairness and equity. The planning system must have simplicity of structure, and clarity of purpose reflected in comprehensive policy."

Andrew Bennett: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Certainly, in a second, because the hon. Gentleman gave way to me.

It is a remarkable achievement that bodies as diverse as the CBI and Friends of the Earth can condemn the Bill. It is remarkable that the Government have been able to introduce it under those circumstances.

Andrew Bennett: With which of the criticisms that the hon. Gentleman cited does he agree?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I agree with all of them, otherwise I would not have cited them. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's contribution because, under his chairmanship, the Select Committee did the House a huge service in taking a huge amount of evidence. However, reading his speech, in parenthesis he appears to say that there is nothing wrong with the present planning system that could not be cured by a little amendment.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe was right: why dismantle the entire present planning structure and architecture, and replace it with something that is unproven and which, as all those outside bodies said, at best will be much more lengthy, and at worst may not work? We must consider carefully what the Bill will bring about. There is no doubt that it will introduce more complexity, more delay, less democratic accountability and more centralised direction. I shall enlarge on all those themes in due course.

A number of hon. Members said that the system is not at fault; it needs to be administered by proper professional officers. I declare my interest as a fellow of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. I know that planning officers, many of whom are in my profession, think that they are undervalued. They certainly think that they are underpaid, compared with the private sector. Until we value them and pay them properly, we will not get planning officers of calibre, whom we will certainly need under the new, more complex system introduced by the Bill.

The Bill introduces the regional planning body and the regional spatial strategies. The Secretary of State will have huge powers over those new unelected regional bodies. He will have to nominate a regional body long before any elected regional assembly comes about, if that ever happens. The Bill centralises the planning system into the hands of the Secretary of State, and huge powers he has. The Local Government Association says of the regional planning body:

"The Secretary of State can decide if an examination in public into a draft RSS"—

that is, regional spatial strategy—

"is required and appoint an inspector who will report their findings to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State has additional powers to direct an RPB"—

that is, regional planning body—

"to prepare a draft revision of the RSS. Where the RPB fails to act in accordance with such a direction, the Secretary of State may prepare a draft revision or revoke all or parts of an RSS. The Secretary of State has powers to remove recognition from the RPBs and prepare his own RSS for a region."

If that is not a more complicated and more centralising system, I do not know what is, but it does not end there.

Not only does the Secretary of State have huge powers to prepare the regional spatial strategy and supervise it; the regional spatial strategy can then inform and dictate the local development framework and document. By that mechanism the Secretary of State is aggregating to himself huge centralising powers under the Bill.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Henry VIII.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: What the Secretary of State does not aggregate to himself through the Bill, he aggregates to himself through order-making powers, as my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir P. Cormack) made clear.

Mr. Edward Davey: I agree with the point made by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), but can he tell the House how centralisation under the Bill differs from the centralisation that the Conservatives bequeathed to the country?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman has not been listening, or he is deaf, or he is incapable of understanding. I have just read that out to him. I shall give him a little advice. Before he goes into Committee, he had better go through the Bill with somebody who knows what it is all about, then he might understand it a little better. He had better do a bit of boning up.

There are many aspects of the Bill that I want to cover in the short time available. Apart from the powers over the regional spatial strategy and local development documents, the Secretary of State has powers to order joint development documents to be prepared. He has powers of correction of errors. That is an appalling principle to introduce into a Bill. The power of correction of errors allows for sloppy decision making and drafting. Under the old system, if the Secretary of State or any civil servant got a document wrong, it went to the court. That is the system that we ought to adopt. If the House allows for the correction of errors in primary legislation, we are going down a very slippery slope.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Will my hon. Friend tell the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) that where we aspired to be Henry VII, the Labour Government have exceeded Henry VIII?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: It is an unfortunate trend, as my hon. Friend says, that every piece of legislation brought in by the Government introduces yet more and yet wider order-making powers into primary legislation. The House is adopting a very bad principle, and we are adopting it with a vengeance in the Bill tonight.

One could say a lot of things about the Bill. I am very sceptical about the community involvement that it introduces. It is all very well having a statement of community involvement at the level of the local development framework, but there is no such statement at the regional spatial strategy level. Of course, the regional spatial strategy element will dictate to every local authority what it is to put in its local plan. I am very sceptical about that. In Committee, I shall table an amendment seeking to ensure that the regional spatial planning body has some form of community involvement.

Some very good speeches have been made, and not only from the Opposition Benches. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) spoke very cogently about the system that operates in Wales. I submit to the Minister, as a constructive point, my belief that the system that the Bill introduces in Wales is much simpler than that which it introduces in England. I cannot understand why one Bill introduces two systems, one of which is much better than the other.

Like other hon. Members, I should like to comment on simplified planning zones. As I said in an intervention, the concept of such zones has been around since the introduction of the Planning and Compensation Act 1991. I told the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) that only 20 such zones had been designated since that Act took effect, but I was wrong. In fact, only 10 have been designated. I must tell him that if the environmental impact statement in the Bill is applied to such zones, there will probably be even fewer in future, as the hurdle will be so high that it will be very difficult for anyone to overcome it. We will need in Committee to consider very carefully the powers that apply in relation to the zones.

The Opposition can welcome some parts of the Bill. I welcome the streamlining on listed buildings and conservation areas, some of the powers for dealing with simultaneous applications and the speeding up of the decision process with regard to the provision of eight weeks within which a local authority must determine a decision. If it does not do so, the applicant can appeal and the matter can go to the Secretary of State for determination.

As the hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe—

Mr. Betts *rose—*

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I was just coming to the hon. Gentleman, so I shall briefly comment on his speech.

One of the most cogent things that he said was that what is wrong with the current planning system is the time that it takes to draw up the local development and structural plans. In his case, as there is a unitary authority, there will be a unitary development plan. He was absolutely right about that problem, although it could be put right within the current system. I welcome some of the powers in the Bill to streamline and speed up some of the planning process. Without a proper plan, it is very difficult for local planning officers to make the correct decisions.

Mr. Betts: Having listened earlier to the arguments of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) about the need for significant reform of the planning system, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to explain to the House precisely what the great reforms that the Opposition would like to see amount to, as his hon. Friend did not do so?

Mr. Clifton-Brown: We would certainly take out of the Bill altogether the whole section relating to regional spatial strategies. We do not believe in regional assemblies, which are a denigration of democracy and take power away from local people. We want the decision-making process to be taken as close to local people as possible. The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy gave the game away: in the past 20 years, 120 Bills have been introduced that have taken powers away from local authorities. We want local authorities to be more accountable and want the Bill to make the planning process faster, more accountable and based on good decisions. We want local people to feel that they have some ownership of the Bill and we want the democratic deficit to be rectified. We want people to have a stake in their planning process. The hon. Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe gave the game away by saying that local people could look at their local unitary plan, but under the new system they will have to go to Leeds, York, Bradford or somewhere else to do so. How will his local people like that?

When Labour Members were challenged, their concerns emerged. The hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) did not want his local plan to be dealt with somewhere in Berkshire and the hon. Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) did not want his plan to be dealt with somewhere in Exeter. I put it to the Government that the whole regional strategy will fail and the Bill will be a mess, because if the regional strategy fails, regional planning will be in the hands of unelected officials. How can they be accountable to local people? Local people will feel alienated from the process, and the turnout at local elections will further decrease.

If the Government want to introduce a system that is fairer and more accountable, they must put more power in the hands of local authorities—even the few that are left. They must not concentrate power in the hands of the Secretary of State, but ensure that people can understand what is going on in their local planning system. The Bill will do exactly the opposite.

9.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): May I simply say to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that I hope the volume is turned down somewhat in Committee, otherwise we shall be concerned about his health?

Let me start with some of the basic facts that stand behind the debate. Cascading a policy change through the current hierarchy can take well over a decade. The unitary development plan regime was introduced in 1990, and there are still any number of local authorities without a plan under that system. I am afraid that less than 10 per cent. of local authorities meet all the performance targets for handling planning applications.

One theme that ran through much of what hon. Members have said this evening is absolutely right, and I said it this morning in the Select Committee: we must achieve, hopefully on a non-partisan basis, a balance between the development control framework and land use policy that the country needs, and the mixture of the concerns about economic development and sustainable communities and the very real concerns that exist in communities that, after all, have to live with the consequences of the planning system.

We have made it clear elsewhere and I emphasise that the Bill is part of the planning reform agenda. However, it is not the entire agenda. As my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear, we have a huge agenda to deliver "sustainable communities"—that is everybody's phrase, not just the Liberal Democrats', although they hijack everything that moves. A reformed planning system must be a key part of our strategy for sustainable communities, and the Bill is part of it.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. McNulty: No. *[Interruption.]* Let me say purely and simply that my hon. Friend has just got here. He has not been here for the entire day and it is not entirely courteous to seek to intervene in those circumstances.

My hon. Friends the Members for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett) and for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) spoke at length about welcoming the planning and development grant and about seeking to engage all the professional bodies in order to "skill up", as the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Sir Sydney Chapman) said, the professions in the area. They also spoke about seeking to change entirely the planning culture. We are working closely with the Royal Town Planning Institute, the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors and a range of other bodies to do precisely that, above and beyond simply the planning development grant.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I accept all that the Minister has said and I welcome what he said in that respect, but does he appreciate that the extra resources must go to the planning authorities to allow them to improve their performance, and that therefore the money must be given up front, rather than as a reward if they manage to meet certain targets? It is a very important point.

Mr. McNulty: As the hon. Gentleman will discover when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister makes his communities plan statement in January, the full details will not be a million miles away from what the hon. Gentleman suggests.

As I said, the Liberal Democrats seek to hijack everything, but it is historical revisionism writ large to compare some tiddly little 1907 town planning Act—

Mr. Edward Davey: It is 1909.

Mr. McNulty: I apologise. The Housing, Town Planning etc. Act 1909 cannot be compared with the glory that is the Town and Country Planning Act 1947. As the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles) said, that Act was part of a broad, cross-party post-war consensus.

My hon. Friend the Member for Denton and Reddish seemed to assume that, this morning, when we were in the Select Committee, I said that every single aspect of secondary legislation would be published in draft before the Bill even goes into Committee. If I did, it was an error on my part. As I have said, we shall try to ensure that as much as possible is published as the Committee unfolds and as the Bill proceeds through both Houses, but absolutely not before the Committee's first sitting.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) made a thoughtful contribution on the Bill's rural dimension and some useful points about the supposed sanctity of county structure plans. I also accept his point that local development orders can be explored further.

The hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) made some interesting points about the Welsh dimension and elements of the Irish planning system's gateway process, about which I know. Although it is not as rosy-tinted as he suggests, it is worth exploring.

Devolution, with which we have no problem, is the reason for the Welsh differences. I almost believed that the hon. Member for Cotswold wanted to get rid of county councils tomorrow because of his great appreciation of the Welsh system, which is rooted in an all-unitary local government structure. It is therefore far easier to apply the spatial strategy there.

My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright), like others, welcomed the changes to the original suggestions for major infrastructure projects and the compulsory purchase order processes.

As a near neighbour, I respect the expertise of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, who made a thoughtful and reflective speech, which was nevertheless often wrong in emphasis. We will not yet have to change the thrust of section 106 because we shall do that in the new year via a circular rather than through the Bill.

I know that the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) has a range of interests in the subject because we had a delightful Adjournment debate on various aspects of the Cambridgeshire green belt. I hope that we can explore that far more in Committee.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) delivered an excellent treatise on the substantive logic behind the shift from counties up to regions and down to localities.

I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) that there is no automatic right to extensive planning permissions after extant consents run out. I will watch with interest as people develop the notion of planning watch wardens running around doing the job of enforcement officers. Perhaps the idea should be explored.

I would be remiss if I did not at least comment on the Loyal Opposition's amendment, especially some of the remarks of the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar, who opened the debate on their behalf. He described my hon. Friend the Minister's opening comments as an ODPM Christmas carol; the amendment resembles a bad Christmas record such as "Mistletoe and Wine".

The amendment suggests that the Bill

"fails to set out a planning framework",

when that is precisely what it does. It continues by claiming that

"it introduces the concept of regional spatial strategies".

The Bill does not do that. The Greater London Authority Act 1999—I had the pleasure of serving on the Committee that considered it for the best part of three months—introduces that concept.

The amendment also claims that the Bill

"creates an unclear mechanism of local development documents, principles, frameworks and strategies".

I point out in passing that much of that has to do with the pleasure of parliamentary counsel. However, the amendment simply refers to a portfolio of specific documents. I do not know how anyone who knows anything about the planning system could make the sort of comments that the hon. Member for Cotswold made.

The amendment gets better when it states that the Bill

"provides for the concept of the correction of errors".

Perhaps the lacuna goes back to 1947, but if the Secretary of State or an inspector in his name currently makes a mistake in a decision letter and writes that 29 Acacia avenue rather than 27 Acacia avenue will be bulldozed, the might of the British state can do nothing about it short of going to court to get the decision changed. The contents of the decision letter prevail in the law, which dates from a long time ago.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Shocking.

Mr. McNulty: That is by the by. To say that the Bill introduces the concept of correcting errors into the planning system is, with the best will in the world, bonkers. Constructing a principled position around that in a winding-up speech does not work.

The amendment goes on to say that the Bill

"abolishes outline planning permission".

It does not.

The amendment also says that the Bill

"fails to clarify the position on planning gains and obligations".

It was never intended to do that. We made it clear before the Bill's publication that that was not going to happen in terms of legislation. We can sort it out in another context.

A range of Opposition Members told us that all this is about Henry VIII rather than Henry VII or whatever else. In an intervention, the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) asked the hon. Member for Cotswold how the Bill gives one extra jot of centralising power to the Secretary of State compared with what prevailed under the 1990 or 1991 position. The answer is that the Bill will give the Secretary of State no additional powers—absolutely none. What prevailed under the RPG-UDP regime will still prevail in terms of RSS-LDF.

We have been told that all this is terribly anti-democratic, but regional planning bodies will be accountable to their regions. Local authority members, who will form the majority, will be accountable to their electorates, but it is right and proper that other representatives should be on the regional planning bodies and accountable to their organisations.

[Mr. McNulty]

Under the current arrangements, RPBs receive funding through contributions from local authorities in their region. Subject to parliamentary approval of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, we shall directly fund the RPBs from April 2003 to the tune of £6 million. We are at least considering whether we can make additional funds available through the planning delivery grant.

To return to what I said to the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet, we fully appreciate that capacity building inside local authorities must be the thrust of the £350 million for the planning delivery grant. What I said about the education programme and everything else that we are trying to do with the Royal Town Planning Institute and the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors goes beyond that. It goes right back to schools and is part of the process of substantive cultural change and the reskilling of what I fully accept has been a denigrated profession over the past 20 years.

With the best will in the world and the greatest respect to architects, it cannot be appropriate that our education system produces one town planner for every 20 architects. That is not exactly what the market needs.

Andrew Mackinlay: I asked the Minister to address clause 34 and the new proposals for the inspector in relation to major infrastructure works. Can we have an assurance that there will be no diminution of the planning inquiry structure and that the appointment of an inspector will not bypass or diminish what is, in practice, well-trodden ground? Will the rights of the individual—the small person—to lodge an objection against the big battalions such as BAA be protected?

Mr. McNulty: I think my hon. Friend will find that he means clause 43 rather than clause 34. He can have that assurance absolutely, and more. The process will be far speedier and far more responsive. Running a series of concurrent inquiries under a team of inspectors rather than under one inspector will make it far more efficient than anything that has gone before.

We were told that there is some sort of conspiracy and that there is something fundamentally wrong with the compulsory purchase order provisions, but this is what will prevail: landowners will get the market value of their property plus the cost of the CPO process plus the new loss payment. They will not get the new loss payment and nothing else.

There are those who suggest that the local authorities somehow corrupt the planning process by utilising it for their own planning permissions. There is a clear position on that, which will remain as it is now: no member of the applicant committee can serve on the planning committee to make such a decision. If the application is outside the existing development plan, it is automatically referred to the Secretary of State rather than there being any debate about it. There is no change at all in terms of the Bill.

There are huge challenges for our planning system, and we on this side of the House are rising to them. I hope that we have a far better discussion in Committee than we are having now. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 184, Noes 321.

Division No. 30] **[9:59 am**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne

Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Jim Murphy

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 62 (Amendment on Second or Third Reading):—

The House divided: Ayes 320, Noes 182.

Division No. 31] **[10:14 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark

Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wood, Mike *(Batley)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Browning, Mrs Angela
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John

Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE BILL (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Orders [28 June 2001 and 29 October 2002],

That the following provisions shall apply to the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill:

Committal

1. The Bill shall be committed to a Standing Committee.

Proceedings in Standing Committee

2. Proceedings in the Standing Committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion on Tuesday 28th January 2003.

3. The Standing Committee shall have leave to sit twice on the first day on which it meets.

Consideration and Third Reading

4. Proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

5. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on the day on which proceedings on consideration are commenced.

6. Sessional Order B (programming committees) made on 28th June 2001 shall not apply to proceedings on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

7. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments or on any further messages from the Lords) may be programmed.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

The House divided: Ayes 353, Noes 142.

Division No. 32] **[10:25 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike

Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dan *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Jim Murphy and
Mr. Nick Ainger

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Curry, rh David
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew

Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Llwyd, Elfyn
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

PLANNING AND COMPULSORY PURCHASE BILL *[MONEY]*

Queen's recommendation having been signified—

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, it is expedient to authorise—

(1) the payment out of money provided by Parliament of—

(a) any expenses of the Secretary of State in making grants in connection with the provision of advice in relation to the planning Acts; and

(b) any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment;

(2) the payment into the Consolidated Fund of any increase attributable to the Act in the sums so payable under any other enactment.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

The House divided: Ayes 329, Noes 130.

Division No. 33] **[10:40 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davis, rh Terry *(B'ham Hodge H)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hancock, Mike
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*

Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Mole, Chris
Moran, Margaret
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, [illegible] *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gar[illegible] *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and
Mr. Jim Murphy

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen

Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hartford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Swayne, Desmond
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Mark Hoban and Mrs. Cheryl Gillan

Question accordingly agreed to.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With permission, I shall put together the remaining motions.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118(6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

Local Government Finance

That the Local Government Finance (England) Special Grant Report (No. 109) (HC15) on Special Grant for addressing the costs of EC Regulation 2037/00 on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer (Disposal of Refrigeration Equipment) 2002, a copy of which was laid before this House on 14th November, be approved.

Northern Ireland

That the draft Marriage (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, which was laid before this House on 4th December, be approved.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Natural Health Products

10.52 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): I rise to present the petition of Mrs. Angela Norman, who trades in Lymington under the name of the Sweet Joe Pye. Her petition is concerned that EU directives on herbal products will remove people's freedom to treat themselves with a range of traditional vitamins, mineral supplements and herbal medicines by driving a range of products from the market.

The petition states:

The petitioner therefore requests that this honourable House requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the Table.

Palestine

10.53 pm

Mr. David Lepper (Brighton, Pavilion): I rise to present the petition of the Brighton and Hove branch of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, which includes nearly 400 signatures, including my own.

The petition

Declares that since the beginning of the second Intifada, 2000 Palestinians have been killed and some tens of thousands injured as a result of Israeli armed forces' and settlers' indiscriminate and excessive use of lethal force; that the UK continues to trade arms with Israel despite Israel's appalling human rights record, its grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and its ongoing occupation and settler-colonization of Palestinian lands; that there are also widespread concerns that British-made equipment is being used against Palestinian civilians, in defiance of UK export criteria; that under article 2 of the Euro-Israel Association Agreement, the EU has the right to invoke sanctions against states with poor human rights records; and that Early Day Motion 1140 has called for an immediate embargo on British arms exports to Israel.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to invoke article 2 of the Euro-Israel Association Agreement and impose an immediate embargo on British arms exports to Israel, to be maintained until Israel ends its illegal occupation and respects all UN resolutions.

To lie upon the Table.

Employers Liability Insurance

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

10.55 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I am grateful for the opportunity of an Adjournment debate on employers liability insurance, which I know is a matter of concern to many hon. Members, as evidenced by the all-party support for early-day motion 146, tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare (Brian Cotter).

I know that the Government have responded on the issue. The Chancellor covered it in his autumn statement, and the Department for Work and Pensions has an inquiry under way. A separate inquiry is taking place under the Office of Fair Trading. One could ask why we should have a debate, as the Government have set the ball rolling. I seek a debate for two reasons. First, to the best of my knowledge, the subject has not been properly debated in the House, at least in recent times. It is important to put on record what the issues are and the extent to which it is a problem for many of our constituents.

Secondly, it is important to clarify how the Government intend to handle the investigation that they are conducting, and particularly the overlap between the two inquiries. The Office of Fair Trading is an independent entity; it is not under Government control. It is not clear to me how its work on public liability insurance will overlap with the work on employers liability insurance in the Department for Work and Pensions study, especially as the problems are related. The two types of insurance are often sold as a package by the insurance industry. It is important that we understand how the Government intend that the two inquiries should relate to each other and what end product we can expect from them.

Like many hon. Members who have become interested in the subject through direct constituency experience, I was not aware that there was a problem until about six months ago, when a constituent came to me. She was a very elderly disabled lady, who used to go every lunchtime to the council's lunch club for pensioners, until the ambulance arrived one day and the driver said that he was under strict instructions not to help her into the ambulance. I wrote an indignant letter to the local council and was told that that was indeed correct. The council was nervous about its insurance policy and the rising cost of insurance, and could not take the risk of its employees suffering back strain by helping a disabled person in those circumstances. I was asked to understand that the insurance issue was technically difficult and that the council had to respect the conditions.

There are many more extensive problems of that kind. Many small businesses, particularly in the building industry, outdoor pursuits and care homes, face escalating insurance claims. The issue also affects the voluntary sector substantially. Many of us are getting reports that voluntary organisations that run ambulance services face subst[illegible] employer liability or public liability claim[illegible] Boy Scouts and Girl Guides have had a big increase in insurance costs for the same reason. To what extent will the voluntary sector be covered by the inquiry that the Minister's Department is undertaking or does he envisage it being concerned purely with business narrowly defined?

The seriousness of the problem is best illustrated not by anecdote, but by some of the figures that are beginning to emerge from the industry. As far as I can establish, there has been an average increase of 30 to 50 per cent. in the cost of insurance over the past year, but some individual companies face increases of 500 per cent., and in some extreme cases, 800 per cent. On average, the increase is substantial—perhaps 30 to 50 per cent.

More serious even than that are the widespread cases, which are now well documented, of large numbers of companies that cannot obtain insurance at all or try to manage without, which is potentially disastrous for their employees and the wider public. The British Chambers of Commerce carried out a survey that suggested that 9 per cent. of manufacturing companies are not covered by employers liability insurance, although that is a statutory requirement, and that 6 per cent. of all businesses are not covered. A separate study commissioned by the insurance company AXA suggested that about 13 per cent. of all small businesses—210,000 businesses with 1.8 million employees—are not properly covered by employers liability insurance as the law requires.

Brian Cotter (Weston-super-Mare): Does my hon. Friend agree that, because people not having cover is so serious, the Minister should say that the current inquiry is urgent and will be brought to a conclusion sooner, rather than later?

Dr. Cable: I hope that the Minister will do so. My understanding is that the report will take three months to produce. No doubt, we will be given some confirmation about the schedule and how it relates to the timetable of the OFT inquiry.

The issue on which we need to make a little progress is why the problem has arisen. Different reasons have been advanced, some of which are self-serving for the interested parties. While reading the literature about the issue, I sensed that a blame culture is developing. The unions tend to blame business for not looking after health and safety, business blames the insurers for ripping it off, the insurers blame the lawyers for their high costs and the lawyers blame us for legislating. There is a tendency to pass the buck back and forth in deciding who is responsible. Without trying to ascribe blame, it is clear that several different factors are involved. It is probably useful to itemise them and ask whether the Minister will conduct as part of the inquiry an analytical study of what is driving this big problem in the insurance market.

First, the rise of premiums in the wake of international terrorism has affected the reinsurance market and those effects have percolated down into insurance costs generally. A second factor is the collapse of independent insurance, which dealt with the high-risk end of employers liability insurance and accounted for a lot of business. That has clearly affected the rest of the market.

There is a third factor that I do not fully understand and which the Minister might help to explain. For some years in the 1990s, the insurance industry under-priced

[Dr. Cable]

insurance and it now appears to be trying to catch up. Various theories have been advanced about that. One refers to ferocious competition in the 1990s and another to the systematic under-pricing of products as a loss leader to attract other forms of insurance. It is not clear what happened, but that is one of the explanations given by the industry.

Furthermore, stock exchange collapse meant that companies could no longer part with their premium income as they did in the bull period of the stock market, and another factor was the emergence of new sorts of risk, especially in relation to illnesses associated with occupation. Big asbestos claims were made, and the emergence of new problems such as strain injury also led to claims.

Finally and perhaps most importantly—this is not completely clear—the no win, no fee system of litigation emerged. The industry argues that about 40 per cent. of all claims are now accounted for by legal costs. The adversarial legal system that underlies the system of employers liability insurance may well be driving up costs very substantially.

There are, however, some subsidiary questions that the Government may be able usefully to explore. Has there been a substantial increase in what one might call the compensation culture? The evidence that I have seen is mixed. I think that claims are increasing by about 7 per cent. a year, but one could argue that those channelled through the trade unions have been rising at a fairly stable rate for a very long time and that a change in culture does not explain the sudden jump.

Another factor could be that no win, no claim insurance is seriously distorting the market and encouraging a system resembling the national lottery in which lawyers and their clients go for big payouts because they recognise—this can certainly apply to clients—that they can afford to lose the case. It is producing inequities in the damages and claims market, and it is loaded with lawyers' costs. Thus a whole set of factors is involved, and it would be useful to know the extent to which the Government inquiry will deal with the no win, no claim problem and whether the legal profession lies behind the escalation of claims.

What is the Government's role in all this? I do not fully understand the technicalities, but I believe that the Government set the discount rate through the Lord Chancellor and that that, in turn, determines the level at which damages are awarded in litigation cases. Perhaps the Minister would explain whether the matter constitutes a Government policy issue.

A problem clearly exists. The number of claims is rising by 7 per cent. a year and settlements have increased by some 100 per cent. over five years and a staggering 300 per cent. in a decade. Thus a set of factors is causing massive inflation in litigation costs, which has affected premiums.

In the remaining few minutes, I want to ask the Minister whether the Government will focus on the big policy issues surrounding employers liability insurance, and liability insurance more generally. To what extent is the insurance industry providing value for money? Will the Government study cover that, or will it be left to the Office of Fair Trading? In his early-day motion, my hon. Friend the Member for Weston-super-Mare raised issues about the transparency and consistency of the insurance market, and whether insurance companies give sufficient notice. Clearly, there are problems in the day-to-day functioning of the market, and it would be useful to know whether the Government will analyse them or leave them to the OFT.

Other issues include competition in the insurance market and the packaging of insurance products. Different types of liability are sold simultaneously, making competition more difficult to achieve. Another issue surrounding the operation of the insurance industry is the sharing of information within the industry, and it would be useful to know whether that will be examined. One of the most galling problems for small companies is that they may have a faultless track record and impeccable performance on health and safety and safeguarding their employees, but that is rarely taken into account in establishing premium rates. It would appear that there is nothing comparable to the Co-op insurance market, where good performance is rewarded and bad performance punished. It would be useful for the Government's inquiry to establish whether information sharing between insurance companies could be advanced to make the market work better. In terms of basic insurance principles, it does not appear to work at all.

A second set of questions concerns different types of illness and injury and whether they should be covered by employers liability insurance. A debate is ongoing as to whether it is reasonable and practical to expect the insurance market to cover diseases as well as injuries and the associated occupational illnesses that have arisen from, for example, asbestos, which is the classic case. That presents special problems for the industry, because claims are made many years after employees have worked and insurance was taken out.

I can see that, from the employee's standpoint, it is vital that insurance claims are met, and it is right that they should be. Basic causality suggests that insurance applies, but it presents a separate set of problems and I should be interested to know whether the Government will look at the scope of employers liability insurance, and how they propose to deal with the issue. Will they consider, for example, pooling insurance for diseases as opposed to injuries?

It would be interesting to know whether the Government intend to examine their role in funding. The industry has made various proposals, for example, for the Government to act as an insurer of last resort. They did that, rightly or wrongly, in the case of the foot and mouth epidemic. They have assumed lender-of-last-resort responsibilities in the case of terrorism and, to some extent, in other matters. The industry argues that the model of pool reinsurance, which was used for terrorist insurance, should be used for a wider range of insurance. It suggests not that the Government should subsidise the insurance market but that they should act as an insurer of last resort. It would be useful to know the extent to which the Government are considering that.

The Government's study lasts only three months and so cannot go into the issues too deeply, but has it considered fundamentally new models of handling employment insurance? There is a strong argument for getting away completely from an adversarial system

driven by lawyers' costs and moving to one that provides companies with genuine incentives to take good care of their employees, have good health and safety records, and invest heavily in the rehabilitation of people who have had accidents.

There are models for such an approach. I believe that the German worker compensation scheme is designed so that in the case of accident or disease, payments are awarded according to a basic scale and there is no need for individual litigation. The industry pays a levy that varies according to how individual sectors or even companies have protected themselves against the risk of accident. It would be useful to know the extent to which the Government will undertake such a fundamental examination.

I am grateful for the opportunity to raise those issues and pose questions. I look forward to the Minister's reply.

11.12 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I congratulate the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on securing the debate on a subject of growing importance. Employers liability insurance is an essential safeguard for those in work. It provides a means of compensation for those who are injured or made ill at work through the fault of their employer. That measure is well established and has been on the statute book for more than 30 years. The Employers' Liability (Compulsory Insurance) Act 1969 requires employers to insure those liabilities.

The debate is timely because it follows a period of great difficulty for many employers, as the hon. Gentleman said, in securing the insurance, and within a week of the Government's commencing a significant review of the operation of employers liability insurance. I know that hon. Members will not be disappointed if I do not prejudge the outcome of the review and discuss recommendations that have not yet been formulated.

There are two sorts of workplace compensation in the United Kingdom—employers liability compulsory insurance, which we are discussing, albeit briefly, this evening, and state benefits, principally industrial injuries disability benefit. The first is fault-based and the state system is no-fault-based.

An employee who is injured or contracts a disease or has been made ill through work can apply for state benefits. However, an employee who believes that the condition arises at least in part from the employer's negligence has the right to sue. If successful, the compensation will be paid from the employer's insurer, with the state recovering from the insurer any moneys paid out in benefit.

Employers liability compulsory insurance, which is an essential safeguard, requires employers to insure against such liabilities. It is based on two fundamental principles, which the Government continue to stand by: the right of employees to access to justice and the responsibility of employers to fund the cost of their negligence. In a sense, it is the principle of "polluter pays."

Although it is compulsory for employers to have the insurance, it is not compulsory for insurers to provide it. There is therefore a need to ensure an effective and affordable market. We are part of the way through the renewal year, and it is therefore hard to be precise about the scale of difficulties experienced in the market this year. The hon. Gentleman has reviewed the evidence in his own way.

Industry sources suggest that, on average, employment liability premiums have increased by about 40 per cent. In some sectors, those increases have been much more acute with reported premium increases of several hundred per cent. That has especially affected sectors that have been perceived as having higher health and safety risks, such as the construction industry, and has been felt in particular by small and medium-sized businesses.

The Government have been monitoring the situation and working closely with trade associations and representatives of insurers and brokers. Our experience suggests that the problems have been largely ones of cost of cover rather than complete unavailability, but it is certainly true that for many businesses affordable cover has become much more difficult to find this year.

Much has been said about the number of firms going out of business or trading uninsured. Here, too, the accuracy of figures is difficult to assess. I have seen reports in a survey commissioned by AXA of large numbers of companies trading uninsured, but the scale of those figures, based on the extrapolation of a much smaller survey, contrasts with our own enforcement evidence and information from other stakeholders.

The Health and Safety Executive enforces employers liability compulsory insurance. Traditionally, that has been a small part of the executive's work, because compliance has been high, but it is important to emphasise that employment liability insurance has been cheap in the United Kingdom—about 0.25 per cent. of total payroll compared with 1.5 to 2.5 per cent. for compensation schemes overseas. Indeed, until recently some insurers were selling employment liability insurance as a loss leader—an attractive part of a wider package of other insurance such as motor cover.

The latest Health and Safety Executive figures suggest that compliance remains high. Between April and September this year, its workplace contact officers contacted 4,366 small and medium-sized businesses, but those contacts required statutory action in just 14 cases. The work of the executive's general inspectors resulted in a further 30 such incidents over the same period.

On average, there have been five prosecutions a year for the past five years, and four so far this year. However, a British Insurance Brokers Association survey suggested that several hundred firms had either gone out of business, citing insurance costs as the reason for the company failure, or were trading uninsured. Trade associations have reported similar figures.

While we by no means accept that there has been a general market failure, we are not complacent about the real difficulties faced by business in tough trading conditions; nor are we complacent about compliance. I must be clear: it is totally unacceptable for any firm to trade uninsured. The penalties are high—up to £2,500 a day for failure to insure—but, beyond that, trading in such a manner removes the protection to which employees have a right, throws back the costs of that firm's negligence to the general taxpayer and creates an

[Malcolm Wicks]

illegal commercial advantage over other competitors that have decided to act responsibly—the great majority, of course.

I hope the House agrees that, as we endeavour to work through the problems in the employer liability market, we must also be firm about enforcement of the existing law. Stakeholders have suggested a number of factors that may explain this year's difficulties. The hon. Gentleman also outlined his own analysis. May I outline ours?

The traditionally cyclical insurance market has been "hardening"—a process exacerbated by the consequences of the attacks on the World Trade Centre. That has led insurers to look much more closely at the extent to which claims are being covered by underwriting income. Employment liability has traditionally been written at an underwriting loss. Premium income in 2001 was about £1.1 billion while claims totalled over £1.5 billion. Such losses have been offset by returns from investing the premium income on the stock market, so the sharp downturn in stock market performance has compounded the problem, we believe.

The collapse of two leading insurers in this market has tightened the market and caused those remaining to look hard at the risks of their business. The result has been a sharp transition in premium prices as the market has adjusted from its traditionally cheap basis to one that now bears the commercial cost. That has come with little warning, and consequently there has been little opportunity for businesses to adjust to these new and sharply imposed costs. Insurers and brokers have suggested that this year represents a market correction. They do not expect premium increases to be as acute next year, though conditions will remain tough. We will continue to monitor the situation.

There are no short-term fixes, but this year's difficulties have also served to highlight a number of underlying or longer-term questions about the system. The Government take concerns from stakeholders seriously when we hear them. We want to ensure that our system of workplace compensation is efficient, sustainable and fair. For that reason, the pre-Budget report signalled our intention to review the operation of employers liability insurance. The start of the review and its terms of reference were announced in a statement to the House last week by my right hon. Friend the Minister for Work.

We are working closely with those responsible for the review by the Office of Fair Trading. The two exercises are different. The OFT study will encompass public product liability, professional and employers liability insurance, but it will not examine employer liability in the same depth or consider the same range of issues as our inquiry will. The OFT's work will be wider ranging than our review and will complement it. The OFT has discussed its draft terms of reference with our Department, and will remain in close contact with us and other key Departments.

I understand the point about the voluntary sector. We have already discussed this issue with our colleagues in the Home Office, which is the lead Department for that sector. Our review is about employer liability rather than general public liability, but we take on board the important issue about the voluntary sector.

We need to be careful. The system that we have in place has worked well for many years. It has provided cover for employees and, historically, has not been a burdensome cost on employers. The speed of transition this year has been painful, but UK costs remain competitive with those abroad. Many overseas systems, which are also facing difficulties, are beginning to adopt some of the characteristics of the UK approach. However, as I have emphasised, it is clear that aspects of the present system that have been raised by stakeholders and by the hon. Gentleman are well worth examining. A key question is whether employer liability is commercially sustainable in the longer term.

We also need to examine the extent to which the £2 billion per annum going into workplace compensation actively contributes to effective outcomes. Do those costs give employers the incentive to manage health and safety more effectively? Do insurers discriminate between good and bad performers? Does the compensation that is paid do all that it might properly to rehabilitate those affected back into work, returning them to economic and social activity? Those are all important questions.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): I hope that the review will consider the huge extension of conditional fee agreements. For the first time, lawyers have a big interest in the outcome of litigation.

Malcolm Wicks: We seek evidence from all those with an interest in this matter. We will review all factors that have led to the present situation.

I do not want to draw conclusions on any of these issues now. We have established the review to undertake that task, and Ministers will look hard at its findings when it reports next spring. In the final analysis, the single most sustainable approach is one based on good health and safety. The more effectively employers manage health and safety the fewer claims there will be. That has to be the best outcome for all concerned.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-four minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 18 December 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Retained Firefighters

1. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If he will make a statement on the recruitment of retained firefighters. [86318]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Each fire brigade is responsible for recruiting its own retained firefighters. Our office recognises the vital role taken by retained staff in meeting the needs of many parts of the country and we are working with the fire service actively to encourage people to become retained firefighters. We are considering carefully the recommendations on retained firefighters made by the independent review of the fire service.

Mr. Edwards: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. Does he share my appreciation of the vital role that retained fire officers play in rural areas, although the nature of the retained service is often not fully appreciated by the public, who often do not realise that being a firefighter is a second job for the retained firefighters? Does he agree that, to improve recruitment, we need to give retained fire officers the same hourly rate as the full-time service, the same opportunities for training and the decent pension scheme, which they do not currently have?

Mr. Raynsford: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend about the very important work of retained firefighters. I, too, pay tribute to the contribution that they make towards the safety of the public in many parts of the country.

As my hon. Friend will know, the Bain review recommended a number of important improvements for retained firefighters, including the ones that he has mentioned. We are considering all these matters carefully and a further statement will be made in the White Paper, which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has promised that we will publish early in the new year.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): Given that the Retained Firefighters Union is not on strike and that its members are not being represented at the ACAS negotiations, why is the Minister so confident that the eventual settlement will give the retained firefighters the decent pay deal that they deserve? Does he not share my concern that the Fire Brigades Union has not represented the retained firefighters properly in the negotiations so far? Why is he so confident that the eventual settlement will give them the pay deal that will solve the recruitment crisis in the retained firefighters service?

Mr. Raynsford: As I made clear in my response to my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards), the Bain review sets out a number of very important proposals in relation to retained firefighters. As I have already said, we are very much minded to proceed on the basis of the Bain review and will set out our responses in the White Paper that we will publish. The responses will cover issues of negotiation and the representation of retained firefighters as well as of full-time firefighters. As the hon. Gentleman knows, there are, in effect, two separate unions, one of which represents only retained firefighters. The FBU also represents some retained firefighters and the issues need to be clarified. We will address them in the White Paper.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I welcome my right hon. Friend's appreciation of the value of retained firefighters. However, is it not the case that there are at least 3,000 to 4,000 fewer retained firefighters than are needed to maintain an adequate response time in rural and urban areas? The retained fee works out after tax at about 15p per hour. Should there not be a national recruitment campaign? Do not retained firefighters need more than just warm words?

Mr. Raynsford: Retained firefighters represent just under a third of the total force of firefighters in the country. We wholly share my hon. Friend's concern to ensure more effective recruitment of retained firefighters. We are already engaged in the preparation of publicity material to assist in that process, and we are looking closely at the trials that have been conducted in areas such as south Wales to improve the recruitment of retained firefighters. I assure my hon. Friend and the House that we are very well seized of the importance of helping to recruit more retained firefighters, who do such a crucial job in many parts of the country.

Domestic Violence

2. **Shona McIsaac** (Cleethorpes): If he will make a statement on the supporting people programme for tackling domestic violence. [86319]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): The supporting people programme will bring major improvements to the quality of housing-related support services for vulnerable groups, including people experiencing

domestic violence. Specialist co-ordinators on domestic violence are working closely with local authorities and providers to offer support and raise awareness.

Shona McIsaac: I welcome my hon. Friend's recent announcement of £9 million extra to deal with domestic violence. Will she tell us in more detail what is involved in the projects? Will they impact, for example, on the Grimsby women's refuge, which has only 10 places for women who are victims of domestic violence?

Mrs. Roche: What happened last week was an important announcement. Together with organisations such as Women's Aid and Refuge, and with the backing of Comic Relief, which has made its largest domestic donation, we have given funds so that we have, for the first time, a national helpline for those suffering from domestic violence. As well as that funding, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has given £7 million to help the Housing Corporation fund refuge places. As far as the refuge is concerned, I believe that it covers Cleethorpes and our money will bolster any bid that it may submit to the Housing Corporation. At the end of the process, we will consider the geographic coverage to see what other unmet need there may be.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): Earlier this year, the Opposition were pleased to support a change in the law that gave people who suffer from domestic violence priority in local authority housing. The hon. Lady will know, not least from constituency cases that I have raised with her, that that message has not got through to local authorities, some of which do not seem to have grasped that it involves moving people across local authority boundaries. In a perversion of the Christmas message, domestic violence will almost certainly double this time next week, as it did last Christmas. Notwithstanding a need to issue guidance to local authorities, will she give the clearest message to them, at this crucial time, that accommodating people who suffer from domestic violence sometimes involves them crossing local authority boundaries?

Mrs. Roche: I am happy to do so. I welcome the hon. Gentleman's commitment to the issue. I know that he takes a keen interest in it. Guidance is available on the supporting people programme. He will know that draft guidance on the priority need order has also been made available. The final guidance will be issued once we have analysed the results of the consultation. There is a firm message to local authorities that the subject is a priority and that they must work together. The strongest message we can send out from both sides of the House to perpetrators of domestic violence is that it will not be tolerated.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): Is it not the case, however, that many extremely good organisations already exist to deal with that problem, although they do not concentrate exclusively on the housing needs of women and their families who flee domestic violence? For example, Camden Safety Net in my borough works well across many departments. How will they access the additional support offered in the supporting people programme?

Mrs. Roche: Victims of domestic violence are one category of the supporting people programme. There are other categories for other vulnerable groups. It is interesting to note that, when we analyse the figures nationally of people who present themselves as homeless, 16 per cent. show a connection with domestic violence. The project that my hon. Friend mentions will definitely benefit from the national helpline.

Debt and Financial Exclusion

3. **Mr. Archy Kirkwood** (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): If he will ask the social exclusion unit to conduct a review of debt and financial exclusion. [86320]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): Our approach for a more inclusive society is to address the root causes of poverty and social exclusion. Improving financial inclusion is central to this. Decisions on future unit projects will be made shortly.

Mr. Kirkwood: Will the Minister reconsider the possibility of producing a further report on current levels of debt, especially in low-income households? The evidence shows that their debt is spiralling out of control, and many of those families cannot cope either with the level of indebtedness or the rates of interest that they have to pay at the hands of loan sharks. Will she undertake to carry out a cross-departmental review to help such families to get out of the debt that they are in?

Mrs. Roche: I certainly recognise the situation that the hon. Gentleman presents. The Department of Trade and Industry is reviewing the Consumer Credit Act 1974 to crack down on loan sharks and it will publish proposals in the new year. It is also important that we carry out work on credit unions, which have increased considerably since 1997, and implement pilot initiatives to discover how community-based organisations can get involved in such work. I shall certainly give careful consideration to his representations.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I support what the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) had to say about loan sharks. Is my hon. Friend aware of a constituent of mine whose original borrowing of £7,500 has now increased to £43,000? The company demanding that money, Provident Financial, has made a profit of £700 million over the last five years, all on the back of the most vulnerable people in deprived communities. Something must be done about that, and urgently.

Mrs. Roche: My hon. Friend is right; there are some absolutely disgraceful cases, which is why the community finance and learning initiative is so important. Those pilot schemes promote financial education and good practice so that we can crack down on loan sharks, who cause a great deal of disruption to our community and feed off vulnerable people.

Planning

4. **Mr. Peter Lilley** (Hitchin and Harpenden): If he will make a statement on how he intends to improve the involvement of local communities in planning decisions. [86321]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill will, subject to parliamentary approval, require all local planning authorities to produce a statement of community involvement setting out what the authority will do to involve the community in preparing local development documents and in their consideration of planning applications.

In addition, we will provide Planning Aid with significant funding over the next three years to enable it to become more proactive and to develop a greater role in targeting communities that traditionally do not get involved in the planning system.

Mr. Lilley: How can the Deputy Prime Minister explain his decision to take out of the hands of elected county and district councils in Hertfordshire and North Hertfordshire key decisions about housing, especially as he previously justified the approval of a plan to build 10,000 houses on the green belt on the grounds that the decision was endorsed by the elected Labour party that was then in power and that there were no other sites? Now a Conservative group has taken power and found alternative sites, so why is the right hon. Gentleman overriding local democracy, and why he is determined to concrete over the green belt?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman's recollection of that application is somewhat limited. He will know that we do not make a judgment according to whether a Labour or Tory council has made the decision; we have planning inspectors to make independent judgments. They made that recommendation, and I accepted it.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Why is the Deputy Prime Minister's commitment to community involvement so poor? He was recently asked whether he would call in a planning application in which a district council gave itself consent to develop its own land, despite the fact that all the people of the town, Teignmouth, asked for the application to be called in.

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are many thousands of applications on planning inquiries which bear my name, but as the hon. Gentleman will know from the process, I am not aware of any individual case. I will look at the matter that he mentioned and write to him, provided that the planning procedure has been completed and that I am not interfering in the process.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): The Deputy Prime Minister's White Paper on regional government was entitled "Your Region, Your Choice", but it is clear from the two Bills already before the House that the Government intend to remove the planning powers from county councils, whether or not there is a referendum and irrespective of the result of any referendum. Why are the people not being given a say in this vital aspect of local government? Should not the White Paper have been entitled "Your Region, No Choice"? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is far too noisy. If hon. Members want to chat, they can leave the Chamber.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I always find it very difficult to understand the right hon. Gentleman's arguments, because it was a previous Conservative Government who abolished county councils without any consultation, along with their planning powers and everything else. We made it clear in our White Paper that it is for the people to choose, and we will give them a referendum. The Conservatives did not do that when they abolished county councils.

David Davis: Well, I did not think that I would get a proper answer to that, so I am not surprised. In the spirit of Christmas, I shall try something a little easier. Yesterday, it became apparent that the Government intend to add insult to injury for county councils. The Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty), told the House that the regional planning bodies would be funded by central Government to the tune of £6 million. In Committee yesterday, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions said that the money would be taken from county councils. Which one is right?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Those bodies will be financed by central Government.

Planning

5. **Keith Vaz** (Leicester, East): If he will make a statement on third-party rights in the planning process. [86322]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The views of interested parties are taken into account in drawing up development plans and when reaching decisions on individual applications. The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill contains new measures that give local residents and third parties greater opportunities to participate more effectively in the planning process.

Keith Vaz: I am sure that the Minister agrees that unlimited involvement by third parties in the planning process will paralyse the whole system. However, does he accept that a limited right at major inquiries, perhaps funded by the taxpayer, would ensure that third-party objectors can put their views across in a focused way, thus shortening those long inquiries?

Mr. Leslie: I have heard what my hon. Friend has said about the need to support residents and interested parties, especially in larger-scale applications. I believe that there are prospects of more support, not only from our announcement about funding for Planning Aid, but from changes such as the introduction of mediators in

the inquiry process and round-table discussions to make sure that details are fully understood at an early stage of inquiries.

Planning

6. **Mr. Tony Clarke** (Northampton, South): What plans he has to reform the planning system. [86323]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Government's programme for the reform of the planning system is set out in "Sustainable Communities—Delivering through Planning", published on 18 July 2002. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is seeking to enact reforms that require primary legislation in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill, introduced on 4 December 2002 and happily given a Second Reading by the House just yesterday.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful to the Minister for his response. I am sure that many local authorities across the country will welcome the changes in the Bill that we debated yesterday, but many are apprehensive about the financial cost of the transition. Can my hon. Friend give me an assurance that local councils will be supported financially through that transitional period, so that in accepting the change there is no financial penalty for those local authorities?

Mr. McNulty: As I have said previously, the legislation that we discussed yesterday is only part of the reform of the planning system, which also includes the review and revision of circulars and policy guidance, and the introduction of £350 million more through the planning delivery grant, which is intended to meet councils' very real concerns, to which my hon. Friend alluded.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am sure that the Minister is aware that all over the country the absence of affordable housing to buy and rent is ripping the heart out of communities. What changes to the planning law does he propose to help the provision of more affordable housing so that local people can afford to live locally? If not through planning, how do the Government intend to help?

Mr. McNulty: Given the hon. Gentleman's party and the previous Government's record, I am terribly tempted to say that he has more front than Harrods for even asking the question. On the planning reform package and affordable housing, a review of circular 6/98 will begin in January. However, an effective, responsive, flexible and speedier planning system will also help the process—that goes for the south-west and all the other regions.

Revenue Support Grant

7. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): What his estimate is of the per capita change in revenue support grant to the Isle of Wight council resulting from his changes to the distribution formula. [86324]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Under our proposals, the Isle of Wight council will receive a grant increase of £3.56 million, which is equivalent to almost £27 per head more than in 2002–03.

Mr. Turner: I recognise and welcome that marginal increase in cash terms, but could the Minister explain how the grant settlement takes account of the additional costs of delivering statutory services, such as fire services, on an island, where we cannot get the help from adjoining authorities that we sometimes need. Will he agree to meet with me a group of representatives of the Isle of Wight council to discuss how those needs can more effectively be met?

Mr. Raynsford: I must tell the hon. Gentleman that our settlement of course takes account of the special circumstances of his area. He will be aware that in the last four years of the Conservative Government, the Isle of Wight received only a 1 per cent. increase in grant—a real-terms cut—whereas under this Government, it has received a 30 per cent. increase in grant. If the hon. Gentleman wishes to bring a delegation to discuss with me how his councillors will spend the extra money that we are making available to his authority, he should put that request in writing and we will, of course, consider it.

Council Tax

8. **Dr. Vincent Cable** (Twickenham): What plans he has for the reform of council tax. [86326]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Local Government Bill contains provisions on council tax revaluation, banding, discounts and exemptions.

Dr. Cable: Is the Minister aware that since the Conservatives introduced council tax nine years ago, the average English council tax bill has risen by more than 70 per cent., and by more than 50 per cent. under the present Government? How do the Government justify dependence on such a regressive tax, unrelated to the ability to pay, to fund a growing percentage of public services?

Mr. Leslie: I shall take that as a representation from the Liberal Democrats in favour of some sort of local income tax, which I understand is their policy. I wonder how many of their constituents appreciate the implications of that policy for them. Council tax is certainly fairer than its predecessor, the poll tax, which some people may still remember, but in our reforms we will take into account how we might be able to make council tax fairer still.

Social Exclusion

9. **Mr. Tom Clarke** (Coatbridge and Chryston): When he intends to visit Coatbridge and Chryston constituency to discuss social exclusion. [86327]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has no current plans to visit

the constituency of Coatbridge and Chryston. However, the Government maintain regular contact with the devolved Administrations on issues relating to social exclusion through forums such as the joint ministerial committee on poverty, which I attended in September.

Mr. Clarke: I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to come to my constituency in the immediate future—he does not know what he is missing. Will my hon. Friend join me in paying tribute to the credit unions, particularly in Kirkwood and Muirhead, which, despite a huge reduction in unemployment, are helping to make life easier for a substantial number of my constituents?

Mrs. Roche: I am very happy to do that, as I know what an interest my right hon. Friend takes in such measures. I believe, as has already been mentioned, that credit unions are incredibly valuable. They can give people real independence. If, by encouraging credit unions, we tackle seriously the problem of financial exclusion that blights many of our communities, we shall be doing all our communities a great service.

Firefighters' Dispute

10. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What progress has been made towards resolving the firefighters' dispute. [86328]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The final report of Sir George Bain's independent review of the fire service, published on Monday, is central to resolving the dispute. On the same day, I made a statement to the House welcoming the report and detailing how the Government will take forward its recommendations. The Government want a fair deal for firefighters and other workers, and a fair deal for the economy. Sir George Bain's report provides the framework for such a deal.

Mrs. Humble: Will my right hon. Friend reassure the Blackpool firefighters whom I met recently at the Bispham fire station that discussions about modernisation will take into account the local circumstances of towns such as Blackpool, where the firefighters care not only for the resident population, but for 11 million visitors in a town that stays open late into the night entertaining them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Many of those in the House with experience of Blackpool will understand my hon. Friend's point. We want to give the Blackpool brigade, and every other brigade, every assistance to be more efficient and more effective in their operations. That is why Sir George Bain's recommendations that we should move to more targeted fire cover based on basic risk assessment, and that working practices should be changed, are important. I identified to the House some of the changes that are needed, and I have already made it clear that I intend, as the inquiry recommended, to begin the repeal of section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Does the Deputy Prime Minister share my concern and surprise that the firefighters have not taken the opportunity to form a considered view of the proposals in the Bain report before calling another strike in the new year? Is that not very regrettable indeed?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I very much agree with what the hon. Lady said. The House will share the hope that all firefighters, at whatever level in the Fire Brigades Union, will take note of what Sir George Bain has said and of what I have said in the House about the changes that the Government will make. I hope that we can all look forward to further discussions in which the report is not treated as irrelevant. It is very relevant and we would like to see a settlement. My advice all the time is to talk, not walk. That remains my advice.

Illegal Camping

11. **Mr. Mark Todd** (South Derbyshire): What recent progress has been made in controlling illegal camping. [86329]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): In the early part of next year, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, in conjunction with the Home Office, will issue new guidance on managing unauthorised camping. The guidance is currently in its second phase of consultation with stakeholders. The guidance issued in the new year will include detailed operational guidance and deal with the roles and responsibilities of local authorities and the police in taking action.

Mr. Todd: Can we ensure that the decision is made in the very earliest part of next year? In my area, there are typically three illegal occupations at any time, trashing our countryside and having an antisocial impact on local residents. Can we please have the earliest possible conclusion to the consultation?

Mr. McNulty: When the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister issued the initial guidance, we took the very clear decision that we wanted substantive consultation, so that when the framework and operational guidance are issued—I hope that that will happen as early as possible in the new year, to satisfy my hon. Friend—they will be agreed to and welcomed by all parties associated with this very serious matter.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [86348] **Mr. David Heath** (Somerton and Frome): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 18 December.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today.

Mr. Heath: The Prime Minister will agree that national security far outweighs commercial sensitivity

or indeed potential embarrassment. If British companies and individuals are named in the declaration on resolution 1441 as having supplied arms or weapon-making technology or material to Iraq—a country with which every appearance suggests we will soon be at war—why do the British Government refuse to publish their names so that the claims can be investigated?

The Prime Minister: The UN resolution concerns the circumstances of the UN's mandate in respect of the inspectors and the ability of this country and others to ensure that Saddam complies with the requirements of the resolution. In respect of any information about companies, we apply exactly the same rules as Governments have always applied, and I think that it is right that we carry on doing so.

Q2. [86349] **Dr. Ian Gibson** (Norwich, North): At the weekend, President Bush declared his intention to offer vaccination against smallpox to every American, with a few exceptions among those with medical conditions. Is that our intention, or do we know something that he does not?

The Prime Minister: No. We do not believe that mass vaccination is warranted. We are following the World Health Organisation's guidelines. Our primary strategy in the event of any outbreak will be to contain and ring vaccinate as the first line of defence. However, we do not know of any specific threat, so the sensible thing for us to do is follow the guidelines set out by the WHO, which I think are correct, and that is what we intend to do.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The United States has made it clear that it will respond to the Iraqi weapons declaration within days. When will the Government publish their formal response to the declaration? From the evidence that the Prime Minister has seen so far and has already produced, will he say whether he agrees with Colin Powell that scepticism about the Iraqi declaration is well founded?

The Prime Minister: We will make a formal response shortly after the Christmas break. In respect of Colin Powell's remarks, most people who have looked at the document, which is obviously very long, are pretty sceptical about the claims that it makes, but it is important that we study it in detail and make a formal and considered response.

Mr. Duncan Smith: It is clear—it is certainly in today's papers—that the Government are making preparations for a major deployment in the Gulf. If a decision to deploy is made during the recess, is the Prime Minister prepared to recall Parliament? There is also confusion about whether there might be a vote on deployment. I would urge him to hold a vote on a substantive motion. Will he now agree to do so?

The Prime Minister: In respect of any substantive vote, we have made it clear that it would be our intention to do so, although that is, of course, subject to the proviso that the Foreign Secretary set out: nothing must be done that would endanger or imperil our troops should we need to act quickly. The Secretary of State will make a statement about the deployment later. It is a contingency deployment. Our position remains exactly as it has always been: we want the inspectors to do their work, we want Saddam to comply with the UN resolutions, and we use force in circumstances in which there is a breach of the UN mandate.

Q3. [86350] **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): Last week, I was told about a child in my constituency who could not sleep, not because she was over-excited about Father Christmas but because she was afraid that some lout might smash the windows of her mum's flat or put a lighted match through the letter box. While I know that the Prime Minister will want to join me in congratulating north Kent police on cutting crime by a further 5 per cent. over the past year, will he assure the mother of that child that he will not let up in his determination to deal with loutish and antisocial behaviour, which still creates a climate of fear? Will he also ensure that the police and local authorities continue to be given the resources they need to tackle the problem, rather than taking the advice of the Conservatives and cutting them?

The Prime Minister: First, I can assure my hon. Friend that we will do all that we can to deal with this issue. I congratulate Kent police on their great achievement of reducing crime in the Kent area. The key is simple and effective ways of enforcing the law on antisocial behaviour. That is why it is important that we streamline the antisocial behaviour orders. I also hope that the House will support the measures in the forthcoming Bill to make it far easier to impose fixed penalty notice fines for a range of antisocial behaviour offences, because the law will be used effectively only if there is a simple way of enforcing it.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): On Iraq, apart from welcoming the apparent conversion of the leader of the Conservative party to the arguments that Liberal Democrats have been advancing here for a long time, may I ask the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* Where is the sense of Christmas spirit in the Conservative party? The Secretary of State for Defence said this morning:

"If members of the Security Council judge ultimately that military action is necessary, it is important that"—

we—

"are in a position to take military action."

He was then asked, however, whether that meant that the UN Security Council would be the final judge of the matter, to which his answer was no. Surely it is important that the Prime Minister should clarify the position.

The Prime Minister: The position is as we have always set it out, which is that UN resolution 1441 assumes that there will be a further discussion in the UN Security Council. Of course, it has always been our desire to act with the full authority of the UN Security Council. We have always made it clear, however, that, if there were a breach and if, for any reason, the Security Council were blocked in any way, we do not believe it right that that breach should go unpunished. Those are the circumstances in which it is important to make sure that we do our level best to work with the UN in any way that

we can, but the bottom line—as I have set out right from the very beginning—must be that the United Nations route must be the way of dealing with the issue, not the way of avoiding dealing with it. Having said that, I believe that the UN will support action in circumstances in which there has been a breach. That is my belief after talking in detail to the main countries involved in the UN.

Mr. Kennedy: I thank the Prime Minister for that detailed and serious reply. Will he clarify one further aspect of the matter? The UN weapons inspectorate will complete its task and submit its conclusions and recommendations to the Security Council. If the American Government were, in the interim, to take any kind of pre-emptive unilateral action in respect of Iraq, would their action have the backing of the British Government?

The Prime Minister: I should point out to the right hon. Gentleman that, although many people thought that the American Government would take a unilateral route, they actually chose to go through the United Nations. They are bound by the UN resolution, just as we are. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will support me in saying that, if we are to use the UN route, and if there is a breach by Saddam, we should agree to take action. That surely must be right. At the very heart of the negotiations over the past few months has been the simple agreement that America and ourselves, and those who are enthusiastic about ensuring that we deal with the issue of weapons of mass destruction, are prepared to go down the UN route. The other side of that agreement, however, is that if Saddam breaches the UN resolution, people agree to take the action necessary to enforce the will of the UN.

Q4. [86351] **Mr. Michael Foster** (Worcester): My right hon. Friend will be well aware of the excellent work undertaken by the Worcester division of West Mercia police in tackling antisocial behaviour, but is he aware that magistrates fined one of my constituents who breached their order only £50? When a second constituent clearly breached an order, the Crown Prosecution Service failed to push the case. Does my right hon. Friend agree that those agencies have let the local police down? If he does, what is he going to do about it?

The Prime Minister: It is interesting to reflect that the Magistrates Association has just agreed to bring forward new sentencing guidelines on breaches of antisocial behaviour orders. Following the discussions that the Home Secretary and I have been having with the CPS, I can assure my hon. Friend that it will attach much greater priority to ensuring that orders are enforced. Nation wide, about 44 per cent. of those prosecuted for breaching antisocial behaviour orders have received custodial sentences, so there are indications, at least in some parts of the country, that this is being treated with the seriousness that it deserves.

I hope very much that the Bill on antisocial behaviour will give us the opportunity, as a House and as a Government, to send the clearest possible signal that antisocial behaviour order offences are a source of immense concern and worry to people, and that they need to be treated with utmost seriousness.

Q5. [86352] **Mr. Malcolm Moss** (North-East Cambridgeshire): Will the Prime Minister tell us why—despite all the promises, despite all the boasting about extra resources and despite the fact that we have had 12 criminal justice Acts in five years—only one crime in 40 ends up in a conviction?

The Prime Minister: For years, of course, there has been a problem with getting those who have committed crimes to justice, but I have to point out to the hon. Gentleman that, for the past five years, crime is down, not up, under this Government. We now have record numbers of police officers. Indeed, his own area, Cambridgeshire, had record police numbers at the end of March 2002. There is still a long way to go, but surely the answer is to keep putting the money into the police service and not take it out, which is his party's intention.

Q6. [86353] **Mrs. Betty Williams** (Conwy): When my right hon. Friend considers the railways, will he discuss with ministerial colleagues the parts of the country that are remote from London and, in particular, the poor and, indeed, worsening service provided by Virgin Trains to north Wales, which, even at the best guess, will not improve until September 2004?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right to talk about the difficulties of the Virgin west coast line. What I know she will understand, as she has talked about it with me, is that the Strategic Rail Authority's west coast strategy—the consultation on it closed on 16 December—includes a through service every two hours between London and Holyhead from 2004, which will run at 125 mph. I know that, as she rightly says, we have to wait some time for that to come online, but it is and it will be as a result of the extra investment going in.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The Government promised to cut road congestion by 6 per cent. Has the Prime Minister kept that promise?

The Prime Minister: Road usage is up by over 20 per cent., it is true.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister did not answer the question. He has broken his promise. According to all figures, congestion is worse, motorway congestion has doubled in the past four years and the Government have even abandoned their target, so he has broken another promise. What about the promise in 1997 to support and strengthen occupational pensions? Has he kept that promise?

The Prime Minister: I believe that the measures announced in the pensions Green Paper yesterday will indeed help occupational pensions. I also believe that the introduction of stakeholder pensions—low-cost private pensions—will also improve the situation, but I may point out on transport that it is true that road usage

is up by over 20 per cent. It is also true that rail usage is up by over 20 per cent. Indeed, so is tube usage. That is in part because the economy is immensely stronger.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The answer is that the Prime Minister has broken his promise on that as well. Occupational pensions are a disaster. As a result of the Prime Minister's £25 billion tax, more than three quarters of occupational schemes have closed or are about to close.

What about the Prime Minister's promise to cut school truancy by a third? Has he kept that promise?

The Prime Minister: First, on pensions—[HON. MEMBERS: "Ah!"] I am sorry; the right hon. Gentleman made a remark about pensions, so I will deal with that first. These are the facts on pensions—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members must not shout across the Floor.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman said that we had broken the promise on pensions. Let me tell him what we have done for pensions. We have introduced the £200 winter allowance. We have introduced the larger-than-inflation rises in the basic state pension. We are introducing the pension credit next October. We have restored free eye tests—and, unlike the right hon. Gentleman's party, we have cut VAT on fuel, not put it up. That is what we have done for pensioners.

The right hon. Gentleman is correct: truancy has remained roughly stable since we took office—that is absolutely true. However, there is one big difference. As a result of the measures that we are introducing, every child who is excluded from school will now get full-time education. When we took office, such children were getting only two hours of education a week.

The point I would make to the right hon. Gentleman is this: whether it is transport or pensions or schools, we are in favour of putting investment in and he is in favour of taking it out.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister promised to cut school truancy, and he has broken that promise. More than 50,000 children play truant every day, and truancy in secondary schools has increased. Is it not the case that when the Prime Minister makes promises on schools, transport, pensions or, for that matter, crime, asylum, drugs or health, he is not juggling balls but talking them?

The Prime Minister: Let us look at the record, shall we? Let us look at the record on schools, hospitals and crime. Under this Government we have the most jobs ever in the economy, the lowest mortgage rates for 40 years, record investment in education and health, the best school results that the country has ever seen, and the best-ever in-patient waiting-list figures since we came to office. Crime is down under this Government; it doubled under the right hon. Gentleman's.

Whether it is schools, hospitals or dealing with crime, we are in favour of putting the investment in. The right hon. Gentleman is in favour of taking the money out.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I have recently been deriving enormous pleasure not just from the opinion polls but from my numerous lunches with pensioners' groups. There is, however, a susurrus of discontent among the pensioners of Northolt over a perceived threat to their bus passes. As they are disinclined to believe me when I assure them that there is no such threat from this Government, will the Prime Minister set the record straight?

The Prime Minister: There is absolutely no way in which we would withdraw the concessions on bus passes for pensioners. I can make that absolutely clear. Once again, that is a measure that we introduced and the Conservative party opposed.

Q7. [86354] **Mr. Adrian Sanders** (Torbay): The Prime Minister will be aware of the rapidly rising insurance premiums that are affecting businesses all over the country, especially tourism businesses that come into contact with the public, which cannot obtain public liability insurance or find that the premiums are rising fast. The Government say that they are organising an inquiry, but that there will be no report until March. Will they in the meantime consider acting as insurer of last resort, so that some of those businesses can obtain cover and stay open?

The Prime Minister: An announcement was made in, I think, the pre-Budget report a few weeks ago, and it is correct to say that it will take until March for the inquiry to report. These are difficult issues, and the hon. Gentleman will know that the Office of Fair Trading is also looking at them, but I cannot give a commitment that the Government will act as an insurer of last resort. That would land the Government with a very large potential indemnity, which would not be a responsible thing to do.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): The whole House will have welcomed the Prime Minister's initiative in calling a middle east peace conference for next month in London. Will he make it clear to Palestinian delegates that although the Government support the creation of an independent and viable Palestinian state, every suicide bomb attack against innocent Israeli civilians puts such a prospect ever further out of reach?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Of course, the purpose of suicide bombings and the killing of innocent Israeli citizens is to provoke such hatred and division between Israelis and Palestinians that they cannot reach an agreement whereby the two states live side by side. In exactly the same way, the so-called dissident republicans and so-called loyalists who are engaged in terrorist activity in Northern Ireland seek to disrupt the process of peace. That is the purpose of the people who engage in these appalling suicide missions, and he is absolutely right in saying that they are the enemies of a lasting peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

Q8. [86355] **Mr. Andrew Rosindell** (Romford): Will the Prime Minister explain to my constituents in Romford—he will recall that Romford was a Conservative gain at the last general election—why, under the new local government formula, Sedgefield is

being given an 8.9 per cent. increase, yet we in the London borough of Havering are receiving only 3.5 per cent.? Are not the people of my borough being short-changed by this Labour Government?

The Prime Minister: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman raises the issue of how much money we are putting into local government services, particularly since, as he says, Romford was one of the few gains that the Conservatives made at the last election. The fact is that, under this Government, we are putting far more money into local government and into services such as education, health and the police. As a result of the additional sums going into Romford and elsewhere, in the past few years local government support has risen by more than 20 per cent. in real terms, yet in the five years before we took office it was actually cut. So the message to his constituents is to reverse the slight misjudgment that they made at the last election.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is no doubt fully briefed on the current negotiations in Brussels on the fishing industry. Is he aware that the proposal for an 80 per cent. cut in fishing effort and for seven days per month spent at sea will totally devastate the fishing industry in Northern Ireland, particularly in my constituency? Will he use his governmental influence to ensure that no such agreement is reached, and that a reasonable effort is made to provide a regime that can sustain the industry on the sea and onshore?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is of course entirely right to raise this concern. He will know—it is always important to repeat the point—that there is a real issue in respect of fishing stocks. Cod stocks have fallen from about 250,000 tonnes to some 35,000 tonnes in the past few years. He will know from what I said the other day in this House that I consider an 80 per cent. cut entirely unacceptable. It would devastate the industry, and we are working flat out in Brussels and elsewhere, and at every level that we can, to try to ensure that that decision is not implemented.

Q9. [86356] **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): With a possible war looming in Iraq, many of our loyal constituents want a clearer explanation of the British involvement. Is that involvement intended to protect Iraq's citizens and neighbours from Saddam, to enhance UN authority, or to protect Britain from a future missile attack and Iraqi-sponsored terrorism?

The Prime Minister: I never quite know where the Conservative party is coming from nowadays. Those factors are not all mutually inconsistent. The reasons for being prepared to take action in respect of Saddam are, first, that Saddam has weapons of mass destruction that threaten his region. As I said a few months ago, they not only threaten his region; frankly, if a conflict took place there involving weapons of mass destruction, it is unthinkable that we would not be involved in it in some way, as we were 10 years ago.

Secondly, it is important because there is a UN resolution. We have laid down the clear will of the international community, which is that Saddam must give up those weapons. There are real issues concerning weapons of mass destruction and if, at this moment in time, we were to allow Saddam to breach the UN will and did nothing about it, the consequences would be felt not just in respect of Iraq. We would send a message across the world that this was a serious issue, but one about which we were prepared to do nothing. *[Interruption.]* Conservative Members shout, "What has it got to do with us?" [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] They were, as a matter of fact. We are members of the international community and we believe that it is important that Britain make sure that Saddam complies with those UN resolutions. That is why Britain has a vital national interest in ensuring that the resolution is implemented.

Jim Dobbin (Heywood and Middleton): Is my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister aware that, today, the UK came bottom of an international league table of 17 countries in terms of the provision of recombinant for haemophilia sufferers? When will the Government provide recombinant for those sufferers in England and Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: We are trying to support this work through research and by considering the case for extending the provision of recombinant to all other haemophilia patients. As my hon. Friend knows, certain of them already get it. It is important that we examine the case for extending it and we are looking at that case at the moment.

Terrorism

Q10. [86357] **Dr. Julian Lewis** (New Forest, East): What his latest estimate is of the risk of terrorist attack by al-Qaeda against the United Kingdom.

The Prime Minister: As I made clear a few weeks ago, barely a day goes by without some new piece of intelligence coming via our security and intelligence services about a threat to UK interests. Although we have had some significant success in damaging al-Qaeda's capabilities since 11 September and have thwarted a number of attacks, the terrorist threat against the UK and UK interests remains real and serious.

Dr. Lewis: Have not the attacks in Bali and Mombasa shown that al-Qaeda specialises in multiple, simultaneous attacks? Given that al-Qaeda cells are believed to be in place in Britain, was not it unwise of the Home Office to withdraw last month the serious warning that it rightly gave of the sort of attacks that we could expect here in the UK? Was not it a mistake to think that it was wrong to spell out the threats in detail because the British people might panic? The British people need to be warned of what they might expect, and I do not think that they will panic if they are told the truth.

The Prime Minister: Of course it is important that people be told, but it is also important that we make a balanced assessment of how much information we give and what we say along with it. It is not just a question of the information; it is the judgment we make as to the weight that can be attached to it. The hon. Gentleman will recall that, a few weeks ago, there were stories in the

newspapers about a possible poison attack on the tube. There was no specific evidence of such an attack, yet the information ended up causing, I think, unnecessary concern among people. It is a difficult balance to strike and we do our level best to get the balance right. However, it is important to realise that intelligence and information comes to us the whole time. If we published all of it, we would cause unnecessary alarm, so we must sift it and make a judgment. I believe that the judgments that we have made so far have been right and the circumstances in which that information was withdrawn were explained at the time.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): This week, Dorset police warned Christmas shoppers to be vigilant about terrorist attacks. Does my right hon. Friend share Dorset police's concern? What action has he taken to reassure constituents such as mine in Dorset about terrorist attacks?

The Prime Minister: It is important that people be vigilant, and this country has long experience of dealing with a possible terrorist threat from the IRA. However, it is important that we recognise that the terrorist threat could take many different forms. Although we are spending considerable sums on doing all that we can to protect ourselves against a threat, it is also important that we realise that there is a limit to what we can do.

Engagements

Q11. [86358] **Mr. Tim Boswell** (Daventry): Is the Prime Minister persisting in his policy of 50 per cent. participation in higher education by people between the ages of 18 and 30 before the year 2010?

The Prime Minister: Yes, we want to make sure that we get as many people into university as possible. We have set a target of 50 per cent., but I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education that that should be open only to people who pass the requisite standard. At the moment, 43 per cent. of the relevant age group go to university. Extending that to 50 per cent. will mean that there will be about 250,000 extra students a year. In the past four years, for example, we have had very nearly 100,000 extra students, so the target is not impossible. However, reaching it must not involve a drop in standards.

Q12. [86359] **Mr. Peter Pike** (Burnley): My right hon. Friend will be aware that the two biggest problems in Burnley are the 4,500 empty houses and the fact that our main core budget is less, in real spending terms, than it was 11 years ago. The forthcoming housing renewal pathfinder project and new financial arrangements will help the area tremendously. However, will my right hon. Friend assure the people of Burnley that next year's transitional and bridging arrangements will enable Burnley borough council to tackle the two important problems that I outlined?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises an issue that is of great concern to people in his area and in other parts of the north-west where houses are lying empty or are falling in value. He will probably know that there is due to be a community statement at the end of January, which will set out the pathfinder initiatives to deal with the problem. The overall investment that the Government will put into housing over the next few years will mean that hundreds of millions of pounds more will be available. I hope that that extra money will play some part in enabling affected communities to rebuild themselves. Again, of course, that is all part of the investment that the Government are committed to putting in, and which the Opposition are committed to taking out.

Iraq

3.32 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a statement on contingency preparations for possible military action against Iraq.

My right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary, and I, have set out the Government's approach to Iraq on a number of occasions. That approach has not changed in any way. We are committed to the disarmament of Saddam Hussein's regime by ensuring its compliance with United Nations Security Council resolution 1441. Our primary objective is to achieve this by peaceful means. Saddam Hussein is being given every opportunity to disarm voluntarily.

We hope that he will take this opportunity to do so but, given his previous record, it would be foolish to assume that he will comply unless he faces clear and overwhelming pressure. That is why we must continue to present a credible threat of force.

When the House debated this issue on 25 November, and when it discussed it again at Defence questions on 9 December, I made it clear that we would continue with the prudent preparations and planning necessary for military action, should it be required. I said that we would continue to take appropriate steps to ensure that British forces were ready and had the training, equipment and support that they needed. What we are doing is ensuring that we have a range of military options available, should they be required. The House may, however, find it helpful if I set out again the work that we have put in hand.

As I told the House on 25 November, we have also been taking action to provide additional capabilities that may potentially be needed, either by bringing forward programmes which were already planned or by making new procurements against short time scales. As the House will recall, these measures include bringing forward the purchase of further temporary deployable accommodation, upgrading the infrastructure available in deployed field hospitals, improving battlefield ambulances, and enhancing the ability of our forces to handle and exploit secure communications. We are approaching the shipping market this week, to charter vessels that might be needed to move equipment and personnel. We are also acting on the lessons learned from Exercise Saif Sareea 2, particularly in relation to the Challenger 2 tank, the AS 90 artillery system, and desert clothing and boots. I can assure the House that we are working closely with industry to ensure that British forces will have the capabilities they need for the contingencies that they may face.

As I previously indicated to the House, we are also continuing to consider the number and mix of reservists who might be required in the event of military action and to ensure that the machinery and processes involved in mobilising reserves are ready to be used if and when the time comes. Relevant units and individual reservists will be informed of the possibility of being included in a call-out, should that become necessary. We will take steps to identify individuals who may have genuine reasons for not being available in the months ahead. Information will also be made available to reservists for their employers.

More generally, I have authorised a range of steps to improve readiness. This includes training, ensuring that the right quantities of equipment are available to those who may need them, as well as the procurement of stocks and spares. For some units it will involve a reduction in their notice to move. This does not mean that they are about to be deployed but that they will be ready to deploy at relatively short notice if required. I emphasise that the involvement of any particular unit in these processes does not mean that it will necessarily take part in any military action that may be required. The purpose of these preparations is to provide the necessary range of options, not a specific plan.

We have already announced the long-planned deployment of the naval task group 2003 in the new year, with scheduled visits and exercises in the Gulf and the Asia-Pacific regions from February to August. This is a routine deployment that happens approximately every three years but, like all maritime deployments, it remains available for a range of potential operations if required. The group will be led by HMS Ark Royal and will include the Type 23 frigate HMS Marlborough, the Type 42 destroyer HMS Liverpool and support from the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels Fort Victoria and Orangeleaf. A nuclear-powered submarine will also be assigned to the group for part of its deployment. In addition, a mine countermeasures group, comprising HMS Ramsey, HMS Grimsby, HMS Shoreham, HMS Ledbury and RFA Sir Bedivere will deploy ahead of the task group to undertake a series of exercises and port visits in the Gulf region.

Further to those routine deployments, we are also considering the deployment of additional maritime forces early in the new year to ensure the readiness of a broad range of maritime capabilities, should they be required.

Finally, I emphasise once more that these are contingency preparations, aimed at increasing the readiness of a range of options. This process does not lead inexorably to military action. The use of force is not inevitable. However, as long as Saddam's compliance with UNSCR 1441 is in doubt, the threat of force must remain and must be real.

Mr. Gerald Howarth (Aldershot): As the Secretary of State is aware, my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), the shadow Secretary of State for Defence, is in the Gulf visiting British servicemen and women who are already there in some force.

I am grateful to the Secretary of State for advance sight of his statement. Indeed, we are grateful to him for responding to the call yesterday from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) to make a statement today, the last major parliamentary day before Christmas. However, it is an indictment of the Government's priorities that the media were briefed yesterday and the House of Commons was briefed today. We are clearly the poor relations.

Furthermore, at the now famous press conference held last month by the Secretary of State and the Chief of the Defence Staff, the right hon. Gentleman undertook to brief Parliament during our debate on 25 November. He failed to do so, imperiously confining himself to a reference to "prudent preparations and planning". Today's mantra, adding to that, seems to be the mere maintenance of a range of options.

[Mr. Gerald Howarth]

It is some time since the Government reported that the United States had submitted a formal request for UK military support. We recognise that operational security may limit the information that the right hon. Gentleman can give the House, so we shall not seek confirmation of every detail published in today's newspapers. However, the House and the country are entitled to know what level of military commitment the Government have in mind. It is frankly bizarre that our television screens are full of US troop manoeuvres in the Gulf while the Government have so far said virtually nothing about possible British involvement.

Today's bland statement adds very little to what we know. From reading today's newspapers, it seems that the media know more about the detail than the Secretary of State is prepared to share with the House, so let me put some questions to him. What specific capability has the United States requested, and what is the Government's response? What are the options that he referred to in his statement? Can he assure the House that, bearing in mind reports of shortages, there will be sufficient spares and logistical support to sustain a campaign lasting more than a few days? Has the equipment been desertised and will units trained on Exercise Saif Sareea be deployed and not held back for firefighting duties?

Given the consequences for both reservists and employers, surely the Government could be more specific about their call-up plans. Does the Secretary of State have in mind the call-up of formed units, apart from the medical services? What medication will be prescribed to any British contingent and will it be different from that prescribed during the Gulf war, or take into account United States developments in that respect?

Is it not the case that the likely resumption of the firemen's strike will have a damaging limitation on the Secretary of State's ability to deploy troops whose training is up to speed, thus confirming that he is unprepared for the unexpected? Does he accept that publicly preparing British forces for deployment will help to bring pressure to bear on Iraq to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1441, and that being more forthcoming would assist the House and the securing of that objective?

The statement was thinner than I had expected and than the House was entitled to have heard. I hope that the Secretary of State will confirm that, if there are to be deployments during the Christmas recess, the House will be advised.

Finally, as we approach Christmas, I hope that in a spirit of good will and cross-party solidarity the Secretary of State will join me in paying tribute to our armed forces and their families as they stand ready to embark on operations should the need arise.

Mr. Hoon: May I make it clear to the hon. Gentleman that there was nothing in the briefing to journalists yesterday that had not previously been set out clearly to the House of Commons on two, if not three, occasions? Each of the points that he made—for example, on desertisation, the impact of a possible fire strike or reservists—has been dealt with in some detail already. Although hon. Members on the Opposition Front Bench are shaking their heads, I invite them to look carefully at reports both of previous debates and of the most recent Defence questions where all those matters were dealt with. I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has come to the House with such a long list of requests—if he had carefully read the pages of *Hansard,* all his questions would have been answered.

Mr. Paul Keetch (Hereford): We on the Liberal Democrat Benches welcome the right hon. Gentleman's statement, and I thank him for providing an advance copy. It is right that he brought that information to the House so that we could consider it; no Government can afford to leave themselves unprepared for military action.

This Christmas, many members of our armed forces and their families will be acutely aware of the possibility that they could be involved in future military action, so I am sure that they would like reassurance from the Secretary of State both about the readiness of the armed forces and about the decision-making process that might precede action.

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's comment that the lessons of Saif Sareea 2 have been learned, but can he confirm that the MOD did not decline an offer from Vickers to modify the tanks earlier this year? If he has changed his mind, how much will that cost the taxpayer?

What is the availability of our aircraft carriers for action and will our Sea Harriers be able to operate in that climate? Can the Secretary of State make a commitment that any troops sent to the Gulf will have the modified SA80 assault rifle?

Are the necessary medical provisions in place? What provision has been made for the purchase of nuclear, biological and chemical suits and filters? What steps have the Government taken to prevent a repeat of the medical problems experienced after the Gulf war? If troops are sent to the region will the Defence Medical Services have the capability to provide enough field hospitals?

The Secretary of State is right to say that war is not inevitable, but Liberal Democrat Members speak for many people in the House and beyond when we say that military action should be conducted only with the authority of the UN and after a substantive vote in the House. We must not fall into the problems experienced by Europe before the first world war; preparations are necessary but they must not make war inevitable. We must not fall into that trap.

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observations and I shall try to deal with each of his points in turn.

Certainly, the Government have learned lessons both from previous exercises and from previous deployments. As I pointed out a few moments ago, I referred on a previous occasion to specific examples in respect of Saif Sareea 2, which was a valuable training exercise and a number of significant lessons were learned—not least about the use of Challenger 2 tanks and the need for desertisation.

As for the SA80, again, we have learned the lessons thrown up by the deployment in Afghanistan, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that the modified assault rifle will be available to our forces in the event of there being a need for military action.

On the medical issues, some of which I have mentioned already today, as I did on a previous occasion, I can also assure him and the House that our forces will be effectively and properly equipped against the risk of exposure to nuclear, biological or chemical weapons. I think that I have already dealt with the point about field hospitals. Certainly, a great deal of effort has been made to learn and understand the lessons from the Gulf war in the early 1990s, and they will be applied in the event of any subsequent operations in similar conditions.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley): Whatever happens in the next few months—no one quite knows what—I spent this weekend at the Iraqi opposition groups' meeting in London and, as far as I could see, apart from a junior Foreign Office official, there was no British involvement at all, although there was a delegation of 50 Americans present. All those in the Iraqi opposition have always said that they want greater British involvement. Whatever the future of that country, Iraq should be democratic, and we should be involved in those talks from the very first day, so will my right hon. Friend please consider those suggestions and act on them?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for those comments and for her typically constructive approach to such matters. For many years, she has been a champion of the need to observe human rights in Iraq and, indeed, she has not shrunk from the difficult decisions that follow from that. I assure her that the Foreign Office monitored the conference closely during the weekend, but that conference was clearly a matter for the Iraqi opposition groups themselves.

While not attempting to foresee the consequences of military action if it is ultimately required in a place such as Iraq, I believe that we have an important model in what has taken place in Afghanistan. In the months since military action was necessary there, we have seen a determined effort—not without difficulty; in no way do I underestimate the problems that have been faced—by the international community, by people in Afghanistan and, significantly, by many people returning from exile abroad to Afghanistan to help in the considerable task of rebuilding their country. I have every expectation that the same determined effort will be made by the international community and, indeed, Iraqi exiles in rebuilding their own country.

Sir John Stanley (Tonbridge and Malling): Following the exchange in the House earlier today on the possibility of a future debate on military intervention in Iraq on a substantive motion in the House, will the Secretary of State for Defence assure the House that the Government's overriding consideration on the timing of any such debate will be the protection of the lives of British servicemen and women?

Mr. Hoon: I can give that assurance. I was asked that question this morning, and I gave that assurance then. I can only repeat what my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has said on precisely that issue: it is obviously crucial that the safety and security of our forces should be uppermost in any decision, and I know that all hon. Members would agree with that.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): While neither President Bush nor anyone else must pre-empt the implementation of Security Council resolution 1441, does my right hon. Friend agree that that resolution must be implemented, that paragraph 13 says that Iraq will face serious consequences if it is not implemented and that it would be irresponsible of Her Majesty's Government not to make contingency preparations in case that way of implementing it is necessary? Does he agree that whether resolution 1441 is implemented by force depends on Saddam Hussein?

Mr. Hoon: My right hon. Friend sets out the position with his customary clarity. I do not need to add anything to his words except to agree that it is vital that we make it clear to Saddam Hussein that the choice is his. He has been given the opportunity of disarming, and, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, that is a choice for him.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Does the right hon. Gentleman not understand that while there may be substantial agreement between those on the Front Benches, that should not mask the fact that a great deal of anxiety exists in this House and elsewhere about the policy towards Iraq? Does he not understand that while a Security Council resolution may make a policy of war legal, it does not make it wise or moral? Furthermore, does he not understand that in the absence of a grave and imminent threat to ourselves and our allies, many of us believe that war is wrong, by which I mean not morally justified, as well as politically profoundly unwise?

Mr. Hoon: I was not sure from the right hon. and learned Gentleman's observations whether he was making a general or a specific observation about the nature of war. I have heard him make observations in the past, and, curiously, they were never critical of his Government when he was a Minister. He has never made previously the kinds of comments that he has made lately about the responsibilities of the House or of the Government to Parliament. I assume that he has made a recent conversion to those views. He is perfectly entitled to those views, but I happen to disagree with them.

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): This will be the first war that will be fought when the International Criminal Court is in operation. Our forces will be subject to it, and I hope that Saddam Hussein will appear before it. Why are the Government negotiating a bilateral agreement with the American Government to help exclude American forces from the provisions of the International Criminal Court?

Mr. Hoon: The answer to that is straightforward: the present United States Administration have not accepted the jurisdiction of the ICC for their armed forces. To ensure a consistency of approach, the Government, together with many other Governments around the world, have agreed that bilateral approach with the United States.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Secretary of State goes out of his way to say that the deployment is routine. Is it routine to deploy minesweepers ahead of the task group? Does he not

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

consider that the UK is now on a treadmill to war, and that, in fact, the decision to commit will not be made by No. 10 but by somebody else across the sea who has already decided that war is inevitable?

Mr. Hoon: I repeat again that this is a routine deployment and a long-planned exercise, which has taken place on a regular basis. On the hon. Gentleman's specific question about minesweepers, it would hardly be sensible to allow this deployment to take place in one of the most dangerous stretches of water anywhere in the world without there being appropriate protection in place, in the form of minesweepers, to ensure that British forces are not at unnecessary risk. I reject absolutely what he says about any decision to commit; that decision will be taken by a British Prime Minister, as has always been the case.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): I have been invited to give a Zayed foundation lecture in Abu Dhabi on Saturday, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman) knows, those are serious occasions. After discussions with the leadership in the Emirates, they were absolutely appalled and horrified at the consequences of an American-British attack on Iraq. What value do the Government attach to the opinion of old and trusted friends of this country?

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom Government attach very great value to their friends and allies around the world, and not least in the Gulf region, to which I have been a regulator visitor over many years. I recognise the importance of maintaining an international coalition on these matters, which is reflected in a unanimous vote by the Security Council—including, perhaps to the surprise of many right hon. and hon. Members, the vote of Syria—in favour of resolution 1441. I assure my hon. Friend and the House that the Government set great store by the views of the international community, and we will continue to seek out those views and to seek to have them in agreement with whatever decisions are taken in due course.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Secretary of State will recall that, following the strategic defence review, the Chief of the General Staff said that the most important development of the SDR for the Army was the development of the formation training cycle, which was designed to prepare formations to make deployments precisely such as this. How robust has the formation training cycle proved under the combination of having to deal with the firefighters' strike, all the other active service deployments and this particular deployment?

Mr. Hoon: I agree with the implication of the hon. Gentleman's observation to the extent that it has not been possible to follow precisely the formation training cycle as laid down in the SDR, not least because of the series of events that the United Kingdom has felt it right to respond to. I do not like challenging him with a further question, but, before he asks a similar question, he needs to think through what would have been the response of Opposition Members if we had stuck rigidly to the formation training cycle and not involved ourselves in a series of important international operations, such as those in Afghanistan and in the Balkans. It is for those reasons that it has not been possible to follow precisely the terms of the formation training cycle.

Mrs. Alice Mahon (Halifax): I have listened to the statement and to the answers that the Prime Minister gave earlier on Iraq, and it seems to some of us that it is absolutely clear that we will support the Bush war on Iraq regardless of the United Nations. Given that, we are entitled to know exactly what the cost of preparing for this illegal, immoral and unnecessary war will be. What contingencies have been made for the thousands of refugees who will undoubtedly seek asylum in our country and in the west in general if the whole area is destabilised?

Mr. Hoon: I can only repeat the assurance that my right hon. Friends and I have given on previous occasions. There is no inevitability about a war. It is a matter of upholding United Nations resolutions and the approach that the UN has taken. Again, I simply invite my hon. Friend to consider how it is otherwise possible to uphold the will of the international community—I am sure that is something that she and I agree upon—unless we are prepared to use force to back up the decisions that the UN has taken.

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): As someone who was personally involved in the last deployment 12 years ago, I wholeheartedly support the Secretary of State's desire to give servicemen and women and their families the maximum possible notice of any deployment. However, one of the options being studied is presumably the deployment of a full armoured division. How long does he calculate that it would take to deploy such a division to the Gulf? Once it is there, how long does he calculate that it would take to bring it ready for operations?

Mr. Hoon: From the hon. Gentleman's considerable previous experience, he knows full well that it would not be sensible for me to answer either of those questions.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): Is it not the case that, this time about 12 years ago, the criminal dictator had time to leave Kuwait and his refusal to do so led to the Gulf war? Now, his refusal to give up weapons of mass destruction might lead to military action. Why do not the critics, including the former Tory Minister who was so enthusiastic about the Gulf war at the time, give the responsibility for war, should it come, not to the allies, the United States, Britain and the international community, but to the criminal regime because it refuses to comply with the UN resolution?

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend puts his case with his customary passion—more passion than I am perhaps able to display. We have always made it clear that Saddam Hussein is a unique case, having not only invaded two neighbours but having used weapons of mass destruction against his own people. That is why the

overwhelming view of the international community is that it is necessary that Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq should be disarmed.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Remembering the experience of prisoners of war after the war in Afghanistan, will the Secretary of State tell us what plans he has to deal with Iraqi prisoners of war in the event of an attack?

Mr. Hoon: They will be dealt with in accordance with humanitarian and international law.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): The terms of the charter of vessels will surely be known in the markets fairly soon, if not now. What can my right hon. Friend tell the House about the earliest start date for those charters and the length of them? Which NATO allies, apart from the US, are also involving themselves in prudent planning?

Mr. Hoon: Again, for reasons that I have set out, I cannot give the House precise details of either the start date of any charters or their length. All I can say is that we are involved in contingency preparations to ensure that vessels are available should their use be required. No decisions have yet been taken on their use. As far as other countries are concerned, I am sure that all responsible members of the Security Council and the UN will want to take appropriate action to ensure the enforcement of Security Council resolution 1441.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Armoured Brigade—the teeth, the arms, the punching machine of the force—that was so carefully, expensively and contentiously trained in Saif Sareea will be used for desert warfare in Iraq?

Mr. Hoon: I am not going to give any indication of the nature of the force package that will be available. If the hon. Gentleman looks again at the words that I used in the statement, he will see that I said that a range of military options will be available to the commanders of UK forces. It would not be sensible for me to dwell on any particular aspect of those forces, as he knows full well.

Mike Gapes (Ilford, South): The Secretary of State will know that Saddam Hussein's regime used Scud missiles in 1991 and that previously it used chemical weapons against its neighbour and its own people. What assurance can he give that, if our forces have to be deployed, they will be adequately protected against such attacks? In that context, is there effective interoperability with our NATO allies and other partners in the coalition if there is a material breach and military action becomes necessary?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that. I said that British forces would be properly protected in the event of a chemical, biological or nuclear attack against them. On interoperability, one of the most recent decisions is to ensure effective communications between different forces. One of the clear lessons from the operation in Afghanistan, especially the deployment of the international security assistance force, is that NATO standard forces can work together quickly given their common training and common approach to equipment. We need to build on that recent success.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Given recent tragic incidents of friendly fire in different theatres of war, can the Secretary of State assure the House, and indeed the country, that all our service personnel deployed in theatre will have the equipment they need to communicate speedily and effectively with friendly units?

Mr. Hoon: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising a serious and important point. I assure him that efforts are being made to ensure that that is the case.

Mr. Peter Kilfoyle (Liverpool, Walton): Recalling A. J. P. Taylor's theory on mobilisation, is not there a certain inevitability about military action given the Americans' stated intention of regime change in Iraq? Will the charters be British ships manned by British crews?

Mr. Hoon: As far as inevitability is concerned, the final observation in my statement was that military action is not inevitable. Equally, however, if we did not make prudent preparations, it would be inevitable that we could not take military action should the circumstances warrant it. I simply invite my hon. Friend to consider that. If he believes, as I am sure he does, in the need to enforce UN resolutions, he must also believe that it is necessary to take military action in certain circumstances to uphold those decisions. As for chartering ships, it is important that the UK has available to it a secure and reliable system of being able to transport both its people and its equipment.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I want to press the Secretary of State on humanitarian aid. Considering the disaster that occurred in Kurdistan after the Gulf war, what contingency plans has he made for humanitarian aid, and what calculations has the Ministry of Defence made for best case and worst case collateral damage?

Mr. Hoon: I shall not go into a great deal of detail at this stage about the range of possible consequences of military action that has yet to be decided on. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman, not least because of our experience in Afghanistan, where a huge amount of humanitarian aid was promptly made available after military operations, that the matter will be high on our list of priorities.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): If war is inevitable only if Iraq fails to comply with Security Council resolution 1441, will all members of the Security Council be furnished with the American analysis of the Iraqi document? Given the somewhat intemperate statements of Secretary Powell, who rushed to judgment on the document's veracity, will such an analysis be verified by the UN inspectors before any decision is made by the Security Council, or is the will of the international community reduced to that of the United States?

Mr. Hoon: I do not accept that for a moment. If my hon. Friend looks carefully later at the question that she just asked me, she will realise that the answer is a matter for the United States. I emphasise to her and other hon. Members that the United States and, quite separately, the United Kingdom will be making their own assessment of the material, as, I anticipate, will other members of the Security Council. There have been certain adjustments in the material made available for perfectly understandable reasons, because it is necessary to ensure that nothing that is communicated to members of the UN should assist in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Other than that, it will be open to members of the Security Council to make their own assessment.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): In supporting the steps being taken by the Secretary of State, I ask him to give the House an assurance that, before he deploys Challenger 2 tanks to the Gulf, he will deal not only with their desertisation but with the technical deficiencies that came to light in recent exercises in Canada. Will he make sure that, in the coming combat, if that occurs, our troops have high-quality equipment that is not likely to break down as they are charging towards Baghdad?

Mr. Hoon: Of course, Challenger 2 tanks regularly exercise in Canada, so it is important to recognise that our information about the performance of the equipment is regularly updated. I assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that every effort will be made to incorporate all the lessons learned from previous exercises and deployments.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Are the Government aware that outside this place there is probably a majority of the British people who are against a war on Iraq? That was not true of the Falklands, Kosovo or Afghanistan, and it must worry Ministers as it worries those of us on the Back Benches. Is my right hon. Friend aware that many electors say that this is about a vain American President wanting to complete the job that his father did not do 12 years ago? They also think that it is about oil. I say to my right hon. Friend and the Government that vanity is not sufficient reason to spill the blood of innocent men, women and children, either here or in Iraq.

Mr. Hoon: My hon. Friend and I are parliamentary neighbours; we live in the same county and therefore come across the same sorts of people. I do not find that people are saying quite what he says. I recognise that there is concern and that there should be concern. There is concern in the House and on this Front Bench about any decision to deploy British forces in a war.

I simply do not accept, however, that the British people believe any of the criticisms that my hon. Friend makes of the United States or its President. They are looking for UN Security Council resolutions to be upheld, ensuring that Saddam Hussein and his regime cannot threaten the stability of the region or indeed the safety and security of British people, whether they are British troops deployed in Cyprus or people here in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my right hon. Friend aware that over 40 per cent. of Iraqis are children under 16? When an attack takes place on Iraq, what action will be taken to ensure that there is not collateral mayhem involving children and innocent people?

Mr. Hoon: An enormous effort is made during the course of any kind of military operation, including bombing operations, to ensure that the targets addressed do not cause unnecessary risk to a civilian population. That was the case during operations over Afghanistan for which I was responsible, when I personally ensured that harm to the civilian population was minimised. I can tell my hon. Friend that even in the relatively short time since the last Gulf war, there have been enormous improvements in the accuracy and sophistication of the equipment used to allow those responsible for any military action to ensure that the threat to civilian populations is minimised.

Hugh Bayley (City of York): Is the Secretary of State aware that many people in Britain hope desperately that we will not go to war with Iraq but nevertheless think that it is wise and prudent to make preparations for war because they know that it is inconceivable that Saddam Hussein will comply and disarm without the threat of military action if he fails to do so?

Mr. Hoon: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Can I make it clear that I am one of those who hope that we will not go to war? I hope that Saddam Hussein will accept his responsibilities and enforce the terms of the United Nations Security Council resolution. Equally, however, like my hon. Friend, I believe that it is much more likely that Saddam Hussein will accept Security Council resolution 1441 if it is backed up by the threat of the use of force.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): Following the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Linlithgow (Mr. Dalyell) about Abu Dhabi, why cannot the Government understand that, having committed themselves to the United Nations process, if they then remove themselves from it and take unilateral or bilateral action, they will alienate moderate Islamic opinion throughout the world? Does he recognise that, if that happens, he will create a hell for us and our children for many generations to come?

Mr. Hoon: But the Government do understand that. The point was made directly to the Prime Minister at Prime Minister's questions only a few minutes ago, and he addressed the issue directly. It is clearly understood, recognised and acted upon by the Government.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): Has the Secretary of State not just made a statement that softens us up for a war? He has no intention of going back to the United Nations or seeking parliamentary approval, and is moving troops into the region to start a war the moment that George Bush says so. Can he deny that carte blanche has been given to George Bush to do what he will, and that the British Government will support him?

Mr. Hoon: I can only reiterate to my hon. Friend all the points that I have made repeatedly in response to each of those questions. I am sorry that he does not appear to accept the answers that I have already given, but I can assure him that it will be for a British Prime Minister acting in the best interests of the United Kingdom to decide whether or not British troops are deployed in the event of a decision to use military force.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that while, as he said, the threat of military action is a major incentive for Saddam to comply with UN resolution 1441, if he forms the impression that war is probable or inevitable, that will be a strong disincentive to disarm? If we sincerely wish to avoid war, surely it is essential that we and our US allies keep a careful balance in the belligerence of our stance?

Mr. Hoon: That is absolutely right. It is important to make it clear that we want a peaceful resolution of the situation—we want Saddam Hussein to accept the opportunity that he has been given to agree to the will of the United Nations and the international community. Equally, however, it follows that he is much more likely to do so if we maintain a credible threat of force.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Despite the shopping list of military resources in the Secretary of State's statement, is not the reality that the British Government have already decided to support a US war on Iraq and, in fact, are already doing so? Given the 300 per cent. increase in US and British raids on the no-fly zone, perhaps he will tell the House how many bombing days he has left before Christmas. Will he also acknowledge that the evidence of Turkish troops using those raids to go in and kill Kurds raises the question of who exactly is being protected in this hidden war against Iraq, long before the formal slaughter begins?

Mr. Hoon: Again, instead of using language like US and UK raids on Iraq, it is important that my hon. Friend thinks about the many men and women based in the east midlands, an area that he and I are both proud to represent, who are risking their lives over the skies of Iraq for humanitarian reasons. Is he telling the House that he believes that those men and women should not be entitled to defend themselves when they come under regular attack from the forces of Saddam Hussein? I am sure that my hon. Friend is not saying that, in which case their actions are entirely justified in international law.

Llew Smith (Blaenau Gwent): The Secretary of State outlined some of the preparations for a war with Iraq, including, frighteningly, the use of nuclear-powered submarines. Can he tell me whether similar preparations are being made for a war with Israel, which is also breaking UN resolutions, is invading Palestine daily, has weapons of mass destruction, and has a Head of State who is a state terrorist?

Mr. Hoon: I must tell my hon. Friend that all British submarines are nuclear powered. The comparison between Iraq and Israel does not stand up. The position in relation to Iraq is quite unique. It is a country that has invaded two of its neighbours and used weapons of mass destruction against its own people. That is in no way comparable with Israel, nor are the resolutions that my hon. Friend cites in any way comparable. The resolutions that mention Israel also mention a number of other countries that have equal obligations under UN Security Council resolutions. The comparison is not helpful. If my hon. Friend looked more carefully at those resolutions, he would not ask such a question.

Harry Cohen (Leyton and Wanstead): Are UK forces taking cluster bombs to the region? Are US forces taking them? Have US forces taken their giant, indiscriminate daisy-cutter bombs there? Are not the preparations really civilian-killing preparations?

Mr. Hoon: Again, I have resisted the temptation that hon. Members and hon. Friends have given me this afternoon to refer to any specific equipment that might or might not be used. Appropriate respect will be given to the requirements of international law in any action that is taken and proves necessary in Iraq.

Scottish Parliament

4.18 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the future size of the Scottish Parliament.

In the White Paper, "Scotland's Parliament" published in July 1997, the Government acknowledged that the special statutory provisions that stipulated a minimum number of Scottish seats in this House would no longer apply. The average Scottish constituency represented here comprises around 55,000 electors, whereas the average for English constituencies is around 70,000. One factor in this increased representation had been the need to recognise the additional requirement for Scottish MPs to scrutinise separate legislation unique to the Scottish system.

The Scotland Act 1998 provides that any reduction in the number of MPs representing Scottish constituencies at Westminster will cause a reduction in the number of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament. The boundary commission for Scotland published in March this year provisional recommendations that would lead to a reduction in the current number of Scottish Westminster constituencies from 72 to 59. The consequence for Holyrood would be a fall in the number of MSPs from 129 to around 104. During the passage of the Scotland Act, the Government made it clear that if the Parliament took the view that its workings would be undermined by a reduction in numbers, representations could be made to the Government of the day to amend that section of the Act. My right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), then Secretary of State for Scotland, reiterated that view in September 2000. I have made similar public statements to that effect.

Honouring that commitment, I launched last year a consultation to seek views on retaining or adjusting the current statutory link between Westminster and Holyrood parliamentary constituencies. In particular, the consultation paper sought views on three issues: the consequence of the reduction required by the Scotland Act for the operation of the Scottish Parliament; the practical effect and issues that might arise between MPs, MSPs and councillors if boundaries were not coterminous for Westminster and Holyrood constituencies; and the implications of non-coterminous boundaries for electoral administrators and local authorities in relation to the registration of voters and conduct of elections and for the structure and operation of political parties. Almost 800 copies of the consultation document were issued, and the Scotland Office website page recorded 1,300 hits. More than 230 replies were received from civic bodies, individuals, electoral administrators, councils, the Scottish Executive, MPs, MSPs and political parties.

The purpose of the consultation was to seek to proceed on the basis of the sort of consensus born out of the Scottish Constitutional Convention's scheme for the Scottish Parliament. That broad-based convention was made up of political parties including the Scottish Labour party and the Scottish Liberal Democrats, as well as trade unions, local authorities, Churches, the voluntary sector, business groups and civic Scotland. I made it clear that if the Government were ever to consider amending the Scotland Act, any proposal should seek the same sort of consensus as that which emerged through the convention.

Two strands emerge from the consultation. First, there is the need for stability. Among the civic and representative bodies that responded, the overwhelming view was that the Scottish Parliament should continue to operate with the present number of MSPs. The argument was put that a reduction would cause difficulties, especially to the Committee system, and that it would be unwise to destabilise the Parliament so early in its life by reducing its numbers. The respondents stated that a reduction would adversely affect the Parliament's scrutiny of legislation and the Executive's capacity to conduct inquiries or initiate legislation. They claimed that any reduction in the numbers of list MSPs would reduce proportionality and that the current structure should be maintained to give a proper balance of representation.

Secondly, it was acknowledged, not least by electoral administrators, that difficulties could arise if the boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood were not coterminous. Confusion could be caused to voters and there would be problems for political parties in relation to their organisation.

A summary of those responses has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. I have weighed up carefully all the responses, and in view of the overwhelming body of opinion in favour of maintaining the current number of MSPs, I propose in the interests of stability to seek to amend the Scotland Act accordingly. However, I also take very seriously the concerns about the operation of different boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood. I therefore propose that an independent commission should be established to examine and make recommendations on issues caused by different boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood constituencies.

I expect that, subject to Parliamentary approval, any order giving effect to revised Westminster boundaries should be in place for the next general election, no later than June 2006. Consequently, the new commission, which has the approval of the Scottish Executive and is referred to in their submission, would sit after the 2007 Scottish Parliament elections. Any changes that it might propose to the Scotland Act would be a matter for this Parliament.

Retaining the present number of 129 MSPs requires an amendment to the Scotland Act by way of primary legislation. It will also be necessary to provide for the routine review of Scottish Parliament constituency boundaries. I will be seeking agreement to introduce legislation as soon as parliamentary time allows. Let me make it clear that any change to the Scotland Act will be narrowly drawn. The Government believe that the spirit of the constitutional convention must guide any changes to the legislation. This announcement acknowledges the fact that, as it approaches the end of its first term, the Scottish Parliament is a hard-working and effective institution committed to serving the needs of the Scottish people. It underpins the stability and success of the constitutional settlement in Scotland, which has strengthened the United Kingdom. I commend this statement to the House.

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): I am grateful to the right hon. Lady for giving me sight of her statement under the new terms of co-operation between the Government and the Opposition. The statement is not unexpected; we have been waiting for it for 264 days, which is more than the number of replies that she received to her consultation document. Perhaps there was too much reading for her to do in her otherwise busy day.

Unlike the Government, the Conservatives have been consistent in wanting a reduction in the number of MSPs. As early as 28 January 1998, my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) argued for such a reduction in line with the welcome reduction in the number of Scottish MPs. The then Minister, Henry McLeish, supported that. Since then, Conservatives in the Commons, the Lords, and the Scottish Parliament have consistently argued for the Government to uphold the terms of the Scotland Act—which set out the reduction—or, alternatively, for true devolution of power so that the Scottish Parliament could make its own decision. The right hon. Lady may recall that, in 1998, she voted to overturn an amendment to the Scotland Bill that would have had the same effect as her new plans. What specifically has happened in the interim to change her mind?

Is the right hon. Lady aware that similar devolved parliaments elsewhere in the world need fewer members? For instance, in British Columbia, which I visited in the summer, the legislature has greater powers but only 79 members. Will she tell us why the Scottish Parliament needs 129? Will she also tell us why it needs all 17 of its Committees, and why it now needs 23 Ministers when the Scottish Office used to get along nicely with five?

I would be grateful for clarification of the right hon. Lady's statement. Is my reading of it correct that, if her proposed new commission concludes that coterminosity is absolutely essential for the democratic process, she is prepared to retain the 72 Scottish MPs at Westminster? Will she confirm that that number will remain at 72 for the general election to be held by June 2006, and for the subsequent one? Will she also tell us whether she expects to introduce the Bill amending the Scotland Act before or after 1 May 2003?

The Scottish Parliament will only work with public support. The Lib-Lab pact running the Scottish Executive is losing the confidence of the Scottish people. The right hon. Lady knew the first First Minister well, and she may remember him saying, on 11 November 1998, that

"over the next few years, we shall have experience of the Scottish Parliament in operation and can then assess how dependent it is on having 129 MSPs for its success. I suspect that that will not be a determining factor. What I believe will be the success of the Parliament will depend on its ability to deliver, to respond to Scottish public opinion and to involve Scottish public opinion in its affairs."—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 386.]

The second First Minister said on 12 May 1998 that he believed that the Parliament could operate effectively with fewer Members and that there were good arguments for maintaining the linkage in constituencies. The third First Minister came to office pledging to do less, better. He has failed to do so. How, then, does the right hon. Lady justify keeping more MSPs than envisaged by the Scotland Act? Will this not be a case of more MSPs and more MPs doing worse?

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Lady has proved that she can count, but she has not proved an awful lot else. She asks what has happened since the consultation began and, indeed, since November 1998. First, let me remind her that in November 1998 she voted for a Lords amendment that would have guaranteed 129 not only for the first Scottish Parliament elections, but in perpetuity. I contend that it is she who is performing a U-turn today. She quoted the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) from January 1998, but she failed to quote his 11 November 1998 speech to the House in which he made it clear that

"The first thing that will be required to make the Scottish Parliament work properly is stability".—[*Official Report*, 11 November 1998; Vol. 319, c. 387.]

The hon. Gentleman accused the Government of defending instability in seeking to cut the number from 129. I suggest that the hon. Lady is a little confused.

The hon. Lady asks about the independent commission that I propose. That commission will be truly independent. It will have an opportunity to look at all the issues relating to coterminosity, and it will be able to advise on any issue arising from having 129 MSPs and a smaller number of Westminster MPs than at present.

I made available to the hon. Lady a copy of my statement, which makes it quite clear that I envisage that the boundary commission will have reported to me and that an order will have been laid before the House to reduce the number of Members of this House by June 2006, which is the last possible date for a general election. In relation to when that legislation is likely to be introduced to amend the Scotland Act, I would hope that it could be done as soon as parliamentary time allows, but I am not in control of when that might be.

The hon. Lady talks about the lessons of devolution. I say to her that her lecturing the House about that is like the wolf giving Little Red Riding Hood advice on long-term care. The Tories have always opposed devolution, and they sought a no, no vote in the referendum. She asks me why 129 is essential. She will see from the replies to the consultation exercise that the overwhelming majority of people support 129. One of the main reasons for that is proportionality.

I point out to the hon. Lady the fact that the Scottish Conservative party had zero constituency MSPs elected in the 1999 general election in Scotland. As a consequence of 129 and the electoral system, 18 Conservative MSPs were elected. There are few examples in modern history of a party with overwhelming support allowing a diminishing Opposition the chance to have some representation when they cannot win first-past-the-post seats.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross): I, too, thank the Secretary of State for her courtesy in letting me have an advance copy of her remarks. May I give a general welcome to the statement, which I believe is courageous? It shows that she has considered the problem seriously, and proposed a considered and constructive solution to the problems set

[John Thurso]

out in the consultation paper. It also has the advantage of being in line with the recommendations made by my party in Scotland and the only Deputy First Minister that the Scottish Parliament has enjoyed. *[Interruption.]* Maybe they will let him keep the cup next time.

May I refer to three points in particular? First, I recognise the Parliament's success, which I believe is self-evident, especially in how the Committee system has worked and in its proportionality.

Secondly, the statement shows that the changes will be made through an amendment to the Scotland Act 1998. It is important that that take place on the Floor of the House with proper opportunity for Members to debate it.

Thirdly, the Secretary of State proposes to set up an independent commission to consider the problems of coterminosity. May I ask the Secretary of State whether its remit will be as tightly drawn as in her statement, or will it have an opportunity to cast its net a little wider? In particular, will it be able to consider as a possibility amendments to the electoral system—for example, the use of the single transferable vote as a remedy for the problem of coterminosity?

Will the Secretary of State consider devolving the routine review of the Scottish Parliament to a boundary commission for Scotland that is answerable in Scotland and operating within clear guidelines? In that context, I commend an amendment that was successful in the other place—not the one mentioned by the hon. Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait)—which I tabled and which was then rejected by the Secretary of State's predecessors.

We who have supported devolution for more than a century commend the Secretary of State for respecting the spirit of the constitutional convention, and, allowing for suitable questions on detail, we support the thrust of her statement.

Mrs. Liddell: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support for the statement, and for the action that I propose.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the role and remit of the new independent commission. It will be appointed by the United Kingdom Government in consultation with the First Minister of the Scottish Parliament. It will be a non-statutory advisory body. I can only say that it is too early for me to be precise about its remit—a subsequent Government will have to make decisions about that, as no Government can bind their successor—but I would expect it to cover any issues arising from the operation of non-coterminous boundaries, and I would not expect it to be prevented from looking at proportional representation.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned a Scottish boundary commission. I see no reason to change the boundary commission as it currently operates. It is an independent body which does its work very effectively, and—I say this with all respect to the hon. Gentleman—I think that the establishment of a Scottish commission would just be tokenism.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I thank the Secretary of State, for whom I retain the greatest respect, for agreeing that the merit of both the Scotland Act 1998 and the current provision lies in common boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood. Is that not, however, a tacit admission that these proposals will cause chaos and confusion with the different boundaries for Westminster and Holyrood?

While I welcome the establishment of the independent commission, I fear that it will come too late to minimise that chaos and confusion. May I urge the Secretary of State to consider setting it up far earlier?

Mrs. Liddell: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his comments, but I must disagree with him about the chaos and confusion. It is not unusual for Members here to deal with different boundaries in a local government context, and also in the context of the European Parliament. I have, however, taken on board the comments that have been made—not least by electoral administrators, who, while not claiming that non-conterminous boundaries would be impossible, say that additional difficulties would be created.

That brings me to my right hon. Friend's second point. He wants me to proceed earlier with the installation of the independent commission. If I did so, we would be engaged in a theoretical paper exercise on how boundaries would operate. What I propose will provide an opportunity to analyse the practical operation of non-coterminous boundaries, because that will happen anyway. If we assume that the next general election occurs in June 2006, given that the next Scottish parliamentary elections after 2003 will be in May 2007, we shall have a period in which to analyse the operation. If the independent commission feels that the difficulties created are too great, it will be able to propose remedies to the Secretary of State.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Is it not ironic that probably the only part of the House that will give the Secretary of State full support for her proposals is the Scottish National party Bench? Does she not think, though, that what this sorry exercise has done is expose the true enemies of the Scottish Parliament? Her own Back Benchers are now fuelled by hostility and jealousy because they are rightly ignored back home in Scotland, and there is an unholy alliance with the Conservatives, who have at least been consistent in opposing a Scottish Parliament that they never wanted..

Will the Secretary of State now do the right and democratic thing, and ensure that the future size and structure of the Scottish Parliament remain an issue for the democratically elected Members of that Parliament? And while she is thinking about that, can she name one legislature in the world that does not determine its own size?

Mrs. Liddell: The true enemies of the Scottish Parliament are the separatists who seek to take Scotland out of the United Kingdom. I remind the hon. Gentleman that his party did not see fit to be part of the Scottish Constitutional Convention, that it has sought for more than 20 years to undermine the devolution settlement, and that in the general election of 2001 it had

its worst result for almost 20 years. The Scottish people support devolution, and they oppose the separatist instincts of the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues. The people of this country see the Scottish Parliament as strengthening the United Kingdom, not wrecking it.

Mr. David Marshall (Glasgow, Shettleston): Bearing in mind the need for coterminous boundaries, and if the 129 number is so important, will the Secretary of State give serious consideration to rearranging the composition in order to elect two MSPs for each of the proposed new 59 Westminster constituencies, one man and one woman for each? That would give a total of 118 members elected on a first-past-the-post basis, to which could be added 11 list members. They would represent the whole of Scotland, unlike the current system, which involves eight separate regional divisions of seven. Would not that be fairer, more acceptable and more popular than the current situation?

Mrs. Liddell: I thank my hon. Friend for laying out that scenario. In establishing the independent commission, I can hardly say at this stage what its conclusions will be, but there will be nothing to prevent it from looking at his proposal.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Secretary of State has quoted selectively from the debate on the Scotland Bill in 1998. I shall assist her with another quotation, from the former Minister Henry McLeish, who said:

"We also believe that the Parliament could operate effectively with fewer Members"—[*Official Report*, 12 May 1998; Vol. 312, c. 225.]

What precisely has happened to change the Government's mind on that issue? Is not this self-serving consensus purely about jobs for the boys?

Mrs. Liddell: On the question of jobs for the boys, I notice that the hon. Gentleman jumps between the Front Bench and the Back Benches to try to swell Conservative numbers. I have conducted a consultation exercise, and the overwhelming majority of people have supported the retention of 129. They have done so because they believe in proportionality, which creates 18 jobs in the Scottish Parliament for Conservative MSPs who would otherwise have had no political career.

Mr. Jimmy Hood (Clydesdale): May I disabuse my right hon. Friend or any commission that she sets up of the notion of seeking any solution that does not include coterminosity? I shall give one example and invite her to comment. One Lanarkshire seat that is planned under the boundary proposals would consist of 60 per cent. of Clydesdale, and 20 per cent. of each of the two neighbouring constituencies. That would involve one Westminster MP, three individually elected MSPs and 16 list MSPs. I repeat: may I disabuse her and the commission of any notion of moving away from coterminosity?

Mrs. Liddell: It is a fact that, in any event, for a certain period between the general elections for this House and for the Scottish Parliament there will not be coterminous constituencies; indeed, that period will allow the independent commission to take on board the very point that my hon. Friend makes. Should the arrangements prove unworkable, it will be up to the independent commission to come forward with proposals that the then Secretary of State could take into account.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): I, too, acknowledge appreciation for the Secretary of State's sticking with the spirit of the constitutional convention, with which I was very closely involved in its first few years. It is also an important principle, on which the referendum was founded, that a Scottish Parliament must be elected by a proportional system. Any suggestion otherwise, such as that made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), would be totally contrary to the spirit of the convention, and of the referendum voted for by the Scottish people.

The Secretary of State acknowledges that coterminosity will be untidy. We know that, but would not STV—as proposed by my hon. Friend the Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (John Thurso)—resolve two problems? It would do away with the problem of coterminosity, and with the problem of there being two classes of MSP.

Mrs. Liddell: The hon. Gentleman compliments us on sticking to the terms of the constitutional convention's recommendations and to the Scotland Act, and concludes by asking for a different system of proportional representation within that. There is little doubt that if the commission looked at the situation in relation to the Scotland Act, it would conclude that a system of proportional representation was the only way of securing some kind of proportionality. However, I ask the hon. Gentleman to turn his mind to the fact that if we have 129 MSPs, plus a conclusion from the independent commission that there is a need for coterminous boundaries, there will have to be a change of some kind to enable those conclusions to be taken into account.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): Surely one of the easiest solutions to the problem is to amend the Scotland Act to retain the 72 Westminster MPs, given that, over the four years, it has been demonstrated clearly that the work load of the Westminster MP has not in any way diminished. I am also reliably informed by those within the boundary commission that if there are similar boundaries between Westminster and Holyrood constituencies, it will be well nigh impossible to operate a system when it comes to the division of the wards within local government.

Mrs. Liddell: The reason for the number of MPs in this House prior to the introduction of devolution was largely to take account of the fact that Members of this House from Scottish constituencies had the job of scrutinising the separate legislation that was available through the Scottish system. For that reason, we ended up with a situation where the average size of Scottish constituencies was roughly 55,000, compared with 70,000 for English constituencies. It has been recognised from day one of the devolution debate that it would be essential to address the size of Scottish constituencies. The boundary commission has begun its work and must

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report to me between December of this year and December 2006. It is completely independent, and we must await its conclusions.

On my hon. Friend's final point, I fear he may have misunderstood what the boundary commission has said. The boundary commission reviews local government boundaries without regard to the shape of parliamentary constituencies, so it would have no difficulty in coming to conclusions in relation to boundaries if we did not have coterminosity between Westminster and Holyrood constituencies.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I will try to call everybody who has been standing, but one question at a time, and not a debate of the issues, would be very helpful.

Angus Robertson (Moray): I note that the Secretary of State did not take the opportunity to give the House an example of one single normal Parliament in the world that cannot determine its own size. Will she now give the House such an example?

Mrs. Liddell: The Scottish Parliament is a devolved parliament within the United Kingdom and is essential to the maintenance of the United Kingdom. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can point as much as he likes. He is a separatist, whereas I believe in the United Kingdom. The people of Scotland have voted for a devolved Parliament within the United Kingdom.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Two great friends of mine who are twice my size and twice my height have asked what this has to do with me. I want to tell them. The size of the Scottish Parliament is not my business. Representation here is my business, and that of my constituents. I believe that all constituencies throughout the UK should be the same size, and I hope that the commission bears that in mind. Last week, we saw a reduction of 130,000 in the electorate of Northern Ireland. Every Member here should have the same number of constituents, and there should be separate compensation if Members' constituencies cover a large area. It should not be the other way round.

Mrs. Liddell: I note what my hon. Friend says. I want to put it on record that I am not one of the two people twice his size and weight who put pressure on him.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): I entirely endorse the sentiments expressed by the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay). I claim an interest, in that my constituency, with 74,000 electors, is set to disappear in the English boundary review. Will the right hon. Lady accept that she has not made a case for Scottish representatives in this place having smaller constituencies than ours? Constituents would be better served if Labour Members—such as the hon. Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe)—paid more attention to Scottish matters and less to television programmes such as "Coronation Street".

Mrs. Liddell: I have not the foggiest idea what the hon. Lady is talking about. From the beginning of the devolution process, the Government have acknowledged that it would not be possible to continue with the size of representation of Scottish constituencies that obtained prior to devolution. That is why the boundary commission has begun work on the matter. However, the Government will take no lessons from Conservative Members on the operation of devolution. They have done everything in their power to thwart devolution, and for 18 years they put in place at every possible opportunity conditions that mean that the Scottish people resent the Conservatives.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Given the overwhelming consensus of organisations in Scotland, my right hon. Friend has done the right thing by introducing her proposals with regard to the 129 MSPs. She has rejected my carefully crafted solution but, given that it was supported only by Brian Monteith and Margo MacDonald, I can see why. However, setting up the independent commission some time after 2007 could be a mistake. Does my right hon. Friend accept that having the debate about 129 for the past year has been something of a distraction in Scottish politics, and that continuing the debate for the next five years might be even more of a distraction?

Mrs. Liddell: I repeat that I have chosen the period after 2007 because I want to gather practical evidence about how coterminous boundaries work. Any other approach would be a paper exercise and we would end up working out how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. We need practical evidence about coterminosity, and the independent commission needs the best available information when it gives advice to Ministers.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I, too, commend the Secretary of State for her brave and balanced approach, despite the siren voices of self-interest from Labour Back-Bench Members. Will she now turn her searching gaze on her Department of State, which, once this exercise is complete, must surely have outlived its usefulness?

Mrs. Liddell: It is strange that an hon. Member representing a Scottish constituency should seek a reduction in Scotland's voice in government. That is bizarre. I believe in the United Kingdom, and that Scotland's voice should be heard in the Cabinet.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): My right hon. Friend will know that I made a submission similar to the one made by my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), which she seems to have rejected out of hand. From what has been said today, it is clear that my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) made a salient point when he said that we were in for five years of people talking down the arrangement that my right hon. Friend proposes. Will she ensure that the independent commission will be included on the face of the Bill to amend the Scotland Act, and that it will not be possible for someone else to withdraw it at a later date? In addition, will she also ensure that the issues at which the commission will look will also be included on the face of the Bill? In that way, people will know the terms on

which the debate will be conducted over the five years. Otherwise, everyone will just be making up their own rules and talking down my right hon. Friend's solution—which, by the way, I believe to be an absolute shambles.

Mrs. Liddell: I remind my hon. Friend of the constitutional principle that no Government can bind their successor. Decisions on the matter will have to be taken by a subsequent Government, as the next general election will be held in 2006. I say again that an endless paper exercise between now and 2007 would mean that we found ourselves in the sort of argument that my hon. Friend has described. I believe that practical evidence must be gathered. In that way, sound decisions can be taken about the proper operation of democracy in Scotland, both in Holyrood and at Westminster.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest): Can the Secretary of State tell us how much the taxpayer is paying for all these extra MSPs? Does she agree that most people in Scotland think that the money would be better spent on schools and hospitals?

Mrs. Liddell: Does the hon. Lady really want me to go through the Government's increased expenditure on schools and hospitals in Scotland? Shall we talk for a little while about the fact that all 26 of Glasgow's schools are being refreshed in the course of this year? Or shall I tell her that the Barnett formula ensures that the Scottish Parliament and the Scottish Executive have responsibility for determining their priorities? That is as it should be—it is what devolution is all about. The only people for whom jobs have been created are the 18 Scottish Tories who could not win under first-past-the-post system.

Mr. Eric Joyce (Falkirk, West): My right hon. Friend will be aware that much of the scepticism concerning the numbers of MSPs in the Scottish Parliament is created by the cynical practice of the Scottish National party in encouraging list MSPs to pose as constituency MPs. Does she agree that that strategy will completely fail and the scepticism will evaporate when it comes to the test next May?

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend makes a valid point. We need only look at the results of the 2001 election in Scotland. The SNP had its worst result since the mid-1980s; it actually managed to lose a seat to the Tories, which is almost unheard-of, and saw the biggest drop in support of any political party. My proposals are about stability. The SNP wants instability—it is not interested in devolution, simply in breaking up the United Kingdom. We believe that divorce would wreck the prospects for Scottish jobs and the Scottish constitution. The Scottish people have rejected it and this House will reject it again.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): The Scottish Constitutional Convention reached a consensus on proportional representation. Will the Secretary of State confirm that it is still the Government's policy that the Scottish Parliament should be elected by proportional representation? If so, and if the Government are still in power when the independent commission is set up, will they write it into the remit of the commission that it can only examine proportional systems of election?

Mrs. Liddell: I confirm that it is the Government's view that the Scottish Parliament should be elected by a system of proportional representation, but I am not in a position to bind any subsequent Administration. That would be complacent and arrogant of me. However, I believe that when the independent commission looks at the operation of the Scottish Parliament and the need for coterminous boundaries, it will conclude that the system of proportional representation is the only way to ensure that parties which do not succeed in winning first-past-the-post places should be able to be elected to that Parliament to give a balance within the Parliament. There can be very few international examples of a party with the overwhelming support that my party has in Scotland being prepared to give up some of that power in the interests of a more balanced assembly. That is what we did with the establishment of the Scottish Parliament.

David Hamilton (Midlothian): As one who has not been here long and knew beforehand that there would probably be a reduction of MPs, I do not have a problem with the proposal. However, I find it unbelievable that at a time when the boundary commission is recommending that I go coterminous with my council, it is also recommended that 16 MSPs are mirrored against me. The commission has to put in place a mechanism before that happens. My colleagues are right that the proposal must be right for everybody in Scotland, which is not the case at present.

Mrs. Liddell: My hon. Friend is proposing a paper exercise that will not take into account the actual operation of boundaries one way or the other. I return to the point that there will inevitably be a period following the next election for this place and the 2007 Scottish Parliament election when, with the best will in the world, there cannot be coterminosity. I believe that that is the appropriate time for the independent commission to sit.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Will the Secretary of State now answer the question of my hon. Friend the Member for Beckenham (Mrs. Lait) about what hard evidence exists to suggest that 20 Ministers are required to do the job that five used to do prior to devolution? Is it simply a case of jobs for the boys?

Mrs. Liddell: That is a matter for the First Minister and for the Scottish Parliament, but everyone on the Labour Benches remembers what a Tory Scottish Office did to Scotland—not least of which was the poll tax. It is not numbers that matter but quality and commitment to Scotland.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I very much applaud my right hon. Friend's bold stance on stability for the Scottish Parliament, which I firmly believe is required. Coterminosity is extremely important. However, the boundary commission's proposals for the south of Scotland would give us one MP and four first-past-the post elected MSPs. Although I acknowledge my

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right hon. Friend's point that the commission's considerations will go beyond 2007, there could be a six-year gap in which coterminosity does not exist. The simplest way out of the problem would be for my right hon. Friend to accept the boundary commission's proposals but to implement them only at the next but one general election in England and Wales.

Mrs. Liddell: I understand my hon. Friend's strong views on the matter and I have a great deal of sympathy with his position. However, I have to be bound by the recommendations of the independent boundary commission and I cannot say when I shall receive its report. I can only state that it must be made before December 2006. I do not want falsely to raise my hon. Friend's hopes, but I believe that it may be possible to implement the commission's recommendations prior to the next general election.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater): The Secretary of State says that she wants to narrow down changes to the Scotland Act 1998. Will that stop Scottish National party Members or other Members from proposing changes that would amend it? Is she not stifling Parliament's ability to make decisions should there be a need for major changes when the commission has produced its recommendations?

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Act arose from the Scottish constitutional convention, which achieved broad consensus across civic Scotland, involving political parties, the churches, voluntary organisations and the trade unions. The Scottish Conservative party decided not to be part of that constitutional convention—as indeed did the Scottish National party. The Scottish Parliament grew out of that consensus. I shall seek to build on that consensus. That is what the Scottish people wanted and they are entitled to have what they want. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman may slap his thigh in pantomime fashion as much as he wants but we have the support of the Scottish people—his party does not.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): We are keeping the best until last.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has made great efforts to explain that there will be a trial period between the next general election and the report of the commission, when we shall have to go back to the Scotland Act in order to implement the commission's recommendations. May I make another suggestion? Could we have a trial period after the next general election so that we can see how the Act is working? Why do we not leave the Act alone so that it can work as it was supposed to do?

Mrs. Liddell: I am unclear as to my hon. Friend's recommendation. I think that he is recommending the ultimate in instability—reducing the number of MSPs and then restoring the number to 129 after a certain period. It is clear from the responses to the consultation exercise that stability is the key thing that people want. I would have thought that, three and a half years into a constitutional settlement which changes a 300-year-old arrangement, the one thing that we want to achieve is stability. My hon. Friend's suggestion would be a recipe for instability.

Points of Order

5.4 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. At Question Time, the Prime Minister alluded to developments in the fisheries negotiations in Europe. Have you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, been made aware of whether the Government intend to report to the House before it rises as to the conduct of those negotiations? Given that the earliest date that the House may be able to debate any decisions arising from the negotiations is in mid-January, some weeks after draconian cuts may be introduced, what is the procedural position when the House has to debate in retrospect measures that could bring ruination for many coastal communities in the country?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I cannot speculate on the future situation; but as to the present, I have received no notification of the intention of a Minister to report to the House.

Mrs. Marion Roe (Broxbourne): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. As you know, there has been some concern recently about names being improperly recorded at the Telling Desks during a vote. The most recent example is that I have been recorded in *Hansard* on 16 December in column 654 as voting for the Hunting Bill, when purely because I will be one of the Chairmen of the Standing Committee that will consider the Bill, I had to abstain on that occasion in accordance with precedent. Mr. Deputy Speaker, will you please ensure that this mistake is corrected, so that my constituents and the press know that I did not vote on that Bill because of my duty to the House?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sure that the hon. Lady's comment will be noted. I agree with her that it is extremely important for those hon. Members who take on the responsibility of chairing Committees and therefore abide by certain rules that prevent them from voting in connection with the Bills that those Committees are considering that their position is not abused either by inaccuracies in recording their votes or, indeed, in reporting that they have voted when they have not. I hope that that will be put right and that it will not happen again in future.

Orders of the Day

INCOME TAX (EARNINGS AND PENSIONS) BILL

Order for Second Reading read.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 90(6) (Second reading committees), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

INCOME TAX (EARNINGS AND PENSIONS) BILL *[WAYS AND MEANS]*

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 52(1)(a) (Money resolutions and ways and means resolutions in connection with bills),

That, for the purposes of any Act resulting from the Income Tax (Earnings and Pensions) Bill, it is expedient to authorise any incidental or consequential charges to tax which may arise from provisions restating, with minor changes, certain enactments relating to income tax on employment income, pension income and social security income.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

REGULATORY REFORM

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 18(1)(a) (Consideration of draft deregulation orders),

LICENSING

That the draft Regulatory Reform (Special Occasions Licensing) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 17th December 2002, be approved.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Question agreed to.

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill (Programme)(No. 2)

5.6 pm

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I beg to move,

That, in accordance with the Resolution of the Programming Committee of 12th December 2002 and pursuant to the Programme Order of 26th November 2002 relating to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill (Clauses 1 to 4), proceedings in Committee of the whole House shall be brought to a conclusion (so far as not previously concluded) by the times specified in the Table—

Table

Proceedings	*Time for conclusion of proceedings*
Clause 1	two and a half hours after the commencement of any proceedings on a motion relating to the Resolution
Clause 2	five hours after the commencement of such proceedings
Clause 3	five and a half hours after the commencement of such proceedings
Clause 4	six hours after the commencement of such proceedings

It is right that clauses 1 to 4 should be debated today on the Floor of the House. Those clauses provide for referendums to be held about establishing regional assemblies, set out the referendum question, entitlement to vote and the referendum period, and we consider them to be of first-class constitutional importance. The remaining clauses do not raise such issues, and it is appropriate that we will consider them in Committee Upstairs.

The motion proposes a split of time between the clauses. Clause 1, on the power to order referendums, should be concluded two hours after the start of the debate. Clause 2, on the referendum question, should be concluded five hours after the start. Clause 3, on the entitlement to vote, should be concluded five and a half hours after the start, and clause 4, on the referendum period, should be concluded six hours after the start. That indicates that we will probably still be at it a little after 11 o'clock this evening.

That allocation of time has been based, broadly, on the subject matter of each clause and the number of amendments currently tabled to each clause. The split seems to us to be broadly right, allowing about 40 per cent. of the time to consider clause 1—one of the most important clauses in the Bill—about the same proportion of time to consider clause 2, which deals with the referendum question and which has obviously generated a lot of interest, while ensuring that the Committee of the whole House has time to consider the other issues raised by clauses 3 and 4. That is a sensible allocation of time, which should allow full and proper scrutiny of all those issues.

5.8 pm

Mr. Philip Hammond (Runnymede and Weybridge): I shall be very brief. For the record, we are disappointed about the allocation of only one day for the Committee of the whole House to debate a Bill that may have profound constitutional implications.

Having failed to persuade the Government of the need for a further day's debate on the Floor of the House, we very much regret the decision to limit the total amount of time for debate today to just six hours. We regret even more the decision to insert intermediate guillotines, making it almost certain that some of the most important issues arising from the Bill will be debated neither on the Floor of the House, nor in Standing Committee.

However, given the irony that any discussion of the iniquity of the timetable and any Division on it erodes still further the very limited time available for debate, I will do no more than place those concerns on record.

5.9 pm

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I wish to reinforce what my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) has said. To use the Minister's words, this is a matter of first-class constitutional importance. It is therefore welcome that this part of the Bill is debated on the Floor of the House, which I acknowledge. I object, however, to the fact that we are subjecting such an important first-class constitutional measure to a guillotine or timetable.

Of course, the Minister is entirely right to speak of the Bill's importance. Clauses 1 and 2 have the possible effect, for example, of incorporating Lincolnshire into the east midlands region, which Lincolnshire does not want, and could lead to the abolition of the county council in Lincolnshire, which Lincolnshire does not want. It is therefore a matter of substantial importance, and it will also apply to all the shire counties, which are grouped within regions.

I very much object to a process of timetabling. I am bound to say that although Bills are now frequently subject to timetabling, it is rare that we have the opportunity to discuss a motion. Because of the Standing Orders that the House has been bullied into passing, timetable motions, on the whole, are no longer debated, which does not enable Members to protest at the process. I am glad to say, however, that on this occasion we can protest at the process with particular reference to this motion.

My first point is an important one. An implied bargain exists between the electorate and the House that if the electorate accept the obligations of legislation, we at least will do our part in scrutinising the legislation. Inevitably, however, as my hon. Friend said, the timetable process prevents the House from performing that function. Legislation that has not been properly discussed will therefore leave the House to go to the other place, and, no doubt, in the fullness of time, there will be a further timetable motion to deal with the amendments coming from the other place. What kind of democracy is that?

On the second question that we need to ask ourselves, who has decided the terms of the motion? My hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge has made it plain that he and his colleagues wanted two days. He was not—and we are not—allowed two days; we are allowed only one day. What will be the consequence of that? The Executive, who have charge of the Bill, will come to the House and tell us that one day is sufficient. To make sure that we only have that which they want, they will use a whipped vote, should there be a Division, to force that through. I regard that as a disgrace.

Furthermore, if we were to push this motion to a Division, and if right hon. and hon. Members wanted to speak for up to 45 minutes on the matter, that would

come out of the time allocated to the clauses, which are substantial. To take the point even further, clause 1 deals with the important question of the regional assemblies, clause 2 deals with important questions as to the language of the referendum, and substantive amendments have been tabled. If we choose to divide on each of the possible amendments in clause 1 and on stand part, we will vote at least three times, and perhaps more. That will reduce the time available to this House to debate the other clauses.

The truth is that we have got used to this process because we cannot stop it. The Government have got used to bullying the House because they know that they can do so. We should, however, take every opportunity to protest. I will not press for a Division on the matter tonight for the reason advanced by my hon. Friend—I am conscious that that will use up time allocated to the debate. This process, however, is contrary to what I understand democracy to be. It is bad law making and bad democracy, and the Labour Front Bench should be profoundly ashamed of their activity.

5.14 pm

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I shall be brief for all the reasons that have been set out by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham (Mr. Hogg) and my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). I wish to add my voice of protest at the timetable to which the House is being asked to agree and, in particular, at the time allowed to debate clause 1.

The first group of amendments on clause 1 deals with the question of whether the House should agree to a Bill that will introduce referendums on the establishment of regional assemblies before it is known what powers those assemblies will have. We do not know what the implications of establishing assemblies will be for the county councils in Lincolnshire and my neighbouring county of Leicestershire. Those are fundamental questions relating to the governance of my constituents and those of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Sleaford and North Hykeham and to the provision of essential public services in that area.

The timetable asks us, in just two and a half hours, to accept the principle of holding referendums to establish regional assemblies without clear knowledge of the powers that the assemblies will have. Under the timetable motion, the House will have two and a half hours less the time that we take to protest against the motion to scrutinise that proposal. I protest vigorously against the principle that two and a half hours is enough to debate that fundamental and wholly objectionable proposal. However, I do so with so brevity—but none the less passion for that—so that we can move on to deal with the substance of the issue.

5.17 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I shall also be brief in recording my protest at the way in which the Government are timetabling the Bill. Although I protest, I am not surprised at the way in which they are handling the matter. We learned in Standing Committee that—not before the Bill receives Royal Assent, not before it goes to another place and not before it returns to the House for Report and Third Reading—the Government were taking soundings under clause 1 before the Bill had even gone to Standing Committee. Such is the Government's contempt for the proceedings of the House. They do not appear to care that the Bill might be amended on its way through. They assume that it will become law, so they have already issued documents and taken soundings all over the country as to the level of interest in referendums. They did that before the Bill had even reached Standing Committee. If ever there were an illustration that the Government had an overbearing attitude to the House and an arrogance towards its procedures, that would surely be it. That is why I place on record my strong protests at the lack of time that there will be to discuss this important measure today.

5.18 pm

Mr. Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills): The Minister has told us that the Bill is a matter of first importance for the constitution. If it is of first importance for the constitution, I would argue that it is wholly inappropriate to guillotine it. A measure of first importance for the constitution would not have been guillotined until this Government came to office in 1997.

I cannot believe that a local government reorganisation, with limited powers asserted that may indeed undo counties that have been in existence for a long time, is anything more than a local government measure. However, even if my judgment were correct and the Bill were merely a matter of local government reorganisation, I would still argue against a guillotine. Guillotines have become an instrument of the management and denigration of the House. We can no longer debate many of the issues that are of relevance and importance to us. I want to re-emphasise, however, that a matter of first-class constitutional importance cannot necessitate a guillotine.

The Minister and the Secretary of State have argued that the proposal is a balancing measure to the Scottish Parliament and Welsh devolution, but it is not. No one could seriously or rationally argue that. The idea is that it will settle the score and make people in England comfortable with the fact that they are grasping real and relevant powers at a local level. All those are important arguments and should not be discussed under the threat of the curtailment of debate. Around me are eminently rational and reasonable people who want to dispose of the matter appropriately. We do not know the rhythm or time that a debate will take, but every one of us should be concerned whether the abolition of, say, Shropshire or Staffordshire is appropriate.

I seriously oppose what has become the instrument of this "forthwith" Government—the guillotine motion. It is clear from our Order Papers that much of our business is forthwith. We have majoritarianism. It is a freak of parliamentary procedure that we have a 45-minute window of opportunity in which we can express our annoyance and anger at the denigration of Parliament. Ordinarily, the matter could have been contained in the motion that followed immediately on Second Reading. I oppose this guillotine.

5.21 pm

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I support the guillotine motion. I may not be eminent, but I assure the House that I consider myself reasonable.

[Mr. Doug Henderson]

I remember what happened with the Scotland Act 1978 when I was involved in Scottish politics in the 1970s. There was a huge demand in Scotland not necessarily for devolution, but for the devolution debate so that the different arguments could be put. People in Scotland got extremely frustrated that it took Parliament about three years to reach a decision by correctly following the procedures of the time and debating the matter on the Floor of the House. That caused much disillusionment afterwards. I am a bit surprised to hear what the Conservatives have to say because they were the worst losers eventually. The electorate were more cynical about them than they were about even the parliamentary process.

People in the English regions want the issue debated and those in my region of the north-east support the proposal. The Government are offering people a choice. The Bill is enabling legislation that allows a referendum to be held. If people in Lincolnshire do not want to be part of a greater area, they will vote against it.

Mr. Hogg: It is all very well to say that if the people of Lincolnshire vote against the proposal they will not be part of it, but if other people in the area vote in favour of it, they will be.

Mr. Henderson: That is complete tautology. That is bound to be the case in any large area. It is like saying that if people in Westerhope in Newcastle are outvoted by people in the east side of the city—

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): They usually were.

Mr. Henderson: Yes, they used to be. However, I do not accept the right hon. and learned Gentleman's point.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Henderson: No, I want to finish and do not want to deny anyone the chance to speak.

People expect a decision. They want a choice. Given the way in which we have delayed and obfuscated before, we should support the motion.

5.24 pm

Mr. Raynsford: We have heard much synthetic indignation from Conservative Members. The arrangements have ensured full and proper scrutiny of the Bill, which has been the subject of detailed consideration over several days Upstairs. It is a matter of agreement between the usual channels that one day should be allocated—*[Interruption.]* It was agreed that one day should be allocated for a debate on the Floor on the House. We have six hours for that debate, which will allow thorough consideration. Obviously I will be keen to hear the comments and interventions from Opposition Members who have raised their concerns in this preliminary debate. The longer we spend debating the programme resolution, the less time we have to debate the substance of the clauses, so I commend the motion to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill

(Clauses 1 to 4)

Considered in Committee.

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Clause 1

REFERENDUMS

5.26 pm

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move amendment No. 45, in page 1, line 5, at beginning insert 'Subject to subsection (3)'.

The Chairman of Ways and Means (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments:

No. 46, in page 1, line 9, leave out subsections (3) to (8) and insert—

'(3) No order under subsection 1 shall be made unless—

(a) a review of the boundaries of the regions in England has been conducted in accordance with section [regional boundaries]; and

(b) an Act setting out the powers and functions of elected regional assemblies shall have received Royal Assent; and

(c) the Secretary of State has concluded on the basis of the evidence available to him that there is substantial support from the business community within the region for the holding of such a referendum; and

(d) the Secretary of State has commissioned and published a report by an independent auditor expressing his opinion that, on the basis of the information available to him at the time of his report, no additional public expenditure overall would be incurred as a result of the proposed implementation of elected regional assembles and the associate reorganisation of local government in the region'.'.

No. 35, in page 1, line 10, leave out from 'unless' to end of line and insert

'the condition in subsection (4) below is satisfied in relation to the region.'.

No. 43, in page 1, line 10, leave out 'two'.

No. 44, in page 1, line 10, leave out from 'satisfied' to end.

No. 36, in page 1, line 11, leave out 'first'.

No. 24, in page 1, line 11, leave out from 'has' to end of line 12 and insert

'concluded on the basis of the evidence available that it is probable that at least twentyfive per cent.of the persons eligible to vote in a referendum held pursuant to section 1 would vote in favour of an elected regional assembly for the region if such a referendum were held.'.

No. 34, in page 1, line 13, leave out subsection (5).

No. 15, in page 1, line 14, at end add—

'(5A) The third condition is that an Act setting out the powers and functions of elected regional assemblies shall have received Royal Assent.'.

No. 17, in page 1, line 14, at end add—

'(5A) The third condition is that the Secretary of State has concluded on the basis of the evidence available to him that there is substantial support from the business community within the region for the holding of such a referendum.'.

No. 18, in page 1, line 14, at end add—

'(5A) The third condition is that the Secretary of State has commissioned and published a report by an independent auditor expressing the opinion that, on the basis of the information available to him at the time of his report, no additional public expenditure overall would be incurred as a result of the proposed implementation of elected regional assemblies and the associated reorganisation of local government in the region.'.

No. 9, in page 2, line 1, leave out subsections (6) and (7).

No. 10, in page 2, line 12, leave out

'if subsection (6) does not apply'.

No. 23, in clause 2, page 2, line 33, at end add—

'It is not proposed to proceed with the establishment of elected regional assemblies in any region where less than twentyfive per cent.of the persons eligible to vote in a referendum vote in favour of the establishment of an elected regional assembly for the region.'.

Mr. Hammond: In Committee our duty is to examine the detail of the Bill, and that is precisely what we shall do over the next few hours in respect of clause 1, which introduces the arrangements for referendums.

Briefly, and by way of putting some context around these debates, it may be useful if I outline the Conservatives' position on the Government's concept of regional assemblies, which we believe is fatally flawed. It introduces an extra tier of government that is more remote from the people. It will undermine local government. It is based on arbitrary and often meaningless boundaries, which mostly have no resonance whatever with the population. It will struggle, in most cases, to create any real sense of identity, and in practice it will be tightly constrained by central Government and watched over by strengthened Government offices for the regions. It will require a wholesale reorganisation of two-tier local government to boot, including the abolition of many, if not most, of our historic counties.

We would not choose to go down that route. However, we recognise the need to address the question of local government in its widest sense—by that I mean the tiers of government between Westminster and the individual citizen—in England, following the Scottish and Welsh devolution settlements. We recognise too the very real sense in some regions that decisions made in London are too remote and not always responsive enough to local mood.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): Where in the Bill does it say that counties will be abolished? It says that nowhere in the Bill, so is not that idea the misinformation that we normally hear from the Conservative party?

Mr. Hammond: I suspect that the matter will be debated at some length. The Government have made clear in the White Paper their requirement that if regional elected assemblies go ahead, we will have all-unitary local government in those areas. I suggested to the Minister yesterday that he might like to indicate whether a unitary Kent authority with a population of 2 million would be acceptable, and he declined to be drawn, saying that he had an open mind on all these issues. However, I suspect that my right hon. and hon. Friends will have their own views about the likely outcome of local government reorganisation.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham) *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I am mindful of the time, so I will make a little progress if the hon. Gentleman will allow me.

I say to the Minister that this is not a solution for all England, and in their heart of hearts the Government know that. It is a response to the specific concerns of one or perhaps two areas masquerading as a final solution to the English question. We would prefer it if the Government went back to the drawing board and tried to build from established units of local government, rather than seeking to sweep them away. However, we recognise that the Government are committed to the process, and our purpose today is to address some of our specific concerns about the Bill.

5.30 pm

Clause 1 sets out the process for initiating a pre-legislative referendum and the conditions that must be met before one can be held, as well as preparations for the establishment of regional assemblies. On closer inspection, this rather large group of amendments can be whittled down. Amendments Nos. 15, 17 and 18, together with the paving amendments Nos. 43 and 44, effectively duplicate amendments Nos. 45 and 46, but were tabled because it was possible that the Standing Committee would have reached clause 26 before today, in which case amendment No. 46 could not be selected. I am glad that it has been selected, and I shall address it rather than amendments Nos. 15, 17 and 18, as it embodies our preferred solution.

Amendments Nos. 34, 35 and 36 tabled by the Liberal Democrats seek to reduce the conditions of precedent and eliminate the link in the Bill to local government reorganisation. We are sympathetic to the objection to the compulsory unitarisation of England, which the Liberals are targeting. They have correctly identified the problem, but have drawn the wrong conclusion. The correct conclusion is that the Government's proposals for regional government in Britain simply do not work—they either involve the compulsory reorganisation of local government or, in the Liberals' preferred option, the imposition of a third tier of government.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): Amendment No. 46 calls for a review of the boundaries of the English regions, but as they were basically drawn up by the last Conservative Government, would the hon. Gentleman tell us which ones they got wrong?

Mr. Hammond: Yes, in just a moment if the hon. Gentleman would bear with me.

Amendment Nos. 46, 24, 23, 9 and 10 address substantive issues. Amendment No. 46 deals with conditions of precedent that must be met before the Secretary of State can call a referendum in a region. Proposed subsection (3)(a) imposes a requirement for a review of regional boundaries. Members on both sides of the House will know that one of the principal

[Mr. Hammond]

objections to the Government's proposal concerns the unwieldy and incoherent nature of the regions and their disparity in size. The smallest region, the north-east, has a population of about 2.5 million; the largest region, the south-east, has a population of 8 million. The electorate per directly elected assembly member will range from 150,000 in the smallest region to nearly 350,000 in the largest region. People in Cornwall do not identify with Bristol; people in Dover have little in common with Banbury. Arguably, only the north-east has a coherent or readily recognisable regional identity. If the regions are to work, they must be natural entities with a sense of identity.

The hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland) asked why I am dissatisfied with the current regional boundaries, when they were indeed established by the previous Government. However, those regions were established for convenience as a tier of administrative government and, as vastly disparate areas, are simply not suitable for the introduction of democratically elected institutions.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): For the second time in debates on the Bill the hon. Gentleman has said that the Conservatives now recognise that people in the north-east have regional aspirations. Will he tell the Committee how the Conservatives would allow the people of the north-east to realise their legitimate regional aspirations?

Mr. Hammond: We recognise—the hon. Gentleman has heard this before—that people in some parts of the United Kingdom feel that decision making in London is remote from them. We believe that it is essential to strengthen local government to ensure genuine devolution of power, rooted in natural communities in cities and counties where people have a true sense of identity. That is the way to strengthen the system of government in this country.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): How would strengthening local government respond to regional identity, which the hon. Gentleman has conceded exists in the case of the north-east?

Mr. Hammond: I said that regional identity may exist in the north-east. Of the Government's proposed regions, that is the one where, by general consensus, there is most likely to be interest in a regional identity. If the proposal is to work, it must be an all-England solution. That is the point that I was about to make. If the Government want to engage the population, they must start from the bottom and work up.

Mr. Kevan Jones *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I must make progress. We have a very constrained timetable for debate today.

Mr. Davey: On that point—

Mr. Hammond: Very well. I shall give way one more time to the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Davey: I want to explore the hon. Gentleman's logic a little further. He said that there were regional aspirations in the north-east, but that those could be realised only through regional government throughout England. Does he not realise the logical inconsistency of his argument?

Mr. Hammond: No, that is not what I said. I said that if the solution is to be workable, it must be applicable throughout England. It is no good the Government proposing a solution that purports to be a resolution to the question of governance across England, if it applies in only one or, at most, two regions.

Jim Knight *rose—*

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East) *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I shall make some progress. Hon. Gentlemen will have plenty of opportunity to speak later.

Paragraph (a) of the amendment refers to new clause 3, which will be considered in due course in Standing Committee. New clause 3 establishes a review of the regions based on submissions from local authorities. It requires the Secretary of State to invite all local authorities to submit proposals to him for the creation of regions for the purposes of the Bill. It also requires the Secretary of State to invite other persons and bodies that appear to him to represent relevant interests to submit proposals, and to ask the Electoral Commission to comment on those submissions and make proposals to the Secretary of State for the creation of regions, having regard to the desirability of all regions being approximately equal in size—one of the great flaws in the Government's proposal—and having regard also to the need to reflect the identities and interests of local communities.

Mr. George Howarth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I shall certainly support the Opposition in one of their amendments on clause 2. I am considering supporting them on this group. First, however, I should like to hear the hon. Gentleman's thinking. My argument, as someone representing a Merseyside constituency, is that Merseyside does not fit neatly into the fictional north-west. If I supported the hon. Gentleman on amendment No. 46, and in the unlikely event that it was carried, would that, in his opinion, enable Merseyside to come up with a totally different solution?

Mr. Hammond: That is the purpose of paragraph (a) of amendment No. 46 and new clause 3, which I am sure the hon. Gentleman has studied. Essentially, the local authorities in the proposed regions would be invited to make their own proposals. The Electoral Commission—not the Secretary of State—an independent body that already controls the boundary committee and has expertise in these matters, would consider those proposals and present to the Secretary of State a proposal for a sensible structure of regions that would allow identities such as the one about which the hon. Gentleman is concerned to be effectively recognised.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman pointed out that the original boundaries were set purely

for administrative convenience. He says that the proposal in new clause 3 is to establish regions of approximately the same size, but are not regions that reflect regional identities bound to vary in size? He is simply creating regions that reflect administrative convenience, not identity.

Mr. Hammond: I accept entirely that there will always be a tension, but it is no good the Minister nodding. What he is proposing are regions that do not reflect any sense of identity. What does Banbury have in common with Dover? We have already heard that the people of Lincolnshire do not want to be included in the east midlands. We have all heard in Committee that the people of Shropshire do not regard themselves as being in the west midlands. The problem already exists, and it is compounded by the huge disparity in size between the different regions that the existing structure proposes.

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Will he clarify whether he proposes that the boundary review should cover London, as that is not clear in the amendment?

Mr. Hammond: Of course not. The subject under discussion is the situation in England, excluding Greater London, which has been dealt with in previous legislation, as the Minister is well aware.

The proposals seem the sensible and obvious way of proceeding if there is a genuine desire for an all-England workable regional government solution. It is the absurdity and arbitrariness of the boundaries that have generated the most hostility to the Government's proposals. Their only response is simply to say that it would take too long to conduct a boundary review before implementing a referendum, but they are prepared to delay a referendum while a local government review is carried out.

Paragraph (b) of the subsection set out in the amendment deals with our concerns about pre-legislative referendums. My right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) pointed out that we are asking the public to vote for a pig in a poke. They have no idea of what powers regional assemblies would have or what authority they would represent. We must trust the Minister when he says that the detail is in a White Paper or consultation document, but we would rather see the measures in place to ensure that people are aware of precisely what the powers and responsibilities of the regional assemblies would be if they opted for them, including the tax-raising powers.

There is an almost bizarre contrast between the Government's absolute and unshakeable commitment to ensuring that local government reorganisation is done and dusted, reported on and established in black and white before a referendum is held and their apparent failure to set out the substance of the powers that will be given to the regional assemblies that will be created if the referendum is successful. People will be asked to vote when the substantive issues are still unclear, but we are told that the subsidiary issue must be resolved first. Incidentally, neither do the Government propose that the electoral boundaries of the districts used in a region for the election of regional assemblymen will be defined before a referendum takes place.

Paragraph (c) would require there to be substantial business support in a region before a referendum is called. The Bill already provides for a so-called test of an appropriate level of interest in holding a referendum, although that is undefined. One of the Government's principal arguments in favour of regional assemblies has been that they will boost regional economic growth. At the very least, that case has not been proven. Indeed, in Scotland, the opposite appears to be the case. Scotland has enjoyed negative—if that is the right word—GDP growth in the fourth quarter of 2001 and the first quarter of 2002, which is the classic definition of a recession. Overall, in the year up to the second quarter of 2002, its GDP grew by just 0.3 per cent., which is not much more than a 10th of growth of the UK as a whole.

Mr. Doug Henderson (Newcastle upon Tyne, North): I hate to refer back to the Scottish issue again, but I must take issue with the hon. Gentleman. I do not think that any Scottish industrialist or business person—I know quite a few of them—would argue that the reason for the relative slowness of the Scottish economy is the Scottish Parliament. It is clearly due to the decline in the technology industries. There is no argument about that in Scotland, so I do not know where he got that idea from.

Mr. Hammond: I shall tell the hon. Gentleman: I got it from the CBI, which is using Scotland as an example that England should not follow, as it shows how additional bureaucracy and layers of government can impose burdens that restrict economic growth.

I am not surprised that the hon. Gentleman is confused about that, because it appears that the Deputy Prime Minister is also confused. On 20 November, referring to my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), he said:

> "He must have been asleep for months, during which time the CBI and other representatives of industry have made it clear that they are supportive of the proposals."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 630.]

For the record, and to clear up any residual confusion in the mind of the Deputy Prime Minister, I shall quote from a Confederation of British Industry press release issued on 23 September, which stated that its members

> "have given 'a vote of no confidence' in government plans to develop the English regions."

In case that was not clear enough for the Deputy Prime Minister, the director general of the CBI bothered to go all the way to the Labour party conference to say it again. There, he said:

> "Business doesn't believe that regional assemblies will deliver . . . There is a real danger they could make a bad situation even worse."

I would suggest to the Minister, therefore, that it was perhaps not my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch who had been asleep for all those months but the Deputy Prime Minister, at the Labour party conference. Perhaps those who attend Labour party conferences will have some sympathy with him.

5.45 pm

Regional assemblies will take control of the regional development agencies. The creation of elected regional assemblies is thus a key issue for business in the regions,

[Mr. Hammond]

and business interests have to be taken into account. Business will clearly have no vote in a referendum, if one is called, so it is right and proper that the Secretary of State should be obliged to establish—before calling a referendum—that there is substantial business support for such a referendum in the region in question.

Mr. Derek Foster (Bishop Auckland): The hon. Gentleman is now arguing that the regional assemblies taking responsibility for the regional development agencies is a substantial reason for the CBI being against the proposal. I remember distinctly, however, having campaigned for regional development agencies for 25 years, that the CBI was almost entirely opposed to RDAs—not only in the north-east, but almost everywhere else as well. This therefore seems like complete opportunism on the part of the CBI, and the Tory party is erecting it as a hurdle for the Bill to jump over.

Mr. Hammond: It is interesting that Labour Members have spent most of the last five years citing the CBI's support for everything that they are doing, whenever the CBI has made observations that the Government find helpful. Now that the CBI has made an objective observation expressing the views of business in the regions about this proposal, Labour Members want to demonise it. That is very telling.

Jim Knight *rose—*

Mr. David Borrow (South Ribble) *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I shall make some progress if I may, because there is quite a lot to get through, and I am sure that other hon. Members will want to contribute to this debate, which is only one of the three debates that we wish to have in the first two and a half hours of our allocated time.

Paragraph (d) in amendment No. 46 seeks to introduce a requirement for the Secretary of State to produce an independent auditor's report. The Labour party manifesto of 1997 stated:

> "In time we will introduce legislation to allow the people, region by region, to decide in a referendum whether they want elected regional government. Only where clear popular consent is established will arrangements be made for elected regional assemblies. This would require a predominantly unitary system of local government, as presently exists . . . and confirmation by independent auditors that no additional public expenditure overall would be involved."

That was Labour's commitment. Our charge is that the Bill will create an extra tier of government, more bureaucracy, more red tape, more tax, more spending, more politicians, more talk, more expensive headquarters buildings and, if Labour controls any of the assemblies, no doubt more cronyism and sleaze as well.

The Minister must accept this amendment, because its words are not my words, but the words of the Labour party manifesto, copied into the amendment. The Labour party, when it was bidding for the job of government, said that there would be independent audit to ensure no additional public expenditure; now that it has the job, it should stick to its word; otherwise, the Minister must tell us how much additional public money and additional tax this whole edifice is going to cost us.

Amendment No. 24 seeks to introduce a slightly more objective test to replace the utterly meaningless one in clause 1(4) of the Bill, which states:

> "The first condition is that the Secretary of State has considered the level of interest in the region in the holding of such a referendum."

What does "considered the level of interest" mean? Does it mean that, in the time it takes his Jaguar to get from New Palace Yard back to his departmental office, the Secretary of State has had a think about it in the back of his car? This is no test at all. There is no requirement that the interest be substantial and no requirement even that that interest be determined as representing a certain level of support for the proposals. There could be a lot of opposition to the Bill, but it would be perverse indeed to use that as a ground for calling a referendum.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Does my hon. Friend agree that there must be interest across a particular region, not just in a small area of it?

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend makes a good point. That issue, in a slightly different form, will be addressed by a subsequent amendment, and I am sure that he will have something to say about it.

I suggest that it will be sensible to hold a referendum only if there is substantial support for elected regional assemblies, if that is what the Secretary of State has determined. I also suggest that, in practice, that is the political judgment that the Deputy Prime Minister will make, so let us include it in the Bill. It is hardly conceivable that he will consider the support in a region, determine that it is overwhelmingly hostile and then call a referendum. Instead of having woolly words that mean effectively nothing, let us get the Bill to say what is going to happen.

Amendment No. 24 would require the Secretary of State to consider on the evidence available to him the probability of a certain level of support for a yes vote. However, the idea that some threshold of support for the proposal—the Minister for Local Government and the Regions prefers to call it a hurdle—has to exist before we enter into such wholesale constitutional restructuring caused angst in Standing Committee.

Originally, I expressed that idea in amendments as a requirement for a minimum percentage turnout. The Minister, in fairness to him, pointed out that that would have perverse outcomes, as it would create an incentive for people opposed to the proposition to abstain. We listened to what he had to say, went away and reformulated the threshold concept around a percentage of the electorate recording a yes vote, which would not produce perverse incentives such as the one which he suggested.

We have chosen 25 per cent. of the eligible electorate voting for the proposition, but that is contentious. Many of my hon. Friends will, I suspect, think it too low a threshold, but the Minister says that it is ridiculous to set any threshold at all. What is ridiculous is postulating a major constitutional change on the back of the

support of a tiny fraction of the electorate. The burden must be on those who propose to change the status quo to show support for that change.

Jim Knight: I am interested in why the hon. Gentleman has chosen 25 per cent. I assume it is because he thinks that being unable to achieve 25 per cent. voting yes would mean no legitimacy on such an important constitutional matter. Given that President Bush got less than 25 per cent. of the votes of those of voting age in the United States presidential election—I have checked the facts—does he regard President Bush as having no legitimacy?

Mr. Hammond: I can tell the hon. Gentleman exactly why I have chosen 25 per cent. as a figure to put before the Committee. My elementary mathematics tells me that 25 per cent. represents a simple equality of half the electorate voting. He is trying to equate an advisory referendum with an election, and he well knows that we have already had that debate in Standing Committee. Interestingly, perhaps, the 25 per cent. threshold would have legitimised the Scottish and Welsh referendums, but not, by a small margin, the Greater London referendum.

Mr. Borrow: The amendments are about the judgment that the Secretary of State would make of the support in a region for a referendum, but a subsequent amendment tabled by the hon. Gentleman calls for an all-England referendum in which all regions would vote on the same day. If this proposal is accepted, I assume that he will withdraw the amendment on an all-England referendum?

Mr. Hammond: I assure the hon. Gentleman that if the Minister rises to his feet to announce that he has suddenly seen the light and wants to accept amendment No. 46, I shall immediately go into a huddle with my hon. Friends. We may well want radically to change what we are putting before the Committee.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): My hon. Friend is something of a high-hurdler and I am a bit of a high-hurdler as well, but the Government are distinctly low-hurdlers. He will recall the threshold to trigger referendums on directly elected mayors and no doubt speculate as to the turnout in those elections and their unsatisfactory nature for the Labour party, particularly in the north-east.

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend astutely identifies an issue. The Minister's difficulty is that he does not like 25 per cent., but he has to agree—indeed, he has agreed—that, in principle, there needs to be a certain level of participation and a certain level of support for the proposition to be legitimised. However, he has so far successfully avoided putting a number on that, and he will not say whether a plurality of turnout of 10 or 20 per cent. would be enough to legitimise such a major constitutional change. I hope that we shall hear him speak on that subject this evening. Let him suggest the appropriate threshold for change.

Mr. George Howarth: Following the intervention of the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), perhaps I should say that I was a high-jumper at school. I suspect that, after today, I will be for the high jump with my Whips. Amendment No. 24 says:

"on the basis of the evidence available . . . it is probable that at least twenty-five per cent. of the persons eligible to vote in a referendum . . . would vote in favour".

How should that be judged?

Mr. Hammond: Unfortunately, we are constrained by the Bill's architecture, as is the hon. Gentleman. That is a test that the Secretary of State would have to apply before calling a referendum. When we debate clause 2, the hon. Gentleman will see that we have sought to address a yes vote of less than 25 per cent. of the eligible electorate, whatever the Secretary of State's judgment in advance of a referendum. In fact, if the hon. Gentleman bears with me, I shall address that point now by referring to amendment No. 23, which is in this group. It deals with the test that the Deputy Prime Minister would have to apply before calling a referendum, but he would still be free to go ahead with creating an elected regional assembly if the turnout were very low—for example, if only 20 per cent. were achieved and 11 per cent. of the electorate voted yes.

Sadly, owing to the nature of the Bill, there is no scope to introduce a test for setting up regional assemblies, so we have tabled this amendment, which would add to the preamble to the question a statement of intent from the Government. I do not often offer to draft such statements for them, but on this occasion I thought I would. That statement is that the Government would not intend to proceed if less than 25 per cent. voted yes.

Some of my hon. Friends may think that I am naïve to assume that the Government would feel bound in any way, shape or form just because they made a statement of intent. Consider their 1997 manifesto commitment and the litter of other broken pledges and failed targets that surround them. However, it is the best that I can do within the constraints of the Bill's architecture. I hope that it allows other Members to address the substantive issue.

That brings me to amendments Nos. 9 and 10, which are offered in the alternative, as my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) would say in his lawyerly way in Standing Committee. If the Government reject amendments Nos. 46 and 24 and leave in place the absurd non-test of clause 1(4), which states that

"the Secretary of State has considered the level of interest",

without setting any parameters as to what he has concluded, amendments Nos. 9 and 10 would at least tighten the process of consideration. Subsections (6) and (7), which those amendments would delete and amend, say that the Secretary of State has considered the level of interest if he orders the referendum within two years of ordering a local government review.

So provided that the Secretary of State made such an order within two years of setting off a local government review, he would be deemed to have carried out that consideration, whether he had done so or not. Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 would remove those paragraphs and require the Secretary of State, before ordering a review, always to consider the items specified in clause 1(8), namely,

"views expressed and information and evidence provided to him",

[Mr. Hammond]

and

"such published material as he thinks appropriate."

I would not have thought that that was a particularly onerous task for the Secretary of State, and it would make his judgment reviewable at least in theory, which his decision under subsection (4) almost certainly would not be.

6 pm

Mr. Clelland: I do not want to make a long speech. I merely want to get to the bottom of the Conservatives' motives. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) said a few moments ago—I think I quote him accurately—"We want to dispose of this matter appropriately". That, I believe, is what the Conservatives want to do: they want to dispose of the matter altogether. They probably think that a wholesale reorganisation of regional boundaries, if it happened, would take so long that a general election would be upon us which, in their own pathetic minds, they imagine they might have a chance of winning. While that is not impossible, of course, it is very unlikely.

I see no need for a review of regional boundaries. As I said earlier, the current boundaries were drawn up by the last Conservative Government, who seemed to think them appropriate then.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I would be entirely content for there to be a Government office for the west midlands for statistical and administrative purposes, but I would not be content with a severing of the link with Gloucestershire, which is important in the context of the Three Choirs Festival and the three counties showground. I would not be content to be run by Birmingham. Administration and government are very different. I wish the hon. Gentleman would understand that crucial distinction.

Mr. Clelland: I think I understand it quite well. I was about to say that as far as I can see there is nothing to prevent any Government or Secretary of State from making proposals to change regional boundaries in the future. We are not drawing up boundaries for ever. Indeed, once we have regional government regions themselves may well suggest boundary changes, and there will be nothing to prevent such changes.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): The Minister said that it would take a year to review local government. The regions can be dealt with at the same time: that would certainly not take longer than a year. The process will not exactly be prolonged. Does it not make much more sense to sort out the boundaries before proceeding further? The hon. Gentleman's region contains perhaps 1.6 million people, and he may be content with his boundary, but the south-east is very much larger and shares no integument across its boundaries.

Mr. Clelland: I do not share the hon. Gentleman's optimism. I think the process would take a great deal longer. I also think the Conservatives know fine well that their proposals would mean the end of regional government this side of a general election. That is what this is all about.

Andrew George: Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that he may be expressing a self-interested view? I have made it clear that I am happy for the north-east to proceed as quickly as possible, but there is not a settled belief in many other so-called regions that the boundaries are acceptable. Whether there is a one-off wide-ranging review, or whether the north-east goes ahead and the "difficult" areas become a part of a separate review by the Secretary of State or the boundary commission, the issues need to be addressed; otherwise there will be no regional government in the bulk of England.

Mr. Clelland: I think that if the Conservatives get their way and the Liberals are minded to support them, there will indeed be no regional assemblies. But if the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that I should declare an interest when defending what is best for my region, I plead guilty. I certainly believe that regional government would be good for the north-east.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) prayed in aid the director general of the CBI, who apparently said that businesses were not keen on the idea of regional government. The director general recently told the Deputy Prime Minister's Department that most businesses considered the planning control system to be a major burden on new business development. A later survey found, however, that most businesses ranked it 13th out of 15 in terms of importance. I do not think that the director general of the CBI necessarily always represents the views of his members.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): This is a very timid Bill, given that it establishes no more than a shell of regional government. One of the most disappointing aspects that emerged in the Standing Committee was the fact that the Government see it as a final settlement rather than a stepping stone to the devolving of real power from this place down to the regions. I must tell Labour Members who share our wish for such devolution that this will produce no more than a weak imitation, which is not intended to go any further.

More worrying, so much is wrapped up in the Bill that it has itself reduced the chances of success in referendums. Certain elements of the Government—perhaps in No. 10—who do not want regional government may have had a hand in this, as under the Bill failure is almost certain in some if not most of the referendums. We want regional government and we want referendums to be won, although not with the boundaries proposed in the Bill.

Our amendments Nos. 35, 36 and 34 seek to decouple local government reform from regional government, for a good reason. As I have said, we want referendums to be won. A single question linking the two issues will cause people to vote "no", not because they do not want regional government but because they do not like the local government reform that is being foisted on them.

Despite what was said by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), we like the principle of unitary authorities, but we do not think

they should be imposed on local people from the centre. Local people should have a choice. It could be provided in one referendum or there could be a separate vote—various procedures are possible—but the decoupling is necessary.

Let us take the example of a two-tier authority such as Worcestershire. If there were a referendum in the west midlands, most people in Worcestershire, who might not want local government change, could find themselves ruled out because the overwhelming majority of those in Coventry, Birmingham and West Bromwich can vote for local government change in Worcestershire. The people in Worcestershire could be overruled by those already in unitary authorities.

Mr. Jim Cousins (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central): Does the hon. Gentleman not see that the toughness and definiteness of the choice that must be made between historic identification with a county and future identification with a region is precisely the answer to the trumped-up Conservative amendments?

Matthew Green: I will come to the amendments tabled by the Conservatives. There could have been grounds for our supporting them, but they have phrased them in such a way that they would not achieve what they set out to achieve.

Mr. Luff: The hon. Gentleman knows that I disagree on the question of regional government, but does he agree that the people of Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley and Wolverhampton face no tough choices, because they are already in unitary authorities? The tough choices are for the people of the counties of Worcestershire, Shropshire, Herefordshire and Warwickshire, but they can be overridden by the majority, who are already in unitary authorities. That is why the proposal is so profoundly undemocratic.

Matthew Green: Absolutely, and we can see similar situations throughout the country. We recognise that there is strong demand for a regional assembly in the north-east. People in Northumbria may not be particularly enthusiastic about local government change, yet it will be forced on them by a majority of people in Newcastle and elsewhere.

Jim Knight: Can the hon. Gentleman tell my constituents in Dorset how many representatives he thinks that they need? Many of them have a parish or town councillor, a district councillor, a county councillor, a Member of Parliament and seven members of the European Parliament. If we add in this extra layer of government without taking one away, they will have, through the regional chamber, a representative attached to the area in which they live, as well as the top-up members. That is ridiculous.

Matthew Green: What we are saying is that we should trust local people to be able to decide what they want. Local people will instinctively oppose having too many representatives, but why not trust them, rather than saying, "We know what's best for everyone around the country, so we'll tell them"? On a more serious point, if we have proper regional devolution in England and some powers are taken away from this place, we ought to look at reducing the number of MPs. Lots of people have been banging on about jobs, but in that regard perhaps we should be focusing on this place, rather than on local councils.

As I said, the purpose of our three amendments—we will seek a vote, if we may, on amendment No. 34—is to decouple the process of local government reform from that of regional government. It is not simply that we are worried about the effect on a regional government referendum; we are also concerned about the fact that one test is the level of interest, which the Minister must discover. In fact, we in Shropshire would like a unitary Shropshire. It consists of five districts and one county, and all the political parties are in agreement in wanting a unitary Shropshire. We do not want to have to wait for that for a long time, but at this rate the only way that we will get it is through a regional government referendum.

The Minister has made it clear on numerous occasions that there is no other way that we are going to get a unitary Shropshire. However, if he judges that the level of interest in regional government across the west midlands does not justify a referendum, and he continues to do so for some years to come, we will never get local government reform in Shropshire. The decoupling process works in both directions. There are some areas that need local government reform, but which cannot wait for a regional government referendum; likewise, in other areas people would vote against regional government not because they oppose it, but because of the problems associated with local government reform.

I want to touch on the two substantive Conservative amendments—Nos. 46 and 24—that, by their own admission, form the crux of this group. In theory, we have a lot of sympathy with elements of amendment No. 46, particularly that concerning regional boundaries. Although we like to tease the Conservatives that the boundaries for the current regions are theirs, if we are frank, the reality is that they established them for purposes other than for elected regional assemblies. As it happens, the boundaries that they drew up in the north-east probably do match the aspirations of the people there, but in many parts of the UK such boundaries do not. It is clear that this is an issue in Cornwall, and in Committee we touched on the question of the Isles of Scilly. One of the points of regional government is to bring local government closer to the people, but elements of local government control in those places would move from London—in some cases, from the Isles of Scilly or from Cornwall, because sadly, the principle works in both directions—to Bristol.

6.15 pm

I am not an expert in these matters, but I understand that by most transport links it takes an awful lot longer to get from the Isles of Scilly to Bristol than it takes to get to London. That would lead to a rather odd situation.

Jim Knight: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way for a second time. I have two questions for him. First, why does he cite Bristol as the base for the south-west, given that it is highly possible that it would be Exeter, which is certainly much more straightforward for people from the Isles of Scilly to get to? Secondly,

[Jim Knight]

why does he seek to decouple the boundary reviews of local government, while supporting the coupling of reviews of regional boundaries? He wants to simplify matters for the elector by uncoupling, but now he seeks coupling. That seems contradictory.

Matthew Green: I am slightly lost as to the meaning of the hon. Gentleman's second point. I mention Bristol only because the Government's administrative region for the south-west has its central offices there, and I believe that the quango regional assembly also meets there. I admit that another place could be chosen, but Bristol seems a reasonable assumption. However, before we get too excited about what the regions can or cannot choose to do, we should bear in mind that if the assemblies follow the terms of the Government's White Paper, they will not even be able to choose their own health advisers; they will have to accept the person that the Secretary of State appoints. Indeed, the regions may not even have the power to decide where the assemblies sit.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Given that the assemblies will have so little power, why should they not just hire a charabanc and tour round the regions, saving us all the costs associated with the Scottish Parliament?

Matthew Green: The right hon. Gentleman makes his point well.

In other regions, boundary issues may well arise. Frankly, in my own region the people of Shropshire, of Herefordshire and of Worcestershire do not feel that they are part of the west midlands; however, the people of the north-east probably do feel that they are part of the north-east region. In my view and the view of many in Shropshire, it would probably make a lot more sense for Shropshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Gloucestershire, which share a common heritage, to be grouped together. Perhaps other people would say the same of their counties. My region consists of 1.7 million people, which is not that far off the population of the north-east. However, we cannot possibly consider such a grouping because the regional boundaries as laid down are sacrosanct.

Mr. Adrian Flook (Taunton): Has the hon. Gentleman calculated how many regions England would consist of if his amalgamation of more local councils were replicated throughout the rest of the country?

Matthew Green: No, because I do not consider it not right for me to go round the country drawing lines on maps; however, the Government obviously think that they can do so. That is the point of having a review—we would not want to prescribe the total number of regions, or their size.

We have heard that the south-east, with a population of 8 million, is the largest region judged by those terms, but I think that all of us accept that it is probably also the region with the least well-defined regional identity. Perhaps that is why enthusiasm for regional government appears to be lowest in the south-east.

Mr. Derek Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Green: I shall make some progress, if I may. Perhaps what the south-east needs is to be broken up into a couple of regions. That might make a lot more sense, and as a result some of people's objections—even, ultimately, of Conservative Members—would disappear.

On the Conservatives' approach to this issue, amendment No. 46 wraps up with boundary reviews lots of other aspects that are perhaps undesirable. They are proceeding by way of reference to new clause 3—the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge has touched on it—which we are not debating today. It is rather odd that the new clause should refer to the desirability that all regions be of approximately equal size. I am not entirely clear whether that means in terms of population or area. Population might be the more sensible of the two; we can think of plenty of reasons why authorities being the same size in terms of area might not make sense. For example, the south-west is relatively under-populated, whereas the metropolitan areas of the west midlands are densely populated. However, even if the proposal referred to population, we would struggle to get natural communities from it. One of the reasons why we are unable to support amendment no. 46 is that the Conservatives have gone about the matter in an undesirable way.

Mr. Raynsford: I have been following the hon. Gentleman's argument with some interest and his most recent remarks with a certain amount of sympathy. Clearly he would like a major review of boundaries to be undertaken. Does he have a view on the minimum size that would make a region viable? Specifically, given the presence of his hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) in the Chamber, would he consider Cornwall sufficiently large to be a viable region in its own right?

Matthew Green: That is exactly what a review would look at. *[Interruption.]* I do not have a view because I do not know a lot about Cornwall and its viability as a separate region. My hon. Friend would know a lot more about that.

Andrew George: Does my hon. Friend accept that the smallest size that a region could be is no smaller than the largest tier of local government? If we raise our eyes above the level of the parish and the often insular debate within the UK and look at the wider world, we see a variety of regions of different sizes in different countries that work perfectly well. Can we not accept that there are regions—and nations in some cases—in other parts of the world that have populations smaller than that of Cornwall?

Matthew Green: My hon. Friend makes his point exceedingly well and that is the sort of issue that we would want a review to look at. We believe that such a review could be concluded within about 12 months.

Mr. Hammond: The hon. Gentleman has attacked the phrasing of the new clause. Does he accept that the new clause would require the Electoral Commission to have regard to the desirability of all regions being of approximately equal size, as well as the need to reflect identities? According to the Bill's own language, that exact same requirement would be placed on the

boundary committee. It is not an absolute requirement, but a question of "having regard." In addition, we have already had this debate in Committee.

Matthew Green: The hon. Gentleman is muddling up regional government and local government. Even within local government, we see different sizes of unitary authority. Rutland is the smallest of the unitary authorities now. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that Rutland should not be a unitary authority? People in Rutland should perhaps know of this new move from the Conservatives.

Amendment No. 24 would put a threshold in the Bill, but I cannot see why the Conservatives are keen on having a threshold. Frankly, the only thing they are currently good at is going around the country stirring up apathy. Given that they are led by the quiet man, it is no surprise that they want to see as little activity as possible.

The key point is that the referendums are indicative and not binding. The Minister—and, presumably, at least part of this House—must make a decision before a regional assembly is set up, as the Minister will probably confirm when he winds up.

Setting a threshold of 25 per cent. voting in favour in a referendum is not putting a hurdle before the Minister; ultimately, it is putting a hurdle before the House's ability to decide things for itself. That is what I find strange about the amendment. The referendums are not the final say; they are indicative. Once again, we will not support the Conservatives on amendment No. 24. I only hope that when the Bill gets to another place, we might be able to find agreement on amendments on boundaries on which we can agree. It is a shame that the relevant amendments that we tabled were not selected.

Mr. Stephen Dorrell (Charnwood): I want to address my remarks—reasonably briefly, I hope—to amendment No. 46, which has been spoken to by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). The amendment deals directly with the principle of a pre-legislative referendum. The hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, just said that we did not need to worry because the referendums were merely indicative and advisory. He said that a yes vote in a region would come back to the House for a decision, and that would be the decisive moment.

With respect, that ignores the effect of the political dynamic. If a referendum in a particular region resulted in a vote in favour of the establishment of an assembly, there would be a strong political dynamic to carry out the expressed wishes of the electorate of that region. It is for that reason, and because I recognise the power of such a referendum result, that it is important for the House to consider what it is being asked to agree to as a principle to be put before the electorate in one of the referendums envisaged by the Bill.

Andrew George: Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that that political dynamic or momentum would have any legitimacy—and that the Minister would give support—if the turnout were less than 10 per cent.?

Mr. Dorrell: I agree, which is why I support the introduction of some hurdle.

It is hard to imagine a more fundamental question for the House to address before agreeing to the principle of holding a referendum than the provision of a proper answer to the question as to what should be the powers and functions of such an assembly were it to be established, whatever the boundaries. I find it difficult to engage in an argument about what the boundaries should be when we are still wholly ignorant of the structure of powers and functions that the electorate are being asked to envisage. I do not regard this as a pedantic piece of small print and I make no apology for asking the House to pause to consider which issues would have to be addressed in the context of a referendum debate.

The services involved in the combination of the establishment of a regional assembly and consequent local government reorganisation—which, as the explanatory notes make clear, the Government regard as a precondition for allowing a referendum to go ahead—include the local education service, which makes up 60 per cent. of everything done by county councils in shire counties.

The second most important area in the provision of local services in a two-tier authority is the social services department. Conceivably, by virtue of involving social services in the reform—and by virtue of what the Government have said about the probability of power being delegated away from central Government towards regional assemblies—the debate would have to involve the future structure of health provision in the regions as well. That is not to mention the delivery of transport services around the regions. Those are the four key areas on which domestic political debate concentrates—the delivery of education, health, social services and transport. All four services would be caught up in the reorganisation that would follow a yes vote in a referendum on the establishment of a regional assembly.

6.30 pm

The House is being asked to agree to a proposal that a precondition for any assembly referendum should be that the boundaries must be sorted out. However, no provision or recommendation has been made about the consequences of a yes vote for the delivery of the core public services that I have listed.

The Government have made two potentially contradictory proposals about the consequences of reorganisation for those services. First, as I have noted already, the Government have said that more of the powers going to the regional assemblies would come from central Government than from the current tiers of local government. Secondly, it is clear that, in any area in which a referendum is held, there must be a parallel proposal for the establishment of a unitary authority.

One Labour Member contended that that does not mean necessarily that county councils must be abolished, but it is hard to see how a unitary local government structure based on the principle that districts should be abolished and that power should be concentrated in counties could be delivered. That proposal is unlikely to command wide public support. We should not agree to allow referendums on

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establishing regional assemblies to go ahead without clear Government proposals about the consequences for delivery of the four core services that I listed earlier.

Jim Knight: I have some sympathy for the right hon. Gentleman's argument, and those problems are touched on in the White Paper. I should like a draft Bill to be published in the next Session of Parliament, so that they could be subject to pre-legislative scrutiny. Would the right hon. Gentleman support that as a happy compromise, or perhaps a middle way? I also want to respond to what he said about unitary counties. It would be perfectly reasonable to take a look at the current district structure of where I live in Dorset. The districts of Purbeck and of Weymouth and Portland are not viable, in terms of their size. People are more emotionally attached to the historic county of Dorset than to the districts, and services are run on that basis.

Mr. Dorrell: I do not want to get into an argument about what the focus of a proposed unitary structure should be. I want to pitch my tent firmly on the territory that the Government should be clear about what they are proposing before they ask people to vote. The hon. Gentleman suggests that a draft Bill should come before the House before the referendum programme begins. I should be the first to agree with that proposition, which represents a huge step forward. However, the House must take seriously its function of probing the Government's proposals, calling the Government to account and setting down the terms under which this huge proposed reorganisation of the structure of local government should be allowed to go ahead. Hon. Members must not simply hope, as the hon. Gentleman does, that the Government might—out of the goodness of their heart and if it fits in with the timetable of the parliamentary draftsmen—introduce a draft Bill before a referendum is held.

The referendums will be about the reorganisation of the delivery of core public services. Before any are held, the House must have the opportunity to tease out the practical implications of a yes vote for the delivery of the education service and for the links between social services and the national health service. Will there be a greater democratic involvement in the delivery of the NHS, and would that be consistent with the principles of the NHS as it has developed over the past 50 years? Those fundamental questions go to the heart of the delivery of public services in Britain. They are not mere details to be covered in the footnotes of a Bill apparently more interested in regional government boundaries than in the delivery of those core services to electors.

Mr. Derek Foster: I detect some confusion about the architecture of what is being proposed. The proposed regional assemblies will be strategic and slimline authorities. I understand that a reorganisation of local government would have deep implications for the delivery of education services, but the regional assemblies will be slimline and strategic. The matters with which they will deal are already being discussed by one configuration of regional authority or another, and the proposal means only that that discussion will have a democratic dimension.

Mr. Dorrell: With great respect, the right hon. Gentleman is focusing on the proposed slimline regional assembly. I recognise the rhetoric, but I doubt that matters would turn out that way in reality. Will he set out the implications for unitary local government in the area where a slimline regional assembly is to be established? The Government insist that those implications should be thought through before a referendum is held. If slimline regional assemblies as he envisaged are set up, the delivery of local government services such as education, social services, transport and, possibly, health would have to be fundamentally reorganised.

My contention is that we need to see the detail of that reorganisation before we agree to allow the referendums to be held.

Mr. Robert Key (Salisbury): As do the people.

Mr. Dorrell: My hon. Friend is right to say that that is what the people want as well. More importantly, we need to allow time for the complexities to be worked through. Any such reorganisation would involve institutions that have grown up over a long period. If we act in haste to reorganise local government, we will have plenty of years to repent at leisure, as we have learned to our cost.

Jim Knight: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way a second time. Will not the boundary committee look at the strategic functions in a local government reorganisation? The unitary proposal would be made clear to electors when they cast their ballots about a regional assembly. The democratic choice would be offered to electors.

Mr. Dorrell: With great respect, I think that the hon. Gentleman has missed the point.

Mr. Raynsford: My hon. Friend is right.

Mr. Dorrell: The Minister says that the hon. Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) is right. Is the Minister endorsing the hon. Gentleman's version? I do not need to give way to the Minister, which will be a relief to those of my hon. Friends who want to contribute to the debate. However, the suggestion does not answer the point, because the complexity of public service delivery must be thought out in detail. It is not good enough for the boundary committee merely to propose on the back of an envelope an outline scheme about how education will be delivered after the reorganisation.

If the House were being asked to consider the reorganisation of the schools service separately, no one would argue with the proposition that the normal way of doing that was for the Government to present proposals, publish a Green Paper and a White Paper and go through a legislative process. Yet we are proposing to do that for social services, transport and conceivably the health service as well, all spatchcocked

up into the same piece of legislation to be dealt with by the boundary committee. I do not think that that is a sensible way of dealing with core public services.

I focused on the implications for those services from an organisational, managerial point of view. They are complex services and I am concerned that if we do it this way, institutions that have developed for good reasons will be changed without proper consideration. There is another reason why I am concerned about abolishing existing institutions and seeking to put in place a regional assembly as the new apex for political accountability for those services on the basis of a single, insufficiently informed referendum. If we are honest about what our constituents are saying, we know that there is already a problem in health and education. People do not really know who is responsible for the core services; they are already too far divorced from political accountability.

The political accountability of all the services that I have identified is already too diffuse within the bureaucracy. We should seek to make political accountability for those services clearer so that people know who is responsible for delivery and hold them to account. I fear that if we set out to deliver that by abolishing tiers of local government in respect of which there is a sense of local community and a local political process and replacing them with regions so that my constituents in Leicestershire are asked to go into an east midlands region where there is no sense of local regional community, that will lead to a further divorce between voters and the people responsible for the core public services. Not only will those public services be less efficient, they will be less accountable. If we manage to take those two tricks together, we shall do a huge disservice to democracy.

I do not regard the Bill as simply a minor party political quibble but as a major threat to good and accountable governance. As I said earlier, I think that it is inappropriate—a massively inadequate word—for us to address these issues in a debate lasting two and a half hours under a guillotine.

Mr. George Howarth: I seek your indulgence, Sir Michael, and hope that you will allow me to spend a few moments explaining my position on the Bill. It will then be more obvious why I will be supporting—or not—the various amendments to it.

I abstained when the House voted on the Bill's Second Reading. I thought long and hard about it. I certainly did not mention anything to do with regional government in my election material—in fact, I was careful not to do so. However, I accept that my party manifesto contained a commitment to regional government and I thought that the wisest course of action on Second Reading was to absent myself and not to oppose the Bill.

I have objections to the Bill in principle. I respect my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, whose views on this are long held. Indeed, I have opposed his view for an equally long time. I believe that the Bill is like sleepwalking piecemeal into constitutional change, the long-term consequences of which we have not fully worked out. However, the Bill has had its Second Reading, and from here on in, my approach is to consider the amendments proposed to it, see what it looks like on Third Reading and make an appropriate decision then.

6.45 pm

I have genuinely tried to see whether there is any scope for me to support the Opposition's amendments. I listened to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) carefully, and I hope that he accepts that my interventions were not debating points but a genuine attempt to find out what was behind his thinking. Amendment No. 46 is the key amendment in the group. Paragraphs (a) and (b) are very sensible, and if the amendment had confined itself to a review of the boundaries and setting out the powers and functions of elected regional assemblies, I would have been minded to support it. I listened carefully to what he said about paragraphs (c) and (d). I am sure that it is not intentional, but if the amendment were accepted, paragraphs (c) and (d) would effectively turn it into a wrecking amendment. They would set unrealistic targets and I do not believe that a Bill that has had its Second Reading should include such draconian targets.

Mr. Hammond: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the target of no additional public expenditure, which was a Labour party manifesto commitment in 1997, is unrealistic?

Mr. Howarth: The hon. Gentleman knows as well as I do that there would be bound to be differences of opinion as to what such an audit was measuring. What was included in an audit could be a cause of continuous and protracted argument. I am not opposed to gauging the opinion of the business community—that should happen regularly and frequently—but why single out business when other sections of the community should be consulted?

Jim Knight: Is my hon. Friend aware that the Conservatives' new clause 3(2) describes the relevant interests that the Secretary of State should consult as professional bodies, trade unions, voluntary organisations, faith groups, political parties, business organisations and community organisations? They have already thought of a perfectly adequate way of describing the people whom the Government should consult but they choose to pick exclusively on the business community.

Mr. Howarth: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's presumption that I had not bothered to read new clause 3. If he will forgive me, I will discuss that when we come to it, and confine my remarks to the amendments before us.

I would be happy to support paragraph (a) of amendment No. 46, and this is the core of the position that I hold. A proposed regional assembly for the north-west would be almost meaningless in that the north-west exists purely as a point on the compass. I am proud to represent a Merseyside constituency that contains parts of two unitary authorities, Knowsley and Sefton. Although people may from time to time take issue with something that either Knowsley or Sefton does, those unitary authorities work perfectly well. I know that the Bill does not propose to take any powers away from either of them, but some remote other layer of government would not service Knowsley or Sefton particularly well, if at all.

Mr. Clelland: I am not quite sure whether my hon. Friend is opposed to regional government in principle or

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because it does not suit his area. The Bill is not about setting up regional government but a referendum. I assume that he has respect for his electors, so why does he not have enough respect to allow them to decide for themselves?

Mr. Howarth: Had my hon. Friend allowed me to develop my argument further, he would have understood my position better. To repeat my earlier point, although my instinct is against the whole process in principle, the Bill has received its Second Reading, so I want, over time, to achieve an accommodation that would allow my constituents to feel comfortable in a region other than something called "the north-west". That is the point that I was trying to develop.

My objective is to find out whether it would be possible, through the processes proposed in the Bill, to end up with a greater Merseyside authority that would have responsibility for some—if not all—of the powers set out in the White Paper. Such an authority would work more effectively for my constituents and would make more natural sense. I note that my hon. Friends the Members for South Ribble (Mr. Borrow) and for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) are listening attentively to the debate. Although my hon. Friends are better able than me to speak for their constituents, such a proposal might suit Manchester and Lancashire better, too. I do not presume to speak for Cheshire, as no Cheshire Member is in the Chamber, but I am sure that they will be here in due course.

The Opposition amendment does not quite fit into the argument that I have developed, so I do not feel able to support it. I intervened on the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge in relation to amendment No. 24, which is not at all suitable because its basis for gauging opinion is unspecified. It would provide for an open-ended process whereby everyone's opinion would have to be taken into account. That would be okay in some ways, but it offers the prospect of protracted argument about the weight to be given to public opinion at any one time and it would not make sense. I realise that he was constrained by what he described as the architecture of the Bill, nevertheless the amendment would not be sensible at this stage. In any case, I am informed that we will not be able to vote on it separately so it would only be vexatious to argue about it.

I am not inclined to support the Opposition on this occasion. However, as I said earlier, I am inclined to support one of their amendments to clause 3 and, if I get the opportunity to catch the eye of the Chairman when we debate it, I shall explain why.

Mr. Curry: I, too, want to address myself to amendment No. 46 and to the Liberal Democrat amendments.

The only difference the measure will make to my constituents is to reorganise their local government. The regional assembly will not make the blindest bit of difference to the overwhelming part of the lives of the overwhelming number of my constituents. Its powers are wholly unspecified. The powers spelled out in the consultation document somewhat optimistically entitled "Your Region, Your Choice" are entirely advisory. They are all about strategic purposes—advising about this or consulting on that—but what can the assembly actually do? The answer is practically nothing.

What matters to my constituents is the one thing that will have an immediate impact on their lives: local government reorganisation. The White Paper may talk of "Your Region, Your Choice", but it would offer neither to my constituents or me. North Yorkshire is part of an area where every other council is already a metropolitan, unitary authority; we are the only part of the region that still has a two-tier structure, and the only part with a predominantly rural character. The sources of employment are mainly the tourism and catering businesses, the public service and small manufacturing. We are very different from the rest of the area.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): May I emphasise my right hon. Friend's point about the lack of powers for regional assemblies? Is he aware that when we gave our first example of that in the Standing Committee, the Bill fell at that first hurdle? The White Paper stated that transport should be one of the strategic functions of regional assemblies, yet a decision about a bypass in a region would be made not by its assembly but by the Government.

Mr. Curry: My hon. Friend makes a very effective point. Almost 90 per cent. of the electorate who will decide whether we in North Yorkshire are to have a change in our local government structure will have nothing whatever at stake because they already have unitary authorities. Their vote will change nothing in the practical details of their daily life, but the change will be significant for my constituents—for the very reasons given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell).

Mr. Clelland: The right hon. Gentleman says that his constituents will not have a choice, but they will have a vote. I understand the point that he makes about the weighting, but where was he when the Conservative Government abolished metropolitan county councils? Where was he when the Conservatives abolished the Greater London Council and Cleveland county council? What choices were people given then?

Mr. Curry: I lay claim to the authorship of the abolition of Cleveland and Humberside—and I am delighted to do so. My argument is not about whether unitary councils are good or bad; on the whole, I have some sympathy for unitary local government. My argument is about who should take the decisions. Decisions on unitary authorities were taken by the House. Orders were passed in this place. However, the Bill proposes a referendum process in which people who may have no interest in the matter, who do not represent anybody else and who have not been elected will take decisions for my constituents.

Important issues will be involved. Health and social services are probably the most important of all. As we know, the Government are constructing a whole new architecture to manage them and, as the Minister will know, North Yorkshire has experienced chronic underfunding in those sectors.

Mr. Raynsford: Just as the abolition of Cleveland was effected by the House so, too, any proposal arising from

a referendum will be effected through the House by the Secretary of State. There is no difference whatever from what the Conservatives did when they were in government.

Mr. Curry: Of course there is a difference: it is precisely what my right hon. Friend the Member for Charnwood spelled out. There will be what the French call a "présomption préalable"; in other words, a preliminary question will have been put. There will have been a referendum that will set a process—a motion—in train. The Minister says that if there is a positive vote in the referendum, he can decide that he will not pursue that course of action. That is radically different to the circumstances that obtained at the time when we created unitary government. That is my first concern.

My second concern is about the sampling process that will relate to a regional assembly whose powers we know not. That is the closest thing to "Blind Date" that has ever been attempted in politics. We do not know what powers the assemblies will have. The White Paper was extremely circumspect. Whenever someone mentions strategic powers, one should reach for one's gun because we know that they cannot work out exactly what such powers should be.

Whom will the Government sample? I suppose they will sample the chambers of commerce and no doubt the faith groups, as we must now call them—perhaps even the Women's Institutes, although that be rather dangerous. The Government might sample the constitutional conventions, which are self-appointed, and perhaps the Soroptimists and the Rotary clubs. Will we be inviting people to make non-submissions if they do not have a view?

What about the person described colloquially as "the punter"? We constantly talk about consultation and the Government are always calling for great public debates about things. It is always daft for Governments to do that: sensible Governments do not want great public debates because they know that such debates will be dominated by self-interested organisations and NGOs.

What about the punter coming back from St. James's park after watching Newcastle United do rather well this season? At least, the team has been doing well until now—sadly, it looks as though it might soon be exiting from the European cup. What about the punter at the optimistically named stadium of light where Sunderland plays? Sunderland is fourth or fifth from the bottom and may be struggling for survival in the premiership, Mr. Butterfill—I know that you follow such things closely, even from your base on the south coast.

Will those punters be asked what they think they have at stake? The problem is that they will be asked about something in which they have no stake, because nothing is at stake yet: there are no powers. This is a proposal for a referendum on an assembly whose powers we do not know, followed by an invitation to people to vote for elected members to an assembly whose powers they probably cannot define. That is a recipe for an extremely low turnout, and we are all agonising about that now.

7 pm

My final point relates to regional identity. I hope that we shall not get ourselves caught in the arguments about that. We have great arguments about identity, usually in relation to Europe. Identity and organisation do not go together and are not the same thing. It is a mistake to assume that people identify with some sort of geographical construction. In fact, many people in the regions are much more interested in differentiating themselves than identifying themselves with one another. My constituents in Craven do not need to differentiate themselves from London, because they are different from London—but by golly they want to differentiate themselves from Bradford, for reasons that I will not explain in any detail tonight.

I draw the Minister's attention to what I might call the postcode wars. He represents a constituency on the edge of London, but those of my constituents who are in the southern part of North Yorkshire have a Leeds postcode. That is tantamount to a declaration of nuclear war. Some people in Bentham in the north-west of my constituency have a Lancaster postcode. That is worse, if one can envisage such a thing. It might be suggested that such things are perfectly logical, but people identify themselves not in that way, but on a much more local basis. They may well broadly describe themselves as coming from Yorkshire, but they are probably thinking of a concept of Yorkshire produced in a previous reorganisation—or even the reorganisation before that—when they say it.

So let us not pretend that people will vote on the basis of regional identities, even in the north-east. My whole family comes from Durham, Northumberland and Teesside, and the notion of the north-east identity is no more coherent than that of the Yorkshire identity. People identify themselves with much more local areas, so I hope that we will not let ourselves be diverted down that route.

I hope that the Minister will say that there is no reason whatever why a two-tier system could not persist in an area such as North Yorkshire, even if there were a regional assembly. If the regional assembly has as few powers and is as light—"Government Lite"—as he says, I can see no reason why we should go to all the hullabaloo of regional reorganisation, which removes accountability and prevents people from being relatively close to their local councillors, simply to elect people who represent 350,000 people, topped up with a drop of proportional representation.

I can see no way in which that will develop accountability or promote the economy, given that the gap between regional performance has increased since the now Minister for Sport said that the regional development agencies would have failed if they did not close the gap in regional performance. So the two great claims for the proposals will simply not be delivered.

Mr. Raynsford: As the right hon. Gentleman suggests that no reorganisation should proceed, will he tell the House whether he regrets his role in the Banham process?

Mr. Curry: No, I do not. I brought a great deal of sense to the Banham process, if I may say so.

I have explained the differences in the constitutional procedures, but there is only one thing that tempts me to vote for the proposal: the possibility of touring the south-west, urging everyone to vote yes, so that the Minister has a major local government reorganisation

[Mr. Curry]

on his hands throughout that area. I would find that a wonderfully entertaining spectacle. Having got the tee-shirt, I would lend it to him with enormous enthusiasm, and it would come back with just as many holes having been made in it as when I wore it myself. I do not regret that, but I believe that there are more urgent pressing issues.

As I said on Second Reading, intellectual arguments can be made for devolution. I have never said that the whole idea is absurd. I have said that this proposal simply is not worth the candle, and the downside is significantly greater than any conceivable benefit that people may derive from it. Five or six years down the road, if my constituents are asked what the regional assembly has done for them, they will say, "What?"

Mr. Borrow: In view of the number of other hon. Members who wish take part in this important debate, I shall only speak for a few minutes.

I wish to speak initially to amendment No. 46. I have considerable sympathy with paragraph (b), which refers to the need for the people in any region to know what they would get if they voted yes in a referendum before doing so. I shall repeat the point that I made on Second Reading, and I will continue to make it. Referendums will be successful only if the powers of the regional assemblies are clearly specified in Bills before they take place. Such Bills may not need to receive Royal Assent before the referendums are held, but draft Bills will be needed at the very minimum.

The White Paper, which is all we have at the moment, is incomplete, so it is absolutely essential for Members of Parliament to have the opportunity to debate the powers outlined in the White Paper, to discuss them in detail and to firm them up before the referendums are held. The proposed powers are fundamentally flawed in many ways, and I would find it very difficult to agree that everything in the White Paper would set up the sort of regional assemblies that I would wish to see set up.

I repeat to my right hon. Friend the Minister and his Front-Bench colleagues that we will return time and again to that issue. We need clear evidence about what will happen if people vote in favour of regional government in a referendum, and at the moment we do not have that evidence.

Amendment No. 24, which says that the Deputy Prime Minister should reach the view that at least 25 per cent. of a region's electorate want to vote in favour of regional government, is totally superfluous. If an opinion poll in the north-west produced a figure of 26 per cent. and the Deputy Prime Minister said that it formed part of the evidence for a referendum, he would be very foolish.

The opinion poll evidence produced by the BBC in March this year showed that the minimum amount of support for regional government in the south-east was 49 per cent, so amendment No. 24 is totally meaningless. Before putting any region through a referendum, the Deputy Prime Minister needs to form a proper judgment, using all the evidence, to show that a majority of people favour regional government.

Mr. Hammond: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman misinterprets amendment No. 24. It would require that 25 per cent. of the total electorate, rather than 25 per cent. of those who voted, were expected to be in favour.

Mr. Borrow: The hon. Gentleman failed in his speech to clarify how that 25 per cent. could be arrived at. How would we judge whether 25 per cent. of the electorate are in favour of regional government, apart from conducting a referendum, which is what we want anyway, or an opinion poll? The opinion polls that have taken place have shown that more than 25 per cent. of the electorate in every region of the United Kingdom are in favour of regional government. That in itself is not enough for the Deputy Prime Minister to call a referendum, so amendment No. 24 is unnecessary and we should not be tied to the idea of a threshold. We could discuss the arguments about thresholds—I do not happen to agree with them—but amendment No. 24 is totally meaningless.

I am also concerned about the business community showing substantial support before referendums are held. I would like to think that there was substantial support in the business community in my region before a referendum was held in the north-west. However, if there was clear support in the north-west for a referendum and in favour of regional government, I would not want the business community to have a veto because of a lack of substantial—whatever "substantial" means—support for regional government.

In October, a few other Lancashire MPs and I met our local chamber of commerce to discuss the implications for business of regional government. It made the point that it wanted some input into regional government, and felt that it should have some say in whether there was regional government, or some membership in terms of a regional assembly. But democracy works on the basis of one elector, one vote, and businesses do not have votes and blocking powers to stop the electorate reaching the decision, so I do not really understand why the proposal has been included unless its purpose is to seek to obstruct the views of the electorate and to stop them getting what they want.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): As far as that proposal is concerned, if regional economic development is isolated in the question for a referendum proposed by the Government as one of the principal functions of a regional assembly and the largest element of its proposed budget—in practice, the only power that we can identify is the power to appoint members of the regional development agency and to instruct them as to the economic strategy—does it not make sense that the business community should be supportive of that move?

Mr. Borrow: There is a lot to be said for the business community of a region being in favour of and supportive of a regional assembly. We should not, however, deny the people in a region the possibility of a regional assembly because there is not overwhelming support from the business community. To give one

section of the community a veto over the rest of community, which, in effect, is what the proposal does, is not what we would want in a democracy.

The only other issue on which I want to touch briefly is local government reorganisation. I have some sympathy with people who argue that local government reorganisation should be decoupled from this process. I recognise, however, that if we had a referendum in my region, and we still had the possibility of an ongoing two-tier local government system, the opponents of regional government would use the fact that there were two tiers of local government as a strong argument against regional government. As politicians, we must make a judgment on the balance of good and bad. I am strongly in favour of unitary local government. What is happening now, however, is that the possibility of local government reorganisation is bringing strong opposition from those vested interests in the county councils that may support regional government in theory but are more concerned at the moment about losing the institutions to which they belong.

Matthew Green: Will the hon. Gentleman also accept that by linking change in local government to regional referendums, and ruling out change occurring separately, we will be preventing places such as Shropshire, which want unitary authorities, from having them until a regional referendum takes place? That is what the Minister said.

Mr. Borrow: Lancashire suffered the botched local government reorganisation of the early 1990s, when two of its largest towns, Blackburn and Blackpool, went unitary, but it is nonsense to say that there is strong support for the existing two-tier system in Lancashire. The institution of Lancashire county council, which had previously always strongly supported the concept of regional government, under the leadership of my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman), is now showing signs of objecting to regional government. I am sure that much of the reason for that is that it sees an end to its existence, and those who are members of, officers of or close to an institution will always seek to defend it.

7.15 pm

The same support does not exist across the county of Lancashire for Lancashire county council as an institution. For instance, Preston, where I live, was previously a county borough and was not part of a two-tier Lancashire county council system prior to 1973. Parts of the existing county of Lancashire were in the old county of the West Riding of Yorkshire. The idea that people have an overwhelming desire to be part of a county and for the county council structure to continue is therefore nonsense. People have a strong affinity with the area in which they live and with the county in which they live. Such loyalty is not affected by whether a county council exists.

DEFERRED DIVISION

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. John Butterfill): I now have to announce the result of a Division deferred from a previous day.

On the motion on section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993, the Ayes were 275, the Noes were 153, so the motion was agreed to.

[The Division List is published at the end of today's debate.]

Mr. Key: If I have understood the Government's motive correctly in introducing this Bill and their regional government proposals to the House, it is to improve the machinery of Government and the delivery of services, to bring them closer to the people, and to improve accountability. I agree with the amendments tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), and I shall seek to explain why I fear that the Government's ambitions will be frustrated by local people who will be able to cast their votes.

The game was given away by the publication earlier this month by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister of the handbook on the soundings exercise, paragraph 24 of which points out:

> "The Secretary of State will be taking account of a very wide range of views, information and evidence in reaching his decision. It is not practicable to set a 'pass mark' above which a region would automatically hold a referendum and below which it automatically would not. In some cases the Secretary of State may have to balance several factors. Ultimately, these must be matters for the Secretary of State's judgement."

Paragraph 25 states:

> "These soundings are initially to inform the Secretary of State's decision".

It does not therefore really matter whether people vote yes or no—the Secretary of State will make up his mind anyway depending on factors that he will not tell us about. That is one of my real problems with the Bill.

I do not believe that the Bill is a European Union conspiracy, as the United Kingdom Independence party believes—it recently held demonstrations at the south-west constitutional convention and told us that we were quislings for even daring to discuss the issue, even though some of us are opposed to the concept. Nor do I think that the cuddly image of accountability will work in the future. The real argument is about whether we are addressing a democratic deficit or voter fatigue. I believe that it is voter fatigue. My hon. Friends have already explained clearly that the Bill provides no new policy making, no new powers, no new money—apart from perhaps some more council tax—and no economic and social partners in the future, which we at least have now.

My principal objection, however, is that people will not vote for the proposals in a referendum if they do not identify with the region. That is the basic point. As far as my area is concerned, the south-west region does not exist. The fact is that the economic planning regions of the United Kingdom date back to the second world war when lines were drawn on maps for the better delivery of wartime administration. That grew during the socialist years of the 1960s when the economic planning regions were developed, and we got stuck with those lines on maps—that is all that they ever were.

Cornwall, for example, could certainly have its own identity in relation to a regional assembly, as it has a very real identity. In Salisbury, my part of the world, we do not consider ourselves to have very much in common with Gloucester or the Isles of Scilly, because we are

[Mr. Key]

Wessex, and we always have been. Bristol is a city state, and Gloucestershire is in the west midlands as far as I am concerned.

Andrew George: Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the Tory amendment in relation to new clause 3 simply proposes to replace sanitised, bureaucratic, convenient regions with standardised regions of a different nature?

Mr. Key: Let us discuss that when we debate new clause 3. I promised to be brief so that the Minister can wind up, but it was a perfectly reasonable point.

Unless there is an identifiable region that has legitimacy, the proposal will not work and people will not vote for it. It should not be imposed on them. The counties have legitimacy because they represent the geography, geology, dialect, buildings, architecture, customs and practice, heritage and traditions of a distinct part of our nation. Local government is built on the rock of national identity. In Wiltshire, we call ourselves moonrakers, because of particular events in our history. All that still means something to people today.

I know that modern culture homogenises our nation and that television, in particular, homogenises the western world. However, most of us are busy seeking roots, particularly when the going gets tough and things go wrong. The Government are making a grave mistake in suggesting that we should be forced into a completely phoney and meaningless local government system. The south-west region is a line drawn on a map. Regional government will simply be a castle in the sand that will be swept away by the tide of history.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Streeter: On a point of order, Mr. Butterfill. Can you advise me as a Back Bencher on how I might proceed? Several Members on both sides of the Chamber rose to speak, and I want to make what I believe to be important points about this group of amendments. However, because of the timetable motion from which we are suffering, I will not be able to make those points. How can I challenge legislation introduced by the Government when they show such contempt for Parliament?

The Temporary Chairman (Mr. John Butterfill): As the hon. Gentleman knows, this is not a matter for me. The orders of the House clearly prescribe the timetable for this Bill, and I am obliged to conform to them.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had an interesting debate around a diverse range of amendments. Many separate issues have come up, including the definition of boundaries, the powers of elected regional assemblies, the reorganisation of local government, the principle of devolution, the extent to which people have absolute clarity when they come to vote in referendums and the importance of choice. I will try to tackle each of those issues while rightly focusing on the amendments before us.

I will start with amendment No. 46, which is the most substantive of the Opposition's amendments. It would insert a new subsection (3) in clause 1, replacing subsections (3) to (8). The new subsection 3(a) would refer to the procedure for determining regional boundaries. It would require that the review of boundaries be undertaken before any order for a referendum could be made. The regions, for the purposes of the Bill, would no longer be those specified in schedule 1 to the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. Rather a region would become one created by order under new clause 3, but the apparent intention is to exclude Greater London because clause 26 would be retained in the Bill.

That obviously creates a problem for the Opposition. They are arguing for consistency between the number of people in each of the regions. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) made a strong point of that in his speech after conceding that the north-east probably was a natural region with a sense of identity and that it probably had an aspiration for regional devolution. If that is so, I ask him how he would achieve the numerical parity that he seeks—let us note that the population of the north-east is 2.5 million whereas that of London is 7.1 million—without a revision of the London boundaries.

Mr. Hammond *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: I am pleased that the hon. Gentleman is going to respond to that point.

Mr. Hammond: I will not address the London issue but, as the Minister knows, new clause 3 says that the commission would have regard to the desirability of the regions being approximately equal. It would also have regard to the need to reflect identities and interests. As we recognised in Standing Committee, there are tensions and there will not be an easy solution, but both factors must be taken into account.

Mr. Raynsford: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman is moving away from the preoccupation with numerical parity. That is the argument that he pushed in Standing Committee and in this debate. When he was challenged on that point by Liberal Democrat Members, he stuck firmly to that line. However, I am glad that wisdom is beginning to prevail and that he recognises that regional identity will involve regions of a very different size. One cannot have a one-size-fits-all simple arithmetic formula.

Andrew George: The Minister accepts that one size does not fit all. As he will acknowledge, one region has expressed a greater desire for a regional assembly in the responses that he has received to the consultation exercise. That region is Cornwall, so why have the Government set their face against an assembly for Cornwall? He is denying an assembly to the one region that wants it.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has not yet persuaded those on the Liberal Democrat Front Bench to agree that Cornwall is a viable region. His party's spokesman was cautious and guarded on that point when I specifically asked him the question. We have

debated the issue with the hon. Gentleman and I have much respect and understanding for the aspirations of the people of Cornwall and for their cultural identity. As he knows, I have recently agreed to recognise the Cornish language, and that is one part of the process. However, we believe that Cornwall is too small an area to be viable as a region with regional powers. That takes us straight to the fundamental point that regions have different functions to counties and districts, which are the traditional local government structures that can best address local issues. The hon. Gentleman may not agree with me, but that is the Government's view.

A key aim of elected regional assemblies is to bring under democratic control the work of existing regional bodies. Who would believe from what we heard from the Conservative Opposition that they set up the existing regional structures—the Government offices for the regions—a decade ago and that they are perfectly happy for them to continue? The Government offices are unaccountable and unresponsive to local opinion. They simply answer to Ministers here in Westminster. That is the Conservatives' position; they are opposed to devolution.

Mr. Hammond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I have very little time. I have given way twice already, so I must press ahead.

The Conservatives oppose devolution and giving people in the English regions the opportunity to govern their own affairs. That is the main charge that I lay against the Conservative Opposition. Our aim is that regional assemblies should be strategic. We want to ensure that the spatial and demographic size of the regions is sufficient to enable them adequately to perform such a role.

The provisions of amendment No. 46 would mean that the Act setting out the powers and functions of elected regional assemblies would have to be in place before a referendum could take place. I hear the argument about clarity and about the importance of people being aware of what they are voting for before they vote in a referendum. We agree entirely on that. That is why we are holding the structural review of local government in those regions where there is an interest. That review will be decided and the Government will make their decision as to whether to carry it forward before people vote in a referendum.

The right hon. Member for Charnwood (Mr. Dorrell) made great play of this issue. He described the process slightly pejoratively as the boundary committee doing calculations on the back of an envelope. It will not be like that. He was a senior Minister in the Government who introduced the 1992 legislation that established the principle of structural reviews, so he will know that they examine the structure of local government and not just the boundaries. The reviews will have a responsibility to produce a wholly unitary structure, determining exactly how the responsibilities that he described will be discharged. That information will be available to people in the regions before they vote, as will a statement from the Government, based on our White Paper, setting out what powers the elected regional assembly would have.

The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry) said that the whole process was worthless because it contained no powers. He was a former housing Minister, so he will be aware of the housing capital allocations made to registered social landlords and local authorities. Those powers will rest with the elected regional assemblies. Is that worthless? The right hon. Gentleman very much underestimates the measure's significance.

Mr. Clelland: My right hon. Friend mentioned the powers. He will recall that I asked my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister a few weeks ago about the suitability of a draft Bill for the regional government legislation. Labour Members have made that point twice in the debate. Does he not think that, in view of the new systems of examining legislation, a draft Bill would be appropriate in this case?

7.30 pm

Mr. Raynsford: We said that that is not ruled out and we will certainly consider it. Indeed, it may be one way to provide the extra clarity that some hon. Members want. Clarification will, of course, be provided in the White Paper, the boundary committee's structural review and the Government's statement before electors vote. It is possible that we will also choose to adopt a Bill that receives pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Dorrell: The Minister clearly has sympathy for the proposition put by the hon. Member for Tyne Bridge (Mr. Clelland). Will he consider that, with a view to making such a commitment, and give the House a firm decision on Report?

Mr. Raynsford: We are prepared to consider that, but I do not want to be committed to a timetable. As a former senior member of a Government, the right hon. Gentleman knows about the constraint of legislative programmes.

Mr. Dorrell *rose—*

Mr. Raynsford: No, I will not give way. I have little time left.

Amendment No. 46(3)(c) states that the Secretary of State would have to be satisfied

"that there is substantial support from the business community"

before holding a referendum. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge made a specious argument about why business was not represented. People might not necessarily live within the local authority from which they run a business, but I do not think that many of them will not live in the same region as their business. So they will be entitled to vote and will have every opportunity to express their view.

We want business to engage with elected regional assemblies. We said that in the White Paper and have specifically consulted on ways in which stakeholders can become involved in the work of the elected regional assemblies. The hon. Gentleman prayed in aid the CBI this evening, but he was much less enthusiastic about it in Committee when he said:

"The CBI is looking at these matters from the narrow perspective of business . . . it cannot be a conclusive perspective in constitutional matters."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee A*, 3 December 2002; c. 30.]

[Mr. Raynsford]

That was his view a fortnight ago and I am surprised that he is taking a totally different approach today. Perhaps that is indicative of the Conservative party, however. Consistency is not one of its great virtues at the moment.

The Liberal Democrats tabled amendments Nos. 34, 35 and 36, which are consistent with their overall approach to have intensive consultation, reviews, discussions and talking shops—in fact, anything but action. I am afraid that the consequences of those amendments would be to delay the process of establishing elected regional assemblies to which they say they are committed. That would be a complete nonsense because we would have a protracted period of debate and discussion with no action. We have no hesitation in urging the House not to support those amendments.

Amendment No. 24 would replace the condition in clause 1(4) requiring the Secretary of State to consider the level of interest in holding a referendum with something entirely different. Instead, it would require the Secretary of State to conclude

"on the basis of the evidence available that it is probable that at least twenty-five per cent. of the persons eligible to vote in a referendum . . . would vote in favour of an elected regional assembly".

But that would mean the Secretary of State looking into a crystal ball and predicting the outcome of a referendum. It is a pretty novel approach to the democratic process. It is also totally impractical because people in the region may be interested in a referendum, but may not have formed or expressed a view. The ballot is secret. It would be wrong to expect people to express a view on which way they were going to vote in order to inform the Secretary of State. It is a curious and perverse proposal, and it is not at all practicable. It is our desire to encourage as many people as possible to vote so that referendums reflect the real view of people in a region. Clause 7 enables the Electoral Commission to do what it thinks necessary to encourage voting.

Amendments Nos. 9 and 10 are technical. I suspect that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will not regard them as crucial, so I shall concentrate on other issues raised. The right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon asked why North Yorkshire should not have two tiers of local government in addition to a regional tier of government, but if we are introducing a tier of regional government, two tiers of local government below it are too many. We need rationalisation to ensure that there is clarity for the electorate and to avoid the proliferation of bureaucracy. I could understand that approach from the Liberal Democrats, who are only too happy to have a proliferation of different tiers of government, but I am surprised at the right hon. Gentleman. He supported unitary authorities in the 1990s, but he is now singing from a different hymn sheet.

We believe that every region should have a choice. It should be free to determine its future and way forward. That is why we have introduced the proposals, which are right and democratic. I commend the clause to the Committee and urge it to reject the amendments.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister failed to respond to our concerns. He said that he did not have time, but whose fault is that? The Government could have allowed us two days on the Floor of the House. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to support me in pressing the amendments to a Division.

It being two and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee, THE TEMPORARY CHAIRMAN, *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The Committee divided: Ayes 135, Noes 352.

Division No. 35] **[7:36 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Curry, rh David
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Fox, Dr. Liam
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond

Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Willetts, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Burstow, Paul
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Carmichael, Alistair
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Killoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John

Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sanders, Adrian
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Speller, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thurso, John
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Derek Twigg

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed: No. 34, in page 1, line 13, leave out subsection (5).—*[Matthew Green.]*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The Committee divided: Ayes 47, Noes 310.

Division No. 38] **[7:50 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Carmichael, Alistair
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Hermon, Lady
Hogg, rh Douglas
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kirkwood, Archy
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Moore, Michael
Oaten, Mark *(Winchester)*
Öpik, Lembit
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Thurso, John
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Tom Brake and
Mr. David Chidgey

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Alexander, Douglas
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen

Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkins, Brian
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
Mclsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin *(Great Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morris, rh Estelle
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Derek Twigg and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 1 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 2

Referendum Question

8 pm

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move amendment No. 39, in page 2, line 20, leave out from beginning to end of line 22 and insert

'Any order made pursuant to section 1 shall direct the Electoral Commission to determine the question or questions to be put in the referendum.'.

The Temporary Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendments: No. 28, in page 2, line 20, leave out 'question' and insert 'questions'.

No. 29, in page 2, line 21, leave out 'is' and insert 'are'.

No. 55, in page 2, line 22, at end insert—

'(1A) A supplementary question shall be asked of persons eligible to vote whose address on the electoral register is in the administrative area of a district council for any area in which both district and county councils have functions.

(1B) The supplementary question referred to in subsection (1A) is—

(a) "do you agree with the proposals to reorganise local government in your area into unitary authorities which the Government intends to implement if an elected regional assembly is established".'.

No. 19, in page 2, line 23, at end insert

'(the (insert name of region) region comprises (insert names of all counties, metropolitan boroughs and unitary authority districts within the region))'.

No. 30, in page 2, line 23, at end insert—

') Do you agree with the recommendations of the Boundary Committee for England to reorganise (insert name of county council) and (insert name of district council or district councils) into a single tier of local government for your area?'.

No. 11, in page 2, line 24, leave out subsection (2) and insert—

[Mr. Hammond]

'(2) The question on the ballot paper shall be preceded by a statement, in a form to be prescribed by the Electoral Commission, conveying such information as the Electoral Commission believe is requisite to enable electors to understand the question and to ensure that electors understand the conclusions of the Boundary Committee review of the region.

(3) The statement to be prescribed under subsection (2) may not include any statement about the intended functions or powers of the proposed elected assembly unless such functions and powers are defined in an Act of Parliament.'.

No. 31, in page 2, line 24, leave out subsection (2).

No. 54, in page 2, leave out line 26 and insert—

'This referendum is advisory only.The Secretary of State will decide, after considering the referendum result, whether to establish an elected assembly for the'.

No. 49, in page 2, line 27, leave out from second 'region', to 'be' in line 30 and insert

'If an elected assembly is established, it is intended that—

(a) the elected assembly would be responsible for a range of activities currently carried out mainly by central government bodies, including regional economic development; and

(b) local government would'.

No. 50, in page 2, line 29, leave out from 'development' to end of line 33.

No. 20, in page 2, line 33, at end add

'It is not proposed to establish an elected regional assembly in any region until at least three regions have voted in favour of the establishment of such assemblies in referenda conducted pursuant to section 1 above.'.

No. 22, in page 2, line 33, at end add—

'In the [insert name of region] region this will entail the abolition of [insert names of local authorities recommended by the Boundary Committee report to be abolished] and the creation of [insert number of new unitary authorities recommended by the Boundary Committee report to be created] new unitary authorities.

The table below shows how the new unitary authorities recommended by the Boundary Committee will relate to the authorities to be abolished—

Name of new Unitary Authority	Old authority areas or parts of old authority areas included
[insert name of each new Unitary Authority as recommended by the Boundary Committee]	[insert name of each constitutent existing local authority district or ward]'.

No. 38, in page 2, line 33, at end add—

'The Boundary Committee has recommended to the Secretary of State that if an elected regional assembly for the [name of region] region is established, the electoral districts which would return directly elected members to the assembly would be as shown below:

Name of Electoral District	Description of areas included	Approximate number of electors
[insert name of each electoral district recommended by the Boundary Committee pursuant to s.19(3)]	[insert description of the districts/ wards or other administrative units included]	[insert approximate number of electors in each proposed district]

No. 51, in page 2, line 33, at end insert—

'(3) In those parts of the region that currently have both county and district councils the following additional question shall be asked—

Do you agree with the proposal to reorganise the county and district councils in your area into a single unitary tier of local government.'.

Mr. Hammond: Clause 2 deals with the question to be put in a referendum and the preamble, so called. That is a piece of Government spin that will be placed on the ballot paper by primary legislation.

This is a mixed bag of amendments grouped together and covering a number of issues. Some of them deal with the procedure; some of them are substantive in the only sense possible, given the architecture of the Bill: they seek to amend the preamble, making substantive changes to the Government's stance, as expressed through the preamble. The preamble is a one-paragraph summary of what an elected regional assembly will be, as the Government would like electors to see it. No doubt some of my hon. Friends will want to comment on the wording of the preamble.

Amendment No. 39 is a pretty uncontroversial proposal. It proposes that the Electoral Commission should determine the question or questions to be put. The purpose of the referendum is made clear by clause 1. Surely the whole purpose of creating the Electoral Commission and giving it a role in dealing with referendums is to ensure that an impartial body not connected with Government, who are highly partial in relation to these referendums, should frame the question.

As it happens, we do not have an objection to the wording of the question proposed in the Bill—it would be rather difficult to have an objection to it, as it is a simple and straightforward question. However, we believe that an important principle is at stake for future referendums, which must be dealt with.

Mr. John Gummer (Suffolk, Coastal): My hon. Friend says that he does not have an objection to the question. May I point out to him that those of us who live in Suffolk have a strong objection, because if the question were asked in relation to East Anglia, it would suggest that Rickmansworth was in East Anglia? When one refers to a region that contains both Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire as if it were East Anglia, the question itself is entirely wrong.

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right, but unfortunately, as he knows, we have already had the debate on the possibility of revisiting the regional boundaries and, despite heroic efforts on the part of the opposition, have lost that argument to the Government.

Mr. Raynsford: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it shows the Alice in Wonderland state of the Conservative party when the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), who was the architect of the regions, now describes them as preposterous?

Mr. Hammond: Not at all. As the Minister well knows, the regions were created for an entirely different purpose and are completely unsuitable for the arrangements that the Government propose.

Mr. Gummer: I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that the regions were created by putting together

what had always been Government sections, and that they were created because the previous Government had had a series of regions, none of which were coterminous for any single purpose. The regions were created for the sake of clarity. An elected assembly ought to cover an area that people recognise as being an electoral area. Nobody in Rickmansworth has anything to do with Trimley St. Mary in my constituency.

Mr. Hammond: My right hon. Friend is right. That is our fundamental objection to the Government's proposals: the regions that are being used as the basis for elected regional assemblies were created for quite a different purpose, and do not deliver the sense of identity that is required if the Government's agenda is to have any chance of success.

Amendment No. 11 would give the Electoral Commission the slightly more difficult task of writing the preamble to the question. I am extremely sceptical about the idea of a preamble on the ballot paper, but if there is to be a preamble, it must be written by a body other than the Government, who are highly partisan in the matter.

The preamble as drafted in the Bill is highly contentious. It goes well beyond the supply of information, which is what the Government would have us believe it does. It states that regional assemblies

"would be responsible for a range of activities",

yet we have not seen those powers enshrined in any legislation. Indeed, in the Standing Committee yesterday the Minister conceded to my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) that the regional assemblies would have influence on central Government, not responsibility in the sense that most electors would understand it.

The preamble states that the activities would be activities

"currently carried out mainly by central government bodies".

The Minister knows that that is highly contentious. Many Opposition Members believe that the regional assemblies will suck more power up than will be devolved to them from central Government. The reference to local government reorganisation in the last couple of sentences of the preamble will not be intelligible to any ordinary elector, unless he happens to be an aficionado of local government terminology.

Under amendment No. 11, the Electoral Commission would be required to draft a preamble that conveyed the information requisite to a proper understanding of the question and a proper understanding of the boundary committee conclusions for the region. I do not see how that could be contentious.

The amendment would also specifically exclude any speculative statements about the functions or powers of elected assemblies yet to be created by Parliament. We simply do not know about that, and it is arrogant of the Government to pretend that simply because they include something in a White Paper or consultation document, they will be able to secure its approval in this place. Many regional referendums might take place after the next general election, and even if the Government can get their proposals through this place, they certainly cannot guarantee their unscathed delivery through the other place.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government are prejudging the decision of Parliament by including this passage in the preamble:

"An assembly would be responsible for a range of activities that are currently carried out mainly by central government bodies"?

Until the Bill dealing with the powers of regional assemblies has been introduced, we will have no idea of what they will entail.

Mr. Hammond: In a strict sense, my hon. Friend is absolutely right. Even the Minister who is promoting that agenda concedes that the provisions deal not with responsibilities as ordinary people understand them, but with abilities to exercise some influence on central Government. That is precisely what the Minister said yesterday.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman obviously was not listening when I responded to the right hon. Member for Skipton and Ripon (Mr. Curry), who raised that question earlier. I pointed out that there were a number of significant powers and responsibilities. When I raised the matter in Committee last week, as the hon. Gentleman said—

Mr. Hammond: Yesterday.

Mr. Raynsford: Indeed. I said that the role of the elected regional assembly would be to influence government and that there would be a combination of direct delivery powers and considerable powers of influence. It is certainly not true to suggest that the assemblies will not have powers.

Mr. Hammond: I do not see any evidence of that in the preamble as it is currently drafted, which states:

"An assembly would be responsible for a range of activities that are currently carried out".

Perhaps the Government will table an amendment on Report saying that the assembly will not only be responsible for a range of activities, but will have the ability to influence central Government in respect of another range of activities. However, that is not what the Bill says.

Mr. Streeter: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Minister has just made his case for him? People voting in the referendums will not know where an elected regional assembly has influence, power, responsibility or decision-making ability. It is all in the lap of the gods. The Minister waves his White Paper in the air, but White Papers and draft Bills do not bind anyone. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need an Act of Parliament to spell out the responsibilities, powers and functions of the elected regional assemblies? Failing that, people will be voting in the dark.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. Electors will be invited to vote for a pig in a poke. That is one of the major problems with the Bill.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Hammond: I must make a little progress.

[Mr. Hammond]

The Government's reluctance to introduce a Bill that Parliament can scrutinise, so that we can ensure in legislation that everyone understands precisely what the powers and responsibilities of regional assemblies will be, contrasts with their insistence that, before they can conduct a referendum, they must carry out a process of local government organisation review in each region. By their own admission, that process will take a year. Why can they not parallel-track with their current proposals the Bill to implement the regional assemblies, so that we will all know exactly where we are when the question is put?

Mr. Edward Davey: The hon. Gentleman may recall that, when the House debated the Greater London Authority Bill, we found that its measures on the powers of the authority were very different from those in the White Paper that was published before the Bill was introduced. In the Bill, the powers of the Greater London Authority were very circumscribed, as many powers were retained by the Secretary of State. Indeed, the Bill mentioned the Secretary of State more times than the Mayor himself. He is therefore making exactly the right point, as people will be voting for an assembly that will not have the powers that the Government set out in the White Paper.

8.15 pm

Mr. Hammond: That is precisely what Opposition Members fear. We would prefer the Electoral Commission to write the preamble, but if the Government resist that proposal, the next few amendments would introduce specific improvements to help the existing preamble to be clearer and fairer in putting the situation to the voter on the day of the referendum. I would prefer the Electoral Commission to draft the preamble, but if it cannot do so, I would rather I did it than the Government.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Many interventions have concentrated on the function of the regional assemblies, but does my hon. Friend agree that the first line of the preamble,

"You can help to decide",

is also important, because it gives no information as to the degree of the decision-making function of the person who is asked to vote? Does he agree that there is a great deal wrong with that statement?

Mr. Hammond: I do indeed. If my right hon. Friend looks at some of the other amendments, he will see that they seek to remove the first line from the preamble.

If the Government resist the proposal to allow the Electoral Commission to write the preamble, the other amendments would make improvements. Amendment No. 19 would provide information about the region in the interests of ensuring clarity for the elector. The regions that the Government are using are so arbitrary and unconnected with people's everyday lives that voters simply will not know the extent of the regions in which they live. Of course, I concede that someone who lives in Manchester is likely to understand that they live in the north-west region, but I am prepared to bet the Minister that if he goes out on to the streets of Manchester and names at random a few communities on the periphery, people will not know whether they are included and will not have any idea of the extent of the region in which they live.

We therefore propose that the preamble should include specific information about the extent of the region. It is not appropriate to ask whether people are interested in a referendum on a regional assembly when we do not even know at this stage whether people understand what region they live in and what other communities are included or excluded. We need some transparency, including more detail on the ballot paper than the name of the region, which is all that the Government propose that it should include.

Amendment No. 22 seeks to insert in the preamble detail of the boundary committee recommendations. Again, it is vital that before electors make their decision about how to vote, they understand precisely how they will be affected by the boundary committee's recommendations. That can only be achieved by setting out the information in a simple tabular format, with the names of the proposed new local government units on one side of the table and those of the old local government units, or those parts that are included in the new region, on the other. That will ensure that each elector who at least knows which local government unit he currently resides in will also know which one he belongs to if the boundary commission changes proceed.

Amendment No. 38 would do the same for electoral areas in a region. That is another Government omission. The Government propose that, although the minute detail of the changed local government structures will be known to the elector if he takes the trouble to find out about them when he votes, he will not have any information about the likely electoral divisions in the region. I suggest that those divisions are equally important to him, as he will need to know how his community will find its voice in any putative regional assembly. He will need to know about the split between rural urban influences in any such assembly.

The Minister is defending an utterly illogical position. We are being asked to engage in a referendum with no Act defining the powers of the regional assemblies and no electoral districts telling people how their limited influence on the assembly will be exercised or with whom they will be grouped in exercising it. However, a boundary committee is an absolute requirement and the full detail of the local government reorganisation must be worked out in advance of the referendum. I suggest to him that electors will not be making an informed decision unless they understand the detail of the local government reorganisation and the electoral divisions in the region, and the powers that such a regional assembly will have.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien (Eddisbury): Does my hon. Friend agree that, although those specific details do not appear in the amendments, because that would be to take a step too far at this stage, without them it will be impossible to know what the transitional and future establishment costs of any future configuration of local representation will be? To lay the charge of the administration at the door of local people through their

council tax and other taxes, without their knowing the cost of those changes, would represent a considerable absence of information in their decision making.

Mr. Hammond: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. He will recall that the Labour manifesto at the 1997 election, which committed the Labour party to going down the route of elected regional government, said that it would do so only if it could produce an independent auditor's report confirming that no additional public expenditure would be involved. That commitment has been quietly dropped. It will be blindingly apparent to all my right hon. and hon. Friends that the local government reorganisation that the Government are making a prerequisite for elected regional assemblies will indeed involve a significant additional amount of public expenditure.

Amendment No. 54 would change the opening lines of the preamble to deal, in part, with the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). The words inserted by the amendment would say explicitly to the elector, whom the Government would like to mislead by saying

"You can help to decide whether there should be an elected assembly"—

[Interruption.] Well, it would be misleading. Under the amendment, the elector would be told:

"This referendum is advisory only. The Secretary of State will decide, after considering the referendum result, whether to establish an elected assembly."

By changing those lines, we would introduce clarity and a bit of honesty into the preamble that is to be put to the voters.

Amendment No. 20 is something of a probing amendment.

Mr. Edward Davey: It is a wrecking amendment.

Mr. Hammond: It is not a wrecking amendment; it is a probing amendment. It proposes a clear statement in the preamble against a single-region settlement. The device that we have used is to write a Government intention into the preamble. The purpose is to get the Minister to address the issue of critical mass. Part of the argument for regional assemblies is, and has always been, that they would provide a counterweight to the centralised, London-focused system of national Government. We have no argument with the desire to devolve power downwards, so long as it is downwards, so long as it is devolved to coherent units, and so long as it is power, and not just responsibility without any real power, which would allow the Government to keep the power and lose the accountability. That is what we fear will happen here.

If we had a one-region solution, with one region opting for elected regional government and no other region following, we should not have a critical counterweight. There is a need for critical mass if this function is to be performed. I therefore invite the Government to consider setting some kind of threshold, so that, if we are to have elected regional assemblies as part of our constitutional settlement, there cannot just be one, or—I would suggest—two. Before the assemblies are established, a number of referendums need to be conducted and won.

Mr. Raynsford: Will the hon. Gentleman tell us whether he conceives of London as having a role in this concept? Does he believe that the people of London should be involved in this process? Or does he believe that the fact that a quasi-regional body already exists in London means that one region already has an assembly, and that that should be taken into account when making the calculations set out in the amendment?

Mr. Hammond: The Minister would, I think, struggle to argue that a devolved assembly in London helps to provide a counterweight to London. That is the argument that has been advanced for elected regional government in other parts of the country.

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman might be interested to know that, when we were debating the Greater London Authority Bill, we challenged the Minister on many occasions by saying that he was creating regional government. He insisted at the time, however, that it was city-wide government, and local government. He would not allow it to be linked to the regional agenda, as we were trying to do.

Mr. Hammond: I shall not intervene in this lovers' tiff between the Liberals and the Government. No doubt they can sort it out afterwards.

I contend that it would be very odd if we ended up with a dramatic change in our constitutional arrangements, the end effect of which was simply that one region was the odd man out in an otherwise unitary England. These proposals highlight the inappropriateness of changing our constitutional arrangements for one, or perhaps two, regions.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hammond: I must make some progress. The right hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his own contribution in due course, and I look forward to it.

Amendment No. 55 and the amendments tabled in the name of the Liberal Democrats deal with the possibility of separating the testing of opinion on local government reorganisation from the testing of opinion on regional elected assemblies, and propose that, in two-tier authorities only—where change to a unitary structure will be required—a separate question should be put to the electors, asking whether they are in favour of the unitarisation of their local government arrangements. That seems eminently sensible. It would allow the Secretary of State, when making his decision following the advisory referendum, to know whether there was support for the idea of an elected regional assembly, and to balance that support against the strength of opposition to the reorganisation of local government in the parts of the region that would be subject to it.

The Liberals have argued against compulsory unitarisation of local government, and we have a great deal of sympathy with their argument. Unfortunately, they have drawn the wrong conclusion. They would be happy to introduce yet another tier of government, more elected politicians, more expenses, more headquarters buildings, more tax, more spending and more bureaucracy. So the Liberals have identified the issue, but drawn the wrong conclusion. We draw the conclusion that the Government's proposals are

[Mr. Hammond]

fundamentally flawed and do not present a stable, sustainable solution for government below the national level in England. This amendment would not directly address that issue, but it would allow the Secretary of State separately to measure opinion in those areas. I shall leave the Liberals to say more on that in due course. I commend this diverse group of amendments to the Committee.

Mr. Davey: Given that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) was so kind about some of our amendments, even though he could not bring himself to support all of them, I shall start by saying that the Liberal Democrats support his amendment No. 39. The idea that the Electoral Commission should draw up the questions is eminently sensible. I have to say that, when his party was in government, it was not very keen on the idea of sub-contracting out decision making to an independent body. If it has had a conversion in favour of restricting the power of the Executive, however, we welcome that.

In approaching the clause and in considering the question and the preamble before us, we should reflect on the advice that the Electoral Commission has proffered to Parliament and to the Government. Although the Minister is aware of the advice that has been sent to him, I shall read it out. I think that he will use it as a defence, but I hope to show that it is weak. The commission

> "takes the view that, as the issue is complex and potentially unfamiliar to many voters, the intelligibility of the question is dependent on the inclusion of a preamble providing extra information. Given that a preamble is to be provided, the proposed question meets the Commission's assessment guidelines."

In other words, the preamble is essential, otherwise the question would not be intelligible.

Mr. Jack: May I probe the hon. Gentleman's understanding of intelligibility? At what reading age should the question be set?

8.30 pm

Mr. Davey: That is a good question. I refer the right hon. Gentleman to the Electoral Commission's assessment guidelines on questions. There are 10, although I am afraid that they do not consider reading age, so that does not help him. However, they refer to the question being well structured and not too long. That might help him, and I am more than happy to show him the guidelines if he has not seen them.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has talked about the importance of the preamble and quoted the Electoral Commission's advice, which he says is important. In quoting that advice, he has shown why it believes that a preamble is necessary. Will he now tell us why he has tabled amendment No. 31, which would delete the preamble?

Mr. Davey: I do not know whether the Minister was listening properly, but I said that I would come to that. I do not think that the Electoral Commission will be given enough scope to analyse the issue properly. I shall return to that, as we need to refer to other primary legislation.

What is particularly interesting is the fact that the Electoral Commission advice goes on to suggest that the Government's proposed preamble is not that intelligible. The Minister ought to listen, as the commission is an independent body that was set up by his Government and it has criticised his preamble. The Electoral Commission has suggested an alternative, which we have set out in our amendment No. 49. He may want to intervene on this point: will he accept that amendment, which would put in the Bill, word for word, the advice proffered by the Electoral Commission?

Mr. Raynsford: No, because we believe that it is right to listen to the views expressed in the House as well as those expressed by the Electoral Commission before deciding on an appropriate amendment to table on Report, which will no doubt pay considerable heed to the commission's views. It would be wrong to pre-empt Members of the House, who have an opportunity in the debate to influence our thinking. I hope that the hon. Gentleman accepts that.

Mr. Davey: That is a very odd argument. I thought that the House was giving the Minister its advice now. We already have the Electoral Commission's advice so, presumably, we ought to vote on this now rather than delay any further. I am surprised that he wants to wait until we consider the Bill on Report, but if he insists, we shall table our amendment then.

As to whether we should take the Electoral Commission as the final word on the matter, I am afraid that I do not think we should. We should consider what the Electoral Commission is allowed to do. It is allowed only to comment on the particular question in the Bill and any subsequent preamble. It is not able to take a view on how many questions ought to be included in a referendum to put across the point being made and the issue on which people are being asked to give their opinion. If the Electoral Commission had been asked to do that, my view is that, rather than go for a preamble and a question, it would probably have gone for two questions, as that is what is being asked.

The Government have not allowed that issue to be debated by the commissioners either in respect of the underlying legislation that set up the Electoral Commission or, as I understand it, in any other directions to the commission, so I must press the Minister. Are the Government prepared, before the Bill is considered on Report, specifically to ask the Electoral Commission whether two questions would be clearer, more intelligible and more sensible as a way forward to decide those matters than one question and the preamble?

Mr. Gummer: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that a dangerous precedent will be set if that is not done? Are we to have general elections involving a preamble to explain why this or that Member might or might not be suitable for this or that constituency? If we are to have a referendum on, let us say, the euro, will there be a nice explanation of why it would be good or not so good for Britain so as to enable people to make up their minds? Is not that a serious constitutional concept?

Mr. Davey: The right hon. Gentleman has a smidgen of a point, although he stretches his argument a little far

in relating it to the general election. I do not think that even this Government would go that far, but I take his general point that we in the House must be careful before accepting preambles linked to questions that we ask the electorate. We must think carefully about whether we could discard the preamble and just ask the electorate—the grown-up, mature electorate—the questions. Trying to hide a question in a preamble is not transparent or open.

The debate is about the fact that the Government are trying to hide the issues from the electorate. Because the Electoral Commission did not have power to consider the issue more widely, I am not sure that the advice I read out can be the last word.

Mr. Streeter: Is there not another point to be made? In a sense, the last place where a preamble needs to appear is a ballot paper. One would hope that most of those voting in person would have made up their minds about the arguments before entering the booth. How many people arrive at a polling station not knowing how they will vote? Is it not more important to convey proper information to the electorate in advance about what is involved—the powers, the functions, the districts, the geography, the whole works—before they reach the stage of voting?

Mr. Davey: I agree to an extent, but let us remember the reason for the preamble. Something is being hidden from the electorate. If they were asked two clear questions, no preamble to either would be needed. Someone, somewhere, is trying to hide something from the voters, and what worries me most is that lack of transparency.

Mr. Hammond: Surely the reason for a preamble rather than a question is that voters are being given no choice on the second, hidden part of the question.

Mr. Davey: Indeed. In fact, I was going to invite the Minister, if he is not prepared to ask the Electoral Commission whether two questions would be preferable, to make a slightly different inquiry about whether a second question would obviate the need for a preamble. If we knew on Report that the Minister had made that inquiry and had received assurances—which, of course, he would publish, being such an open and transparent Minister—we would be much more likely to accept the clause. Is the Minister going to tell us that he will do that?

Mr. Raynsford: The Liberal Democrats continue to astonish me. The hon. Gentleman will know, because there is already advice from the Electoral Commission, that we have consulted the commission. It has made its recommendations, which we will heed carefully because we think them sensible. However, we will wait to hear all the opinions expressed in the debate before making a final decision on how the preamble should be framed and whether amendments will be necessary on Report.

Mr. Davey: The Minister is very able and is respected in all parties, but he knows that the original Act did not enable the commission to say that two questions would be better in this instance. It was only able to comment on the one question and the preamble, and the intelligibility of those. I am challenging the Minister on whether he is prepared to return to the commission to clarify the point. If he is so worried about how the House feels, as he ought to be, he should reflect its concern by doing as I suggest.

Amendments Nos. 28, 29, 30, 31 and 50 are linked in many respects. They are all intended to secure that second question. If the Minister is not prepared to go to the Electoral Commission, let us try to put that question on the ballot paper ourselves. Not only would it provide greater clarity, and avoid potential allegations that the Government are trying to hide something from the electorate; it would, in my view, bring about greater democracy.

We should give the electorate the chance to make their decision in separate questions. As my hon. Friend the Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green) said earlier, we want people to have power to make decisions about the government they want. We want them to have not just the power to vote for a regional assembly, but the power to decide what structure local government should have in their areas—to decide whether they want unitary authorities, and whether they want county and district councils to be restructured.

Matthew Green: Does my hon. Friend also accept that separating out the question would increase the number of people who are likely to vote yes to regional government, because they would not be diverted by the issue of whether they want a change to local government? The proposal would therefore assist the Minister in his aim of achieving regional government.

Mr. Davey: Absolutely. If the proposal were accepted, the Minister would for once be saying that the Government were going to trust people. They would not be imposing a restructuring of local government in the manner of the previous Conservative Government; they would actually be asking people in those areas what they think.

My personal opinion is that it would be better to see some reorganisation and to move to unitary government, but I see no reason why I, the Minister or anyone else in the House should foist that on people. If people do not want to pay more—the issue that seems to concern the Conservatives most—they will vote for unitarisation.

Mr. Beith: The problem is worse than that. First, the people concerned will be asked to vote for a specific scheme of unitary government that is not necessarily the one that they would choose; secondly, the decision will be made not by them but by the great majority of people who already live in unitary areas, such as those in the northern regions. Those people have no interest in the outcome, but because they are voting on the regional issue they will determine what kind of unitary system the minority, who currently live in two-tier areas, will get.

Mr. Davey: My right hon. Friend is of course exactly right, and he brings me to the final amendment that I wish to speak to.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: On the point made by the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), the

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

simple solution is to force the conclusion that it is right to vote against the Bill; otherwise, one is simply exacerbating the problem that has been highlighted.

Mr. Davey: What we are trying to do is to amend the Bill so that it is in line with our views and our policy. We voted for it on Second Reading because unlike the Conservatives, we are in favour of regional devolution. We want to democratise existing regional government, but it was the Conservatives who set up a whole series of quangos that govern the lives of our constituents. Those quangos cannot be held to account, so we need regional democracy, which is why we support the Bill.

Mr. Hammond: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman was very generous to me, so I shall be generous to him.

Mr. Hammond: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I understand his aspiration, but if, as we must anticipate, he is unsuccessful in achieving it and the Government proceed with the Bill on the basis that the price for elected regional assemblies is the compulsory unitarisation of all local government in the regions, will the Liberal Democrats support that process, or will they join us in opposing it?

Mr. Davey: The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) are anticipating not just tonight's voting, but voting in another place. I can assure the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that we will urge our colleagues to amend the Bill to make it more democratic, and I hope that he will ask the same of his. My concern is that the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues in the other place may be trying to wreck this Bill, and that they do not in fact want to democratise regional government. That is the issue before us.

Mr. Derek Foster: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: The right hon. Gentleman is a very experienced Member, and it is a delight to let him in.

Mr. Foster: That is very kind of the hon. Gentleman. I invite him to speculate, were there to be a second question, on the size of the preamble that would seek to explain to the electorate the various alternatives that local government might imply for them and their families.

Mr. Davey: Well, we do not have to look very far to deal with the right hon. Gentleman's concern about the preamble becoming too long. We need look no further than amendment No. 51—I was about to discuss it—which would insert a second question for those affected by local government restructuring. To them, the county councils and district councils that would be mentioned in it are very real, because they have voted for them for several decades. If that question were provided for those people, a preamble would not be necessary because the question would be so clear.

Amendment No. 51 not only deals with the problem mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed: ensuring that the referendum result is fair, and that people from the majority part of the region are not imposing local government restructuring on the minority part; if amendment No. 51 were accepted, we would be more likely to get what the Government desire: a yes vote in the referendum on the regional assemblies. By decoupling the issues and creating greater democracy, we are more likely to gain the people's trust and then get the right result for the Government.

8.45 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I support the idea of decoupling the issue of local government reorganisation from regional government, so the principle behind the amendments is one that I understand and support. However, the way in which they are phrased does not attract me, because they involve a choice between one solution of unitary government—the one that the boundary committee recommends—and the status quo, which would still leave the areas concerned with two tiers.

One way of dealing with that might have been to have a separate question for the areas affected by local government reorganisation, to the effect that there was a choice between one or other form of unitary government. One of the Liberal Democrat councillors in the north-east, Chris Foote-Wood, has proposed such a formula for a second question. Since I, like the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), am a supporter of unitary government, that might have been one way of dealing with it.

I hope that my Front-Bench colleagues will not close their minds to the possibility of decoupling the issue from the main debate on regional government. Failure to do so would send a message that regional government had something to do with local government, whereas—as my right hon. Friend the Minister knows—those of us who have been keen on regional government for a long time see it as something important in its own right, something that could be supported on its own merits and something that would bring a new form of democracy to our country.

I do not accept any of the arguments of the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond). It is a shame that someone with the historic name of Runnymede in his constituency title should be so resistant to any constitutional innovation, and I am disappointed by his narrow-minded attitude to regional government. However, I hope that the Government will look at the ideas behind the Liberal Democrat amendments, even if, like me, they are not attracted by the specific amendments.

I want to refer to the comments made by Conservative Members about their fears about the destruction of the counties, and they often refer to the idea of the historic counties. Having been born and brought up in the historic county of Northumberland, and representing now two towns in the historic county of Durham, I know perfectly well that the historic counties have not existed for a long time. Indeed, they were effectively destroyed by the then Conservative Government in the 1970s. I do not recall the Conservatives taking into

account at the time the feelings of identity that people had with those historic counties. Their argument about counties is misplaced, and the previous Conservative Government compounded the matter by some of the decisions they took, understandably, to allow unitary areas in other parts of the former historic counties. We should not be attracted to their points of view. None the less, I urge my hon. Friends to accept that it is important, in the campaign to establish regional government in this country, that a clear distinction be drawn between the role and functions of regional government and those of local government. It is possible to believe strongly in the need for stronger and more effective local government—as Labour Members do—without that contradicting the principle that we must have an equally strong regional democratic government in those areas that want it.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge argued that it would not be possible to have regional government in only one area of England. I found that argument incomprehensible. At present, we already have what is referred to as an asymmetrical form of devolution in this country. The Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly each have their unique powers, and a special arrangement is in place for London. A number of special arrangements exist: if such an arrangement suited the people in north-east England, for instance, why should they be denied something to which people elsewhere in the UK have been given an entitlement?

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge seemed to take the view that England must be standardised. That is entirely wrong. Indeed, that standardisation approach has bedevilled previous local government reorganisations, as it does not take account of regional and local feeling.

Mr. Lansley: Does not the right hon. Lady accept that the Government are offering devolution only on their own terms? Other parts of the UK may not want to adopt the standard model—for example, they might prefer central Government powers to be devolved to upper-tier authorities such as county councils. If people in the north-east want, and vote for, regional government, that would be okay for them. However, that may well be the exception and the Government would not allow others a different form of devolution.

Joyce Quin: I do not accept that. The Bill allows a certain form of regional government for areas that decide that they want it. However, why should not a future Government listen to different proposals that may come forward from areas that decide otherwise? As the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton noted, there is no reason why a future Government should not produce proposals for unitary local government in areas that do not want to move to regional government. That is another reason why the two issues should be decoupled.

Mr. Lansley: The point that the right hon. Lady makes is contradicted by the specific example of planning. The Government propose that regional planning will be conducted either by the elected regional assemblies or by unelected—nominated—regional planning bodies. People will not have the option to say that the devolved planning responsibilities in their region should be conducted at a sub-regional level or by counties. That option is simply not available.

Joyce Quin: The hon. Gentleman makes a point about one aspect of this decentralisation process. However, although I believe that the proposals will suit my part of the country, the north-east, it is perfectly possible that, in the future, different proposals could be formulated that would suit other parts of the country. It is absurd of the hon. Gentleman to see the decentralisation process as a one-off event that closes the door on any future innovation.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I want to substantiate the point made so well by my hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley). If people in north Cumbria—the old county of Cumberland—had to suffer regional government, they might prefer to be part of her north-east regional assembly than a north-west assembly. How would that be tested if, as my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) asserts, there is no possibility that one region of England can go it alone?

Joyce Quin: I strongly support the Government's approach of proceeding on the basis of the regional boundaries that we have because that is the way to make progress with regional devolution. However, I am perfectly relaxed about the prospect of having an elected assembly in the north-west and one in the north-east or even not having an elected assembly in the north-west and yet there being a sufficient desire to reopen the boundary issue at some point. My perspective is different from that of the hon. Gentleman; he seems to imagine that regional boundaries are prisons from which one cannot escape. That is an absurd notion. Why should a north-western region not co-operate with the north-east over transport links and economic links in border areas of the regions?

This is not an entrapment mechanism; it will enable regions to look at their needs and to co-operate. The devolved structures in European countries and elsewhere in the world often have structures that allow regions to co-operate with each other. To see regions as something from which one can never escape or to believe that it is impossible for them to have a dialogue with central Government or other regions is an absurd way of viewing the situation.

I hope that we can make progress on the Bill. Despite hoping that Ministers will look at local government reorganisation somewhat differently, I strongly support the Government's overall approach to the issue.

Mr. Gummer: It is important, when considering the referendum question, to recognise that the regions were first established for the convenience of Government to deal with elected counties in particular and unitary authorities. That is why they are drawn as they are—it is for the convenience of Government, while counties, districts and unitary authorities are the elected convenience. If we turn that round and take away the elected counties, we are doing something very different. That is why I draw a distinction between the regions as a Government convenience—it was more convenient to have a common Government local region rather than

[Mr. Gummer]

having different regions for different purposes—and the Minister's suggestion that the regions to which individuals naturally show some allegiance are convenient for Government. Historically, people did not do that because they were in a county or district, depending on the issue, or a unitary authority.

Jim Knight: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: In a moment.

In many parts of the country, the region itself holds no particular attraction. I agree with the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). I am sure that in the north-east and, perhaps to a lesser extent, the north-west, there will be those who see some connection between themselves and a place called the north-east. We have all found that in our travels around the countryside, and in our business and political life. However, I hope that she will accept from me that that does not exist for some regions. I am not trying to have a row with the Minister for Local Government and the Regions. We can have a bit of badinage, but he knows perfectly well whether there is a connection between Rickmansworth and my constituency. Rickmansworth is to a great extent part of greater London, with which it connects itself and has no connection with my part of the country.

It is likely that if there were a referendum, most of the people of the so-called eastern region would vote no to the first question put to them. They would be more likely to vote no if there were not a second question. Even more antagonism is created by the idea of local government reorganisation of the kind we know that the Government have in mind.

9 pm

In my constituency, before the last general election, a proposal was floated—and chatted out by the local Labour party—that there should be a new unitary authority called Greater Ipswich. If there is one thing that the people of Felixstowe like less than the idea of being part of a region called East Anglia that includes Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, it is becoming part of Greater Ipswich. Anyone who has ever experienced the complete incompetence of Ipswich borough council will understand why the people of Felixstowe do not want to be part of it. The Minister may make faces, but one reason that people do not want that change is that their council tax will go through the roof.

Mr. Lansley: Another thing that my right hon. Friend's constituents may not like is the fact that they could be asked such a question at a time when they did not know where the seat of regional government was to be. If they would not like to be part of Ipswich, they would probably not like to be governed from Cambridge—part of which I represent—or still less, from the big new city the size of Milton Keynes that the East of England planning body proposes to establish in the eastern region. Perhaps the East of England is proposing the Brasilia option.

Mr. Gummer: Without following my hon. Friend too far down that route, I merely note that although the East of England planning authority is proposing the establishment of that new city, it is unwilling to tell us where it would be, in case the proposal is unpopular with anyone who lives there at present.

If two questions are not included in the referendum, the Government will get a much lower vote in a number of areas. People can see the difference between the two questions. I shall vote no to both of them, but that will not be true of everyone in my constituency. Obviously, I want to give the proposal a fair wind; I should not dream of doing otherwise—I want people to have the chance to choose. I am sure that the vote will be overwhelmingly against it, but we should let people have the chance.

What is wrong with asking two questions when the alternative is the interesting preamble to the referendum question set out in clause 2(2)? I want to make some points about the preamble, Mr. Winterton—[HON. MEMBERS: "Sir Nicholas."]—I beg your pardon, Sir Nicholas.

Mr. Raynsford: The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) emphasises the importance of giving people choice. Will he tell the House how much choice he gave people at the time of the Banham review, over which he presided? Was there an option for a referendum in any electoral district of the country under the Conservative Government's reorganisation?

Mr. Gummer: As the right hon. Gentleman knows perfectly well, because I have told him privately on several occasions, I neither wrote the terms of the boundary commission's operation, nor did I approve of the way in which they were drawn up or of the people who drew them up. If he thinks that I shall defend the structure, he has another think coming—I have never done so anywhere.

Happily, we are not discussing the Banham review but the Bill. I realise of course that the Minister would like to discuss something else because he does not like the Bill. That is the problem. I always know when the right hon. Gentleman does not like what he has to do; his smile becomes broader and deeper and he becomes more avuncular and much more charming than he ever is when he is really keen on something.

The right hon. Gentleman is not keen on the Bill and the reason is the extremely peculiar piece of writing to which I referred. I am sure that he did not write the statement himself—it is not elegant enough. Why was it included? Because the Government are very afraid that faced with the simple question,

"Should there be an elected assembly for the region?"—

the East Anglian region, or wherever it is—many people will say, "I don't know", or even worse, "I don't care". So we have to start with a bit of indoctrination explaining why people should know and care.

I do not know whether the Minister has noticed how long it normally takes people to vote at a polling station, but if they all have to sit down and read and understand the statement—

Mr. Lansley: There will be no queues.

Mr. Gummer: Of course not, because so few people will vote that there will be plenty of time. Perhaps that

is what the Minister hopes. Perhaps he hopes that less than 20 per cent. of the electorate will bother to turn out so the queues will not be too long.

Mr. Jack: Does my right hon. Friend see a picture where someone may seek help and an interpretation of those words at the ballot box? How would that matter be resolved?

Mr. Gummer: I do not know. Indeed, those who are unfortunately disabled in one way or another may need the normal arrangements that help them to vote to be extended in some way, and I do not know what the Minister would do in those circumstances. Will someone be there to read the preamble to anyone who is partially sighted, for example? That is a serious question. This is a different kind of voting from that which we have had before.

Mr. Edward Davey: I think that the right hon. Gentleman does a disservice to the Minister. The Minister wants a lot of people to vote; it is No. 10 Downing street that does not.

Mr. Gummer: None of us can entirely know what is going on in No. 10 Downing street, so I should not like to follow the hon. Gentleman down that path.

The preamble exists because the Government are uncertain that the public will understand what they are being asked to do. The preamble might be justified if it helped to make things certain, but it does not, which is why I support the amendments that relate to the preamble's wording.

First, the preamble says:

"You can help to decide whether there should be an elected assembly in"

whichever region it is. That may or may not be true, but it is certainly not what the public think help means. They think that, if they mark their crosses on the ballot papers and there are more crosses in favour than against, they will have helped to create an elected regional assembly, but that will not happen. What will happen is that the result will be communicated to the Secretary of State, who will decide, so the public are only helping to advise the Secretary of State.

The referendums will be advisory. At the very least, the preamble, if we are to have one, must say that the referendums are advisory and that the public are partially helping and making a bit of a contribution. However, even fewer people will vote when they understand that, but saying it is worth while.

The preamble then says:

"the regional assembly would be responsible for a range of activities".

I am always suspicious when people use the phrase "a range of activities". What the blazes does a range of activities mean?

I noted the fact that the Minister referred to a number of very real powers, but he did not mention what those powers would be. He also said that there would be a number of opportunities to advise, but which opportunities, which circumstances and would anyone bother to listen? All that is unclear. The preamble is a load of old guff and, what is more, those reading it will realise that it is.

Mr. Streeter: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the people who will vote in the referendums do not need a preamble? What they need is an Act of Parliament to be passed, spelling out the functions and responsibilities of the elected regional assemblies, and an executive summary to be made available to them so that they know exactly what they are voting for.

Mr. Gummer: I want to ask why that will not be done, because it is so obvious. I suspect that it will not be done for exactly the same reason as why the Government were so coy about the powers of the Mayor of London: they do not want to say what the powers will be.

Jim Knight: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Gummer: No.

The Government do not want anyone to be too certain about the powers because they may not wish to provide so many powers, or they may wish to be more vague about them, so that they can find out who voted for the regional assembly before defining them. I noticed that, when the person whom the Government had hoped would not be chosen was elected as Mayor of London, he got rather less power than the mayor might have got if another gentlemen had won. I think that that is what this is all about.

The Bill is about not defining the powers too precisely so that the Government can see what happens. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) should remember that, if they were defined in an Act of Parliament, there would not be much give and take at the edges. If they are defined simply by a few words from the Minister and Labour party headquarters and by a comforting remark from the Prime Minister, no doubt, the powers can be adjusted according to region.

Do we know whether the powers will be the same in every region? Or perhaps those regions that generally seem to be on the Government's side may be given a bit more power and those that do not support them a bit less? A real, constitutional reason therefore exists for saying that the preamble is a fudge designed to make sure that the Government do not get hoist with their own petard.

My last point is in relation to the reorganisation of local government as hidden in this preamble. I have said that I would like two questions, but I do not know who will understand this preamble. A single tier can mean a range of things. In Suffolk, people would generally prefer the counties. Whatever the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West said, in Suffolk, when the local reorganisation to which she referred took place, the historic county was replaced, because, in the 1870s, it was divided into two—East and West Suffolk—and the historic county came back into operation in 1974. I want to remind her of her history, however, because the proposals of the then Conservative Government were much closer to the historic counties than the proposals put forward in the Redcliffe-Maud report, which was a very socialist report—I think that

[Mr. Gummer]

you and I, Sir Nicholas, are the only two Members present who can remember those great days. That report would have swept away many of the structures that we are discussing, and would have been a recipe for a new socialist Britain, much of which, happily, we managed to defeat.

The fact of the matter is that those of us who live in historic counties do not want to lose them. I know that because of my experience in local government reform. I did not choose that task—it was one of those things that was handed on—and I have always believed that local government reform is a disaster for anyone who does it, in any circumstances, ever since it has been done. This Government will find that as well. It is one of those things: a fact of life. It is no good thinking that is a party political question. Whatever the Minister says about the last Government, local government reform is always difficult because there are lots of people out there who want something totally different from lots of other people, and there is no way of satisfying everybody. The Minister will be very unpopular, and nobody will like the reforms much, but that is the nature of local government reform, not the nature of the Bill.

This Bill and question, however, are worse than most. That is because they do not do the job that the Minister wants. He should think about his love of history and the accumulated wisdom of the past, about which I have heard him talk on a number of occasions, and say to himself, "Isn't it odd that this will be the first kind of referendum that needs a whole lot of guff before we can get anybody to vote on it?" Would it not be better to throw it out and replace it with two simple questions? The first question should ask whether there should be an elected assembly for the East Anglian region—I use my region as an example—and list the counties of which that region would consist. Everybody would then know what was being talked about. When one refers to East Anglia in Suffolk, people think that that means Norfolk, Suffolk and possibly Cambridgeshire. It certainly does not include Essex, as we never include Essex in any circumstances, and none of us has ever thought that Bedfordshire was in East Anglia.

The second question would be very simple: should the local authority now be a unitary authority called, for example, Greater Ipswich? One of the reasons my majority increased at the last election was that I mentioned, because I thought it right, to everybody in Felixstowe that the Labour party wanted a Greater Ipswich. The vote on that subject was very satisfactory. I cannot therefore promise the Minister that he will make progress very fast in that area.

Mr. Raynsford: I entirely share the right hon. Gentleman's love of history. He has commented on the possible electoral consequences of his actions, so does he think that the Labour party's remarkable electoral success in Berkshire in the 1997 election owed anything to his decision to abolish the historic county of Berkshire?

Mr. Gummer: The Labour party's success in Berkshire owed more to its success in the United Kingdom as a whole. As the Minister well knows, there is no indication that the Labour party did better in Berkshire than elsewhere. After the next election, it is unlikely that the Labour party will be able to point to any part of Berkshire that is represented by a Labour Member. That will have nothing to do with electoral reorganisation either.

There is no doubt that my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) was wrong to say that the proposal was like buying a pig in a poke. If we buy a pig in a poke, we at least find the pig and the poke. With this proposal, we do not know what we are buying. When we buy a pig in a poke, we know that we are not getting a horse. With this proposal, we have no idea. Decent constitutional needs require simple constitutional questions, so can we have two simple questions in all parts of the country? In most parts of the country, people will say no, but let us ask them, trust them and not give them guff.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Temporary Chairman (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I shall seek to be helpful to a Committee of the whole House. Several Members wish to contribute to the debate. If they are brief, more of them may be able to speak before we run out of time than would otherwise be the case.

9.15 pm

Mr. George Howarth: I shall try to heed your instructions, Mr. Winterton.

The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), in his tigerish manner, suggested that the politics of identity were important. He hit on an important truth. We often define our identity not so much in terms of whom we associate with but of whom we do not want to be associated with. I served for a couple of years as a junior Minister in Northern Ireland, and I am well aware of the truth of that, sad though it may often be.

I grew up and spent most of my young life in Huyton. Until I was a young man, it was part of Lancashire but, in 1974, it was put into Merseyside. I slightly disagree with the right hon. Gentleman on this point. Although a Conservative Government introduced the legislation, it made more sense for the people of Huyton to be in Merseyside than it ever did for us to be in Lancashire. That is as true today as it was then. I now live in Prescot. It used to be in my constituency but, because of the vagaries of boundary changes, it no longer is. Many people who live there consider that they live still live in Lancashire. Because there is no natural border with Lancashire, they have a somewhat vain hope that they will return to it.

I should have said at the outset that I intend to support the Opposition's lead amendment—amendment No. 39. There should be a second question on the ballot paper in my part of the world. People should be asked whether they would prefer to have a Greater Merseyside assembly or authority. I shall try to work out the details of the question, but my current argument is that that option should be available.

I noted that my right hon. Friend the Minister was anxious to preserve the position of London. He challenged the Opposition Front-Bench spokesman several times on the implications of their amendments

for that city. If the arrangements in London—possibly minus Ken Livingstone—are satisfactory for people there, why can we not have something similar on Merseyside? For that matter, why can the people of Manchester or Newcastle not have something similar if they so wish?

I made it clear that I object in principle to the whole process. However, the Bill received Second Reading, although not with my support because I abstained, and the Government's majority means that it is almost certain to end up on the statute book. As the argument develops, I think that more people will share my view. If I can convince the people of Merseyside to support me, I hope that they will have the ability to say, "This is the future we want." Current arrangements allow them some control over their transport and that would continue under the process that I advocate. No doubt they would want to have some influence over policing. We have a good relationship with the chief constable and all the local authorities have a good relationship with the police through partnership arrangements. They would want to have local control over other things as well.

I object to the Government's proposal because there is no natural sympathy between the people who live on Merseyside and the people of Manchester. There is no connection between the people of Cheshire and the people of Merseyside. There are connections for those people who have moved around, but they are different places with different histories, different backgrounds and, let us be honest about it, possibly different aspirations. The same is probably true of Lancashire. I cannot begin to describe what a strange relationship we have with Cumbria. It is a wonderful place. I love the people and am keen on my right hon. and hon. Friends who represent it, but there is no natural connection with my constituency other than the fact that we love to go there for our holidays, for a day out or to go camping or walking.

I have grave doubts about the process, but my right hon. Friend could persuade me and some of my colleagues who are beginning to share my view to take a different approach if he at least gave the major urban areas the opportunity to carve out their own identity. Frankly, the one-size-fits-all arrangement will not suit Merseyside. I hope that he has listened carefully to my comments. I will support the Opposition on the amendment. I hope not to be put in that position repeatedly and that my right hon. Friend will give me a reason to support the Government again on this matter.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth), who has held a consistent and reasoned view on the legitimate question of marrying identity with what feels right so that the local government configuration serves the mutual interests of belonging and accountability. He and I debated that recently on a north-west television hustings programme. Some 800 calls were taken during that half-hour programme. I know that the Minister is keen to establish whether there is support for regional assemblies and that he wants to take soundings on them. The idea of the programme was to test support for a north-west regional assembly. I argued against it and said that there was no need or demand for it. As it happens, my view came out on top. It might help to bear that in mind in terms of soundings.

I endorse the points made so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) and will vote accordingly. Speaking as the only Member whose constituency, Eddisbury, is named from the original hundred, it is clear that what the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East said about identity as the core will be uppermost in the minds of people who have to consider the decision. Those of us who are privileged and proud to represent seats in Cheshire—I say this, knowing very well that you are one of those, Sir Nicholas—are in no doubt about people's sense that they come from a county rather than from the north-west. No matter that some counties are only 25 years old and others are many hundreds of years old—or indeed that, following one reincarnation, some have been returned to their original state.

I say that by way of providing a background to consideration of clause 2 and the referendum question. The right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) was unable properly to respond to that question because there will not be only a "one size fits all" approach but a difficult, desynchronised process intended to deal with the Government's proposed devolution arrangements for England. England is the entity being considered, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland already having been addressed.

The failure to give the people of north Cumberland, the residents of the old Cumberland county, the option of saying whether they feel it appropriate to be in the north-west, the north-east or perhaps a newly named north region is a major hole in the Government's proposals. Endorsing the erudite arguments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), it demonstrates why there should be two referendum questions, not least because that addresses so many of the questions asked in interventions.

Despite the Minister's attempt to claim otherwise, the preamble will not meet the requirement under section 104 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 that the Electoral Commission consider the intelligibility of the wording of the referendum question. The preamble begins:

> "You can help to decide whether there should be an elected assembly in the . . . region."

That does not give the reader a sense that there is a real choice, as it would if it were rephrased—if it is to remain. I endorse all the arguments as to why it is guff. Any preamble should read, "You can help to decide whether there should or should not be an elected assembly." It would then be clear that there was a choice.

The reason for my suspicion, and for my endorsement of the amendments, is the fact that the chief executive of the existing north-west regional assembly, a certain Mr. Steve Machin, has already conducted an exercise in which he sent out postcards that could be returned if the recipient were in favour of a north-west region. There was no option on the card to suggest something else or, more important, to state a preference for the status quo.

Hey presto, the exercise is now being prayed in evidence by Mr. Machin and all those who are desperate for the establishment of a north-west region to justify their jobs, so there seems to be a high percentage of support for the proposal. Having corresponded with Mr. Machin, I have placed on record my view that that

[Mr. Stephen O'Brien]

was an illegitimate way of securing support for the north-west region that he is so anxious to establish. He wrote back, saying, "Well, if you can get sponsorship for your question, we would be very happy to conduct a similar exercise."

Mr. George Osborne: Mr. Machin's behaviour is one reason why the Labour party in the north-west is divided, as we have seen from the speech by the hon. Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth). The behaviour of the current north-west assembly has put most people in the region off the whole idea of an elected assembly.

Mr. O'Brien: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour. Even while protected by the privileges of the House, I shall only go so far as to say that I dare say he will share my aspiration that the Minister will conduct close, careful scrutiny of events in the north-west assembly. I gather that he has made a commitment on the Floor of the House that if there has been any use of public money for such arrangements, it will be regarded as a serious matter which could have consequences. Without evidence and absolute proof, it would be wrong to do anything more than simply ask the Minister to be aware that this matter needs deep consideration and close scrutiny.

I shall soon conclude to allow others to speak, but I back the amendments tabled by my colleagues. There is no clear popular demand for north-west regional government. The process of taking soundings requires trust and must not be nobbled—one argument must not be favoured over another. It is therefore extremely important that we note the behaviour of some of those who are strong advocates of regional government in the north-west, as their actions and approaches have undermined my faith that the process has been undertaken in good faith.

9.30 pm

The Temporary Chairman: I urge Members to heed the exhortation I made a few minutes ago for brief speeches so that as many Members as possible can speak on this important amendment.

Mr. Beith: I shall do my best to meet your requirements, Sir Nicholas.

I am in favour of a regional assembly for my own region, the north-east, and therefore strongly oppose amendment No. 20, which is a clear Conservative fiat determining that even if the north-east voted by a large majority for a regional assembly and the legislation was in place, it would be denied the opportunity to have one, which is quite wrong. However, I make a plea to the Minister on behalf of my constituents and people in other parts of the north-east in the remaining two-tier areas who are a minority of the population. The Labour manifesto referred to "predominantly unitary" local government in regions that are to be allowed to proceed to a regional assembly. That condition is already satisfied in the north-east.

In its present form, the Bill would require areas where it has proved difficult in the past to create unitary local government to have it. That decision would require the people in the region who wanted a regional assembly to vote for unitary government, whether or not they wanted it in that form. However, the Bill ensures that the decision about whether they will get an assembly is made by the vast majority of people who live in areas that already have unitary government. That majority would be confused by the question and would have no desire to determine the local government of the remaining two-tier areas—they would not be in the least interested in the fate of local government in areas in which they do not live.

I shall underline for the Minister's benefit the difficulties experienced during previous attempts to create unitary government in Northumberland. The county is too large and diverse to be a single-tier authority—it stretches from Berwick in the north across to Haltwhistle in the west—so there is strong opposition to the proposal. If a unitary Northumberland were the only option, some people might choose it to keep the name "Northumberland" and the association with the county, but it is a very large local government unit. The alternative of reducing six districts to three is often criticised from the centre because their population is relatively small, even though they cover a huge area. Either way, we are likely to face a worrying system of unitary government to which a section of the population is strongly opposed on fairly good grounds. We would be asked to decide the question of a regional assembly in the light of a wholly separate question. As the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) pointed out, that gives the confusing impression that this is all about local government powers: it is not—it is about central Government powers and how they can be devolved effectively.

The Minister and the Government will put a lot of people in rural Northumberland in a difficult position if they tell them that they can have a regional assembly only if they have a particular system of unitary local government. If they do not want that system, they cannot have a regional assembly. Slightly more realistic, perhaps, is a situation in which people may not bother voting because their local government system will be decided by people in Tyneside, Teesside, Hartlepool and all the other unitary areas that make up the majority of the north-east's population. In fact, their votes may be crucial to our getting a regional assembly or not—it may be a close-run thing. In that case, they should be allowed to vote on whether they want a regional assembly. They may well have strong views—in my case, I am strongly in favour of an assembly—and we must not allow that choice to be subverted by a decision on an issue which the Minister must know has been difficult to resolve in previous local government reorganisations.

There may well be a route to a workable system of unitary local government, but I can hardly imagine a worse way of going about it, or a worse way of hobbling the campaign for a regional assembly, than a decision that has nothing at all to do with it.

The Temporary Chairman: The right hon. Gentleman has set a good example, which I hope will be followed.

Jim Knight: I shall do my best, Sir Nicholas. I wish to comment on two aspects of the amendments, which I shall vote against.

The first aspect is the proposal to ask the Electoral Commission to come up with the wording of the question and any necessary preamble. I am proud of the fact that we live in a parliamentary democracy, and I believe that the wording and the preamble should be agreed here in Parliament, not delegated to a less accountable body, even one as highly regarded as the Electoral Commission.

The other amendments on which I shall comment—at slightly greater length, if you will forgive me, Sir Nicholas—are those relating to the preamble. The right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer), in particular, questioned the need for a preamble. I have the greatest respect for the right hon. Gentleman. He will be delighted to know that this time next week, I shall be celebrating Christmas in his constituency—*[Interruption.]* I shall not be going to his house, he will also be pleased to know.

If we do not have a preamble, the Government will be accused of hiding our motives. It is important that it be spelled out clearly to the electorate that they have a choice between the status quo and replacing the two principal levels of local government with a unitary authority and a regional assembly. That seems clear, but I draw the attention of the House to clause 8, dealing with the provision of information to voters. I agree with the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter). It would be wrong to have a long preamble. The choice should be made clear to voters in advance. Clause 8 makes provision for that, especially in subsection (2), which states:

"The Electoral Commission may take such steps as they think appropriate to provide for persons entitled to vote in the referendum such information as the Commission think is likely to promote awareness among those persons about the arguments for and against each answer to the referendum question."

That places a requirement on the Electoral Commission to provide exactly the information called for by the hon. Member for South-West Devon.

I contrast that with the approach of the Opposition. The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond), who has just left the Chamber, spoke about clarity and honesty. The amendments that he tabled would add a whole essay to the preamble. Amendment No. 54 would make it necessary to tell people that the referendum was advisory. Amendment No. 20 would inform them that there would be no action until three regions had voted for a regional assembly. Amendment No. 22 would provide a detailed description of local government reorganisation. Under amendment No. 38, the constituency of the directly elected members would have to be set out. Amendment No. 23 would explain the threshold that the Opposition wish to impose. All those together amount to an incomprehensible essay. I hope that, given his comments, the hon. Member for South-West Devon in particular will vote against this group of amendments.

Finally, I shall add a comment of my own on the preamble, which I hope my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider and deal with on Report. Subsection (2) states:

"Where it is proposed to establish an elected regional assembly, it is also intended that local government should be reorganised into a single tier in those parts of the region that currently have both county and district councils."

I fear that that may be confusing to electors who live in areas with three tiers of local government, because it does not make it clear that parish councils would not be included in that reorganisation into a single tier. I am sure that most hon. Members would understand the provision, and later in the Bill the meaning is made clear, but as a preamble to the referendum question, it may be confusing to electors. I ask my right hon. Friend to reflect on that.

Mr. Streeter: I shall also be brief, Sir Nicholas, in the hope of winning your praise as well.

I should like to focus on one issue relating to the amendments: getting maximum information to the people who may be voting in the referendums. I think that it was Ernest Bevin—I know that the Minister has modelled his political career on this Labour bigwig—pleaded many years ago with the Labour party not to send him naked into the negotiating chamber. If the Bill is enacted, we will be sending our constituents blind into the ballot box and they will be voting on a series of questions about which they have inadequate information. We all want to trust the people, but before we can trust them to make a decision, we must inform them and ensure that they have the requisite information to make an informed choice. We have to spell out exactly what they would be voting for, but the preamble and question as they are configured in the Bill simply do not do that. What people know as they take part in referendums in years to come will be dwarfed by what they do not know about the new elected regional assemblies and local government reform.

Clause 19 gives us a clue about some of things that people will not know, as the information will be available after a referendum. For example, they will not know about

"the electoral areas into which the region is to be divided...the number of electoral areas or the name by which each electoral area is to be known".

We know how significant the name of a district or constituency is to local people. They will not even know

"the total number of members to be elected to the assembly",

so they will not have a clue what the assembly will look like. Perhaps even more worryingly—it is vital to spell out this information in a preamble or in some other way—people will not know about the precise powers, functions and responsibilities of what they are voting for.

When I approached the Standing Committee some weeks ago, I very naively assumed that strategic transport decisions would be taken by the elected regional assemblies. I did so because I thought that that was what the White Paper said. It states that a transport strategy

"will spell out plans to address congestion, improve public transport and road links, and ensure that the transport system supports sustainable economic growth".

That appears to make it fairly clear that the regional assemblies will have significant decision-making ability and power in relation to transport decisions. In the Standing Committee, I asked the Minister whether the regional assembly would make decisions on where road bypasses were installed. He said no and told me that that would remain the province of the Government. Unless we spell out what is happening, many people will vote

[Mr. Streeter]

for an assembly in the belief that the bypass that they have wanted for years is within their grasp because of the impression that local people will have power over such decisions. That is complete balderdash, as that is not what the Bill would give them.

Unless we can spell out exactly what people will get, we will be leading the electorate up the garden path. I still do not believe that that explanation can be given in any form of preamble, as it will come at the wrong time. The ballot paper is not the right place for such information. I believe that we need an active Parliament that clearly defines all the powers, and that an executive summary should be sent to each potential elector well in advance so that he or she can make an informed and coherent decision. Unless the Minister can deliver on that tonight, I shall vote in support of the amendments.

Mr. Key: I wish simply to underline all the comments that have been made about the importance of local government's delivery of services. I think that we will lose a great deal in that regard. Most people do not know that every single local authority has nominated a member of our regional chambers who will take decisions every day on the important strategic issues, including waste, transport and a range of other things. We will lose that under the Bill. I would rather ensure that every local authority was indirectly elected under the existing system than see its replacement by 30 people who have neither the dedication of local government councillors nor the desire to fight for a seat in this House. What sort of people will they be to take over those functions?

Mr. Flook: In order to be brief, I wish to speak mainly to amendment No. 55 and about its recognition of the importance of the county and district set up, primarily as it exists in Somerset.

The south-west region is very much a man-made construct that is of modern hue and has no connection whatever with anyone in Somerset. As the Bill stands, when a local voter goes into the polling booth, should the referendum ever take place, he will be confused even by the question of what region he lives in. Somerset is the county of cider, cricket, the renaissance of the Wurzels and Somerset clotted cream, rather than that of Devon.

Mr. Streeter: Oh, come on.

Mr. Flook: Somerset clotted cream is, as we know, far superior to that of Devon.

The voter will also wonder, when he walks in to the polling booth, what a single tier is. He will not know that local authorities represent a single tier, because he has lived under the administration of Somerset county council and Taunton Deane borough council. Will he be aware, as he votes, that Bristol, Swindon, Torbay, Exeter, Gloucester and Plymouth are already unitary? Will he also be aware that he is at a disadvantage compared with his colleagues in the north of the so-called region of which he is part? Will he have thought that the urban areas will have different needs? The Liberal Democrats who control Somerset county council keep telling us that the area is rural, although they never do anything about that. Will the voter also be aware that, if there are to be unitary authorities in Somerset, Taunton would be part of the west Somerset unitary authority—which, ironically, would be good for the Conservatives? Although I get on very well with my hon. Friend the Member for Bridgwater (Mr. Liddell-Grainger), I am not sure that the people of Taunton get on well enough with the people of Bridgwater to want to be in the same local authority.

A regional area is a construct that has no relevance whatever to anyone in Somerset. That is not surprising, because the regional development agency, on which the regional assembly would be based, has been completely useless to the people of Taunton. When I wrote to the RDA asking what contribution it had made to the Taunton constituency, it tried to dress up its contribution, but in fact the money that it had spent had been given to it by English Partnerships. The real keystone, the Government office for the south-west, was, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer) said, for the convenience of Government. He also talked about an elected convenience of local authorities. In fact, we miss the point if we have regional assemblies based on a regional construct, because what we need is democratic ownership. That is why I shall be voting for the amendment.

Mr. Jack: I firmly believe that the terms of amendment No. 39 should be supported. In relation to the preamble, anyone would find it difficult to agree on a word that everyone would be satisfied with, but simple questions are what referendums are about, and we should have two such questions: one on the regional assembly and one that makes people aware of what the local government implications are. My constituents would certainly not welcome finding the borough of Fylde subsumed into a city of the Fylde, dominated by Blackpool. There is antagonism of an historic nature there, and people need to be alerted to the situation.

I agree with the comments that have been made about the need to ensure that people have full and adequate information before they reach the ballot box. Having this type of statement in the preamble is not the place to debate the issues of the moment on this matter. If, however, the amendments are lost and this statement does appear, the Minister should tell us at what reading age it has been aimed. I would like to know why, for example, no alternative form of display for this information has been proposed. It could have been displayed perhaps not in a paragraph but in bullet point form. Perhaps the skills of tabloid journalists could have been applied, in a positive sense, to convey a lot more information to people, so far as the text is concerned. The enthusiasm for regional government was demonstrated to me last Friday when I met members of the north-west CBI. In an altogether random but none the less interesting straw poll of about 60 business people, only two voted positively for this proposal. I believe that the use of two straightforward questions is the way forward.

Mr. Raynsford: We have had an interesting debate that has focused on three main issues: whether there should be a preamble and whether there were precedents for it; the use of a single question linking the issue of the

regional assembly to the unitary local government arrangement, as against the preference of some Members for two questions; and the definition of regions. I shall try to deal with all those points while responding on the amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond).

Amendment No. 39 would require any order made under clause 1—that is, one to hold a referendum—also to direct the Electoral Commission to determine the question or questions. Amendment No. 11 would also leave the form of the preamble to the Electoral Commission, but Parliament, through the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, gave a specific role to the commission. What we propose is entirely consistent with that role, which is to comment on the intelligibility of UK national and regional referendum questions and to be consulted when the question or preamble is set by subordinate legislation.

The 2000 Act does not give the commission the responsibility to set the question and understandably so, as it is meant to be above the political fray such as that which we have seen today over the form that the referendum question should take. As my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight) emphasised, such decisions should ultimately be taken by an elected Government who are answerable to an elected Parliament.

As the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge explained, amendment No. 11 has other implications.

Mr. George Howarth: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way, as he has little time. If he rejects the notion of the Electoral Commission setting more than one question, will he at least allow the possibility of there being more than one?

Mr. Raynsford: I shall come to that in a moment. I hope that my hon. Friend will bear with me, as I want to try to address the point through a series of logical steps. Otherwise, I will not be able to cover the ground in the relatively short time available.

I have sympathy with the points made by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge on the importance of the electorate understanding the conclusions of the boundary committee review of their region. We also believe that voters should be aware of the implications for local government when they cast their vote, but our approach has been to keep the preamble relatively short and general, highlighting the intention to move to wholly unitary government if an elected assembly is to be established.

However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman and all Members of the House that we also intend to put out a factual statement to voters in the run-up to a referendum, which would include more detailed information on the local government changes recommended by the boundary committee. I have listened carefully to the debate, and I can say in response to the questions raised by a number of Members that we would be perfectly prepared to consider having a map to set out the whole region and illustrating it with further information on the number of counties and other districts in that region, if that would be helpful. We want to ensure that electors are fully informed of the implications.

Accepting amendment No. 11 would also mean that no statement on the intended functions or powers of the proposed assembly could be included in the preamble unless those functions and powers were defined in an Act. This is just another example of the Opposition's delaying tactics, which we have rejected. I believe that the Liberal Democrats have rejected them too.

Mr. Hammond: The Minister has conceded readily that conducting the boundary review will take approximately a year. Does he really think that it would be impossible for the Government to get their act together and put the legislation to set up the assemblies through Parliament within a year?

Mr. Raynsford: As I have made clear to the hon. Gentleman in many previous exchanges, we are following exactly the same precedent that was adopted in the examples of Scotland, Wales and London whereby a referendum was held to determine whether the Government should legislate to allow the creation of the relevant Parliament or Assembly. We are following exactly the same procedure and we will ensure that information is made available in a comprehensive form, so that people are fully aware of what they are voting on. We intend to publish a statement on the proposed powers of the elected assembly based on our White Paper proposals so that electors are properly informed before they cast their vote.

Mr. Lansley: How can the Minister, based on the White Paper, assert in the preamble that the activities that would be carried out by the assembly are those

"carried out mainly by central government bodies,"

especially in respect of regional economic development? The only transfer of a central Government responsibility for regional economic development in the White Paper is the appointment of the chair and members of a regional development agency. Everything else is already done either regionally or locally.

Mr. Raynsford: The hon. Gentleman has drawn attention to a hugely important issue—the appointment of members of regional development agencies and the oversight of their work. Their work is crucial to economic development in regions, and we are giving the elected regional assemblies that role and responsibility as well as oversight of a number of other areas. *[Interruption.]* I have not time to elaborate on that this evening. In response to an earlier intervention, I have already given the details of the powers in relation to housing and I could give details about a number of other matters, but time is limited. Let me simply stress that the powers relate coherently to regional functions that must be discharged in a region. Powers relating to economic development, transport planning, housing planning, wider land use planning, environmental planning and cultural issues, for instance, are best discharged at regional level and will form the substance of the work of the elected regional assemblies.

The Liberal Democrat amendments Nos. 28, 29, 30 and 51 ask for a separate question on local government reorganisation. Amendments Nos. 30 and 51 set out two different formulations for the question. That is a fairly typical Liberal Democrat approach:

[Mr. Raynsford]

whenever there is a chance of being simple, avoid it and try to be complicated. Let us have a proliferation of questions and a proliferation of talking shops!

I remember only too well the parallel situation involving the Greater London Authority. The Liberal Democrats wanted two questions then. They wanted to separate the mayor from the assembly: they did not want a mayor and an assembly working together. They always go for two questions rather than one if they can. It is a sad comment on the Conservative party—and it is probably why, according to the opinion polls, it now has only 27 per cent. support—that it has followed the Liberal Democrats down this fruitless path. Both parties are completely out of touch.

I disagree with both of them. The move to a single tier of local government is an integral part of the regional assembly package. Without rationalisation, a regional assembly will add complexity to the structure of government and lead to an undesirable proliferation of tiers of government. We want a clear division of responsibilities between different tiers of government, and clear lines of accountability between those tiers and the voters. In all parts of the United Kingdom where we have devolved powers to Parliaments or assemblies—Scotland, Wales and Greater London—local government is unitary, and it is entirely logical to have a unitary framework of local government in any region that opts for an elected regional assembly.

Amendments Nos. 19, 22 and 38 would all add information to the preamble. I have some sympathy with what the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge is trying to achieve, at least in the first two amendments. He wants to ensure that voters know which local authorities are in their regions, and what local government changes would be intended to result if an elected assembly were established. I am, however, less impressed by the wording. Why does the hon. Gentleman want to list countries rather than counties, and why has he left out non-metropolitan districts? But I will pass over that. I have already given an assurance that we are happy to consider including a map and an appropriate description, which will ensure that people are properly informed.

Amendment No. 38 is slightly different. It seeks to set out in the preamble what the electoral districts would be for directly elected members of an assembly. It is somewhat confused, in that the Electoral Commission, rather than the Boundary Committee, will advise on electoral areas. Clause 19 provides that the commission should give that advice after a referendum has been held and when an elected assembly is to be established.

Mr. George Osborne : Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Raynsford: No, I have no time.

By contrast with amendment No. 11, the Liberal Democrat amendment No. 31 would remove the preamble altogether. That is a curious proposal, as I have already pointed out. *[Interruption.]*

The Temporary Chairman: Order. The Committee may not wish to listen to the Minister, but I do.

10 pm

Mr. Raynsford: The Liberal Democrats' wish to remove the preamble is curious, given their strong advocacy in the debate for the Electoral Commission's proposed preamble; but I do not expect consistency from the Liberal Democrats.

Amendment No. 54 tries to redraft the first sentence of the preamble and emphasises the fact that the referendum is advisory, but our intention is to be guided by the referendum result. If people do vote yes, we intend to establish an assembly; if they vote no, we intend not to do so. That is why, in the wording of clause 2(2), we have said:

"You can help to decide".

By not stating, "You can decide", clause 2(2) already reflects the fact that the referendum is advisory. The Electoral Commission considered the wording and was content with this approach. Through other amendments, hon. Members are seeking to place great store by the commission's views on the wording of the question and of the preamble. So I trust that the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge will not press amendment No. 54 to a vote.

Amendment No. 49 seeks to replace the current wording of the preamble with that proposed by the Electoral Commission. As I have said, we take the commission's views very seriously indeed, and we will consider its comments carefully, along with some comments made during the debate, including those of my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Jim Knight), who made a valid point about parish councils. We will consider all such comments before deciding whether it is appropriate to amend the Bill, and if so, at what stage.

Amendment No. 50, which was moved by the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), would delete from the preamble any reference to local government reorganisation. I imagine that he intends it to be consequential on his other amendments, which add a separate question on reorganisation. I have already explained why we do not regard that as appropriate. We do not accept the Liberal Democrat wish for a continued proliferation of tiers of government, and for more talk, more talking shops and more politicians. We want streamlined structures, we want clarity, and we want action, not words.

I turn to amendment No. 20. We have already discussed, under clause 1, the issue of a threshold. Now, the Opposition want to set another hurdle before elected assemblies can be established. If the amendment were accepted, three or more regions would have to vote in favour of an assembly before any could be established. We all know that interest in having an elected regional assembly varies in different parts of the country. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) rightly made the point that if individual regions want an elected assembly, there is no reason whatsoever why they should be denied. It is a classic comment on the views of the Conservatives that they would deny individual regions the opportunity of an elected regional assembly. No wonder they have such little representation in the north-east.

We heard an extraordinary contribution from the right hon. Member for Suffolk, Coastal (Mr. Gummer). In a speech that reminded me of medieval theologians

debating angels dancing on the head of a pin—given his very real interest in theology, he will probably consider that analogy carefully—he tried to justify his own current rejection of regions that he himself designated, as Secretary of State, in the mid-1990s. He ended up disowning the whole process of local government reorganisation over which he presided. That is the most extraordinary example, certainly since the time of Mr. Tony Benn, of a former Secretary of State disowning virtually everything that he himself actively promoted when in government. His own legacy was dismissed as—in his own words—a "load of old guff".

I do not see a variation of interest as a reason to hold back progress in the regions where interest is most advanced. If people in one or two regions vote to establish a regional assembly, I see no reason why the Opposition should deny them that choice. We believe in letting people in the regions make a choice, and we want them to determine the future of their regions. The Opposition want to hold them back, and the Liberal Democrats want simply to delay and to have endless talking shops. So I urge the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge to withdraw his amendment, and if he does not I urge the House to reject it.

Mr. Hammond: I will do no such thing. I realise that the Minister was under time pressure, but he has not replied to the important point that my hon. Friend the Member for Eddisbury (Mr. O'Brien) made about the north-west regional assembly. I hope that he will write to him on it. I should also tell the Minister that, before trying to score a point out of a printing error, it is always a good idea to get the latest version of the Order Paper, rather than yesterday's version.

We can sum up what the Minister told us at the end of this debate, which has been about making information available, ensuring that it is fairly presented, and ensuring that the significance of the question is correctly understood by electors.

At the end of the debate, the Minister has conceded that the only significant power that will be devolved down from central Government to the newly elected regional assemblies will be the power to appoint the chairman of the regional development agency. I suggest to the Minister that if he had the honesty to put that in the preamble rather than talking about

"activities that are currently carried out mainly by central government bodies"

he would find that the level of interest—however low it might already have been—would decrease still further.

The Minister has simply failed to address the concerns that have been expressed from my right hon. and hon. Friends and the concerns with which the amendments seek to deal; making sure that electors have the information that they need to deal with the question and that any preamble is presented fairly and objectively. It should be prepared, ideally, by an independent body; if not, it should at least at least include proper, factual information and not a lot of Government spin. If the Minister wants to know the definition of "guff", he only has to look at his own words. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to vote for the amendment tonight.

It being five hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee, THE FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN *put forthwith the Question already proposed from the Chair, pursuant to Order [this day].*

The Committee divided: Ayes 172, Noes 296.

Division No. 37] **[10:06 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Allan, Richard
Amess, David
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Brazier, Julian
Breed, Colin
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burnett, John
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hammond, Philip
Harvey, Nick
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Keetch, Paul
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lamb, Norman
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Maude, rh Francis
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Portillo, rh Michael
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Redwood, rh John
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Sanders, Adrian
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard

Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Stunell, Andrew
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tonge, Dr. Jenny
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois.

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Berry, Roger
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Boateng, rh Paul
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Browne, Desmond
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Etherington, Bill
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNamara, Kevin
MacShane, Denis
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Miliband, David
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Denis *(Wansbeck)*
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Primarolo, rh Dawn
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*

Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Winnick, David
Woolas, Phil
Worthington, Tony
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Nick Ainger and Gillian Merron

Question accordingly negatived.

Clause 2 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 3

ENTITLEMENT TO VOTE

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move amendment No. 48, in page 2, line 36, leave out from 'at' to second 'the' in line 37 and insert

'a parliamentary election in any parliamentary constituency, any part of which falls within the region and his address on the electoral register falls within'.

The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means (Sylvia Heal): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendment No. 25, in page 2, line 37, at end insert—

'(1A) Where there is a proposal to reorganise local government, only people living in the relevant local government areas may vote on such a proposal.'.

Mr. Hammond: Amendment No. 48 would amend the franchise for the referendum as it is defined in clause 3. At first glance, the clause might appear unexceptional. Subsection (1) states:

"A person is entitled to vote in a referendum held in a region . . . if on the date of the referendum he is entitled to vote at the election of councillors for any electoral area in the region."

In other words, the local government—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order. Will Members who are remaining in the Chamber please be quiet while the hon. Gentleman moves the amendment?

Mr. Hammond: Thank you, Mrs. Heal.

The franchise that will apply is the local government franchise. However, throughout our deliberations on the Bill thus far, the Minister has told us that elected regional assemblies will not be about the exercise of local government powers sucked up from existing tiers of local government. In fact, he has told us the contrary: regional assemblies will have as their business the exercise of powers—to use the words of the statement in clause 2—

"currently carried out mainly by central government bodies".

I put it to the Minister, therefore, that it is grossly illogical to use the local government franchise for the referendum on that question when he claims that elected regional assemblies will primarily dispense powers that were previously exercised by central Government.

The two franchises are not identical. European Union citizens living in England are entitled to vote in local government elections, and would thus be entitled to vote in the referendum as the Bill is drafted, but not in parliamentary elections. Our amendment proposes that the franchise applicable should be the parliamentary franchise, and that an elector entitled to vote in a particular regional referendum will be any elector who is entitled to vote in

"a parliamentary election in any parliamentary constituency"

all or part of which is within the region. That allows for the possibility that a parliamentary constituency may fall within two regions. I do not expect that to happen, but it is always possible. The provision is qualified by the requirement that an elector, in order to be eligible to vote in the referendum, should have an address on the electoral register in the region.

If the Minister objects to that revision of the franchise, he must say why, given his claims, it is more appropriate to use the local government franchise for the referendum rather than the parliamentary franchise. If the Minister insists on using the local government franchise, it will tend to support the Opposition's suspicion that the elected regional assemblies will be more about taking powers away from local authorities and about a different way to exercise local powers than any genuine measure of devolution.

Mr. Lansley: I am entirely following the point that my hon. Friend makes. I wanted to establish why the Government have proceeded in this way, so I read the notes on clauses, as one tends to do, only to find that there are notes on clauses 2 and 4, but none on clause 3. So I cannot even find out where the Government started on this issue.

Mr. Hammond: We will look to the Minister for further elucidation. My hon. Friend will have discovered, as I have, that it is sometimes unwise to rely too much on the explanatory notes, which tend to tell the reader what the Government want him to think the Bill says, rather than what it actually says on a closer reading. The amendment seems pretty logical, and I look forward to hearing the reason why the Minister will resist it if, indeed, he wants to do so.

Matthew Green: I obviously want to speak to amendment No. 25, but before doing so, I shall touch on amendment No. 48, tabled by the Conservatives. We are a little interested in that amendment because we believe—we seek the Minister's clarification on this—that British citizens who live in Germany can vote in that country's regional elections but not its national elections, so the group of people who can vote in local elections will be eligible. We wonder whether the

[Matthew Green]

amendment is a bit of anti-Europeanism by the Conservative party. Conservative Members are desperate not to mention Europe these days.

Mr. Swayne: I can clearly understand the argument for using a local franchise in elections to the assemblies, but we are talking about the determination of a constitutional issue, which is quite properly a matter for the parliamentary franchise. Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that distinction?

Matthew Green: I can see a slight distinction, but the amendment would rule out some European citizens who live in the United Kingdom being able to vote in the referendums, which, after all, are only indicative. Whether those people can vote will depend on the area in which they live. Perhaps I should use the phrase "region of Europe", although I know that Conservative Members will not be keen on it. The Conservatives obviously do not want any other European citizens to be able to vote in the referendums, so we know where they are coming from, even if they will not be so explicit themselves.

I come now to amendment No. 25, which is my main reason for speaking. Under that amendment, where local government reorganisation is proposed so that a two-tier system will be reduced to a unitary structure, only people who live in that area could vote on that proposal. The Minister has said that he will consider our proposal for two questions, although he has not been persuaded by that argument. Under that amendment, if there were two questions, the franchise for the referendum would be restricted to those people who live in that area, thereby solving the problem in the Bill.

We have heard that the north-east may choose to hold a referendum. Under amendment No. 25, the people of Newcastle, who already have unitary government, will be able to vote on whether Northumberland, which currently has a two-tier system, should have unitary government. So we seek to ensure that the decisions on changing local government are taken by the people who are directly affected. Once again, we are telling the Government to trust the people. If they are prepared to do that, they will find that there is greater support for regional government and that they are more likely to win the regional referendums.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I believe that the Committee may have made some progress this evening—

Mr. Edward Davey: When the Minister was not here.

Mr. Leslie: I have been here, for good or ill, throughout much of the debate today.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) said in moving his amendment that one reason why we should use the parliamentary franchise is that powers will be taken from national level, not local level. I think that that was essentially his argument.

Mr. Hammond: I am sure that the Minister would not want to disappoint me. He will know that I said that the Government claim that the purpose of these regional assemblies is to devolve power down from central Government.

10.30 pm

Mr. Leslie: I was so hopeful, but my hopes for the hon. Gentleman have been dashed on the rocks. What a great pity. I was about to welcome his acceptance, at last, of the truth behind our proposals: elected regional assemblies will take powers from Whitehall and from central Government, and not from local government. It is a pity that the Conservatives have not dealt with that.

The hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge knows well why it is best to use the local franchise register in this case. It is not simply a case of quoting precedent, although that is important. The local register was used in the Scotland, Wales and London referendums, and is also the basis for electing Members of those assemblies. We plan to use the register for electing members of regional assemblies, too. A strong argument exists that there should be a common approach for all sub-national referendums and elections. That is an important point.

The Liberal Democrat spokesman also spotted that the local register includes relevant citizens of the European Union who are resident, as well as life peers. Those are the only practical differences from the parliamentary register. What does the Conservative party have against life peers voting in these referendums? Why should not Councillor Lord Peter Smith, the leader of Wigan council and the former chairman of the north-west regional assembly, be entitled to vote for an elected regional assembly? Why should Lord Hanningfield, the Tory leader of Essex county council, be precluded from voting? What do the Conservatives have against those fine upstanding citizens?

In terms of the European Union citizen provisions, I remind the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge that those came into force in 1994 and 1996. Why should the Conservatives now be frightened of using their own provisions? Regional government is sub-national, sub-parliamentary government.

Mr. Lansley: As my hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) made clear, the reason is that what we are discussing is not a decision but an advisory referendum to the Government in relation to the exercise of a parliamentary responsibility. Lord Hanningfield, good man that he is, has an opportunity to comment on and decide on this matter in another place. He does not need to have a vote in the referendum to do that.

Mr. Leslie: I am not quite sure that I follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. I had a feeling that he was slightly warmer towards our European friends and neighbours than some others on the Conservative Benches, and I am most disappointed with that particular argument. These are reciprocal arrangements for sub-national government arrangements, and I do not see why the advisory referendum for elected regional government should be any different.

In respect of amendment No. 25, tabled by the hon. Member for Ludlow (Matthew Green), the argument is familiar, and we have rehearsed it in discussions about

clause 2. The Government do not believe that we should have a separate question on local government restructuring, so the amendment would be redundant. In any case, we believe strongly that unitarisation is integral to the creation of elected regional assemblies. It is part of the package in relation to streamlining the system, and it is necessary if a new regional tier of elected government is to come into place. Two tiers of local government below regional assemblies would be one too many. I am surprised that the Liberal Democrats are setting their face against that. No other local government reorganisations have been subject to a vote by people in the areas affected, so at least this referendum is adding the option for people to express their views on the total package proposed. Amendment No. 25 is unnecessary and redundant.

A very strong case exists for using the local franchise register. I urge the House to reject amendment No. 48.

Mr. Hammond: I have listened carefully to what the Minister said, which was not difficult as he did not say very much. My hon. Friend the Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley) made the point concisely that a parliamentary responsibility will be discharged by the Secretary of State on the basis of advice given in a referendum. It is not appropriate that persons who are excluded from voting in a parliamentary election should be entitled to vote in that referendum.

I now come to the great logical flaw in the Minister's position. An EU subject or a peer, for example, cannot vote for a national Government to exercise powers such as the power to appoint the chairman of a regional development agency. If those powers were, by any chance, devolved to an elected regional assembly, the use of the local government franchise would enable those people to participate in electing the body that would exercise the powers. That is completely illogical and gives the lie to the Government's assertion that the bodies are mainly about transferring powers down from central Government. It underscores what the Opposition have always suspected: the bodies will be more akin to overblown local authorities than to devolved centres of power coming down from Westminster and Whitehall.

In view of the timetable arrangements and the fact that a Division would leave us with virtually no time to debate the next group of amendments, I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

It being five and a half hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *put forthwith the Questions necessary for the disposal of the business to be concluded at that hour.*

Clause 3 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Clause 4

REFERENDUM PERIOD

Mr. Hammond: I beg to move amendment No. 47, in page 3, line 7, at end add—

'after taking account of the advice of the Electoral Commission as to the period required for the proper conduct of the referendum having regard to all relevant circumstances'.

The First Deputy Chairman: With this it will be convenient to discuss the following amendment: No. 27, in page 3, line 7, at end add—

'( ) Any order issued under subsection (1) above must set a referendum period lasting not less than 30 days, excluding weekends and bank holidays.'.

Mr. Hammond: Clause 4 deals with the referendum period for the purposes of part 7 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. It says that

"the Secretary of State must by order determine the referendum period for a referendum held in pursuance of an order under section 1."

That relates to the order that will call a referendum in a given region.

The referendum period is a significant time window that must be defined. It will have an impact on matters such as the recording of election expenses and the publication of election material, and will constrain the participants in the election, with one notable exception. The Government, masquerading inappropriately as a neutral party, will be allowed to continue publishing material and doing things that would not be permitted by other participants right up to the 29th day before the referendum is held. They will be able to use the power and the purse of the state to pursue a partisan position in the debate that the referendum will address.

Because of the Government exemption, it is doubly important that the referendum period be correctly set. The Electoral Commission has been appointed to become involved in such matters and in the conduct of a referendum in the attempt to inject impartiality and objectivity into the process, so it would be wholly appropriate for the commission to advise the Secretary of State—we do not suggest that the commission should take the decision—on the time that will be required for the proper conduct of the election. That is appropriate to ensure that the period is set in an impartial fashion that is not biased in favour of one side or the other.

We must bear in mind the fact that, whatever the referendum period, the Secretary of State and the Government will be in the unique position of being able to distribute their material unconstrained until 28 days before the referendum. It is not appropriate that the Secretary of State, who is partisan in such matters, should have the loudest voice in determining the referendum period. It is, however, entirely appropriate that the Electoral Commission should have a voice that is heard.

Mr. Edward Davey: Amendments Nos. 47 and 27 are two ways of doing a similar thing. We want to restrain the Government's power by ensuring either that someone other than the Government sets the period for the referendum—amendment No. 47 suggests the Electoral Commission—or that there is a minimum period for it. There is a danger that a Minister could push through a referendum quickly, which would stifle debate, the campaign and the very democracy that lies behind the Bill. As I am sure that that is not the Minister's intention, we tabled amendment No. 27.

Our amendment would ensure that there is a minimum period for the referendum of not less than

[Mr. Edward Davey]

30 days, excluding weekends and bank holidays. That is effectively a six-week campaign. We could have gone for a four or five-week campaign, but referendum campaigns are unusual beasts. They are one-offs. Campaign organisations are not like normal political parties. They are set up purely for the purpose of fighting a particular referendum. Although those organisations might begin to get prepared before the referendum is called, they need a little longer than a normal general election or council campaign to uphold the democratic process established in the Bill.

Mr. Hammond: It has just occurred to me that the hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. In practice, the yes campaign will not be a purely local campaign set up for each referendum; it will be a rolling campaign, based on the Campaign for the English Regions. It is the no campaign that will have a standing start and will be disadvantaged.

Mr. Davey: I am discouraged—or encouraged, perhaps—that the hon. Gentleman believes that the no campaign is so badly organised, primarily because I thought that the Conservative party was the no campaign. However, I do not want to be ruled out of order and shall return to the amendment.

I well remember the 1997 general election campaign when I was first returned to the House. That was a six-week campaign. The previous Prime Minister, John Major, must regret the fact that he let us have that campaign.

Mr. Kevan Jones: How does the six-week campaign fit with the clear and vehement opposition that the Liberal Democrats portrayed in Committee to all postal ballots?

Mr. Davey: The two things are completely different. The ballot relates to the actual vote on the ballot paper. I am talking about ensuring that there is a minimum period during which we can engage the electorate in the debate. We would be happy to discuss with the Minister whether it should be 20, 25 or 30 days. We are not theological about that. What we want to do is to ensure that the Bill stipulates a minimum period so that a referendum cannot be rushed through. The Minister keeps stressing the importance of the Bill, and we need a minimum period to allow the people of a region to engage in the debate.

10.45 pm

Mr. Swayne: I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman is aware that there is a need for a maximum length for the campaign. Has he not noticed that people are already campaigning? Indeed, the whole process of taking soundings is, in itself, a surreptitious campaign. *[Interruption.]* I am glad to see that there is agreement. The Minister was involving the peers in that, at least from a sedentary position, in the debate on the previous amendment. Bishops—bishops, I ask you—have been campaigning for this nonsense for months with absolutely no constraint whatsoever. Back to their vestries with them.

Mr. Davey: Well, bless my soul. One felt like saying "tally ho" to that intervention.

Matthew Green *rose—*

Mr. Davey: I do not want to detain the House much longer on this relatively minor matter, but my hon. Friend wants to make a very important point, so I will let him intervene.

Matthew Green: Does my hon. Friend agree that a campaign of reasonable length, and not a very short one, will increase the chances of a reasonable turnout in the referendum, which we would all like to see? There will be time to get the messages across, and that may encourage turnout.

Mr. Davey: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. A reasonable campaign would certainly help with turnout, and the Government would like a good turnout. They are taking measures in this Bill and elsewhere to encourage people to participate democratically. I hope that the Under-Secretary is listening not only to his Whip but to the power of this argument, and that he will accept amendment No. 27 or, if not, return with his own amendment on Report.

Mr. Leslie: This is an interesting debate, but I am conscious of the hour, so I shall try to keep my remarks brief.

Clause 4 is needed because the 2000 Act does not set a technical referendum period, but leaves it to be set by the provisions of another Act; hence it appears in the Bill. The Conservative amendment would require the Secretary of State to take account of advice from the Electoral Commission before making the order setting the referendum period. Although the 2000 Act does not explicitly set out how a referendum period is to be determined, it sets a timetable for designating assistance to the official yes and no campaigns. It also sets out arrangements for the date of the poll. Taken together, those periods in effect give a standard referendum period of 10 weeks, so in general our intention would be to set that as the referendum period.

Mr. Edward Davey: I am rather concerned that suddenly the Government have turned volte face, and having criticised the Liberal Democrats for wanting more consultation and discussion, they now want to delay and extend these times, when we requested a minimum campaign of a mere six weeks.

Mr. Leslie: I am troubled by the anti-democratic tendencies of the Liberal Democrats in seeking to curtail a fair and reasonable campaign period. I believe that 10 weeks strikes the right balance, and in any case—this answers the questions asked by the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond)—it is for the Government to decide the referendum period, subject of course to parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does my hon. Friend agree that 10 weeks is a good length of time to ensure that the

campaign receives both the vigorous debate that we want and the maximum turnout in a region? The Liberal Democrats' view reinforces their anti-democratic stance in being opposed to all postal ballots.

Mr. Leslie: That was indeed a very worrying development among Liberal Democrat Members in the Standing Committee. Their expressed intention to turn their face against all postal ballots calls into question the very title of their political party, but we should leave that for another day.

Mr. Swayne: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Leslie: I cannot resist the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Swayne: The Minister is very generous. I entirely understand the argument for a 10-week campaign. It will clearly be advantageous to have such a long campaign, particularly for the no campaign because previously, of course, the Government were able to distribute information in a way that the no campaign was not, and it gave them a good start. However, why will the Minister not include in the Bill his choice of campaign length, or at least give an indication of it? As someone who questions the whole enterprise, I ask him to imagine that campaign—those 10 weeks of misery and exhaustion.

Mr. Leslie: If only I had time to detail what we learned about the hon. Gentleman in Committee and his history of fending off allegations of rigging ballots in Scotland. I know that he was given an honourable discharge—*[Interruption.]*

The First Deputy Chairman: Order.

Mr. Leslie: On amendment No. 47, if we are to use the expected 10-week period, what is the point of requiring the Electoral Commission to provide advice on the issue? In effect, it would be required to second-guess why the 10-week period is implicit in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act. The amendment is unnecessary, but of course we are happy to discuss with the commission any practical implications of a longer or shorter campaign. However, I do not see the case for enshrining in statute the need to seek its advice on our intentions.

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) tabled a reasonably probing amendment in amendment No. 27. While in theory it is possible to shorten the designated period for an official campaign, I cannot see that there are circumstances that would lead us to set a referendum period significantly shorter than the 10-week period I mentioned earlier. We would not wish to do so, and even if we did and went for a period of less than 10 weeks, an order would have to be introduced, debated and receive assent in both Houses. No doubt, tough questions would have to be answered then.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): In looking at the referendum period, will my hon. Friend consider the paucity of the Opposition's argument against regional government, particularly in the north-west of England? Can we be spared the ordeal of having to campaign too long against the Opposition's absurd posturing, particularly as some hon. Members are inclined to use the privileges of the House to attack people outside it?

Mr. Leslie: I suspect that there is a longer story to be told, but I tend to agree with my hon. Friend. Amendment No. 27 is unlikely to have much practical effect and, together with amendment No. 47, is unnecessary. I therefore urge the hon. Members for Runnymede and Weybridge and for Kingston and Surbiton not to press them further.

Mr. Hammond: We have had an interesting debate. I am not sure that I followed the intervention of the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson), but generally I am never quite sure that I do. My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) was indeed the culprit in the case to which the Minister referred, lest hon. Members fear that any outside party was being impugned.

The Government are once again giving themselves extraordinary power and, in this case, do not even want to take advice. In our debate on clause 1 we did not get a chance to talk about the amendment that would delete subsection (9). I know that you would not want me to cover that ground now, Mrs. Heal. Effectively, however, as the Bill stands, once the Government see how the land lies, they have the power in a run-up to the referendum to cancel it. If, a couple of weeks from a referendum, things are looking a bit iffy, the Secretary of State, under clause 1(9), can simply call it off, which is an extraordinarily flexible power. At the other end of the process, he has complete flexibility in setting when the referendum period should begin.

The Minister told us that he would normally expect that period to last 10 weeks. The initial and understandable reaction of my hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West was that that is a long time. However, we must bear in mind the fact that the Government, until the referendum period begins, will have free reign to distribute literature and information supporting their position and the case for elected regional assemblies without the no campaign being able to respond and distribute counter-information.

Perhaps 10 weeks is the right period. I am happy to concede to the Minister that that may be about right, but why does he not write it into the Bill? The unconstrained power of the Secretary of State to determine the start of the period, the end of the period and, having called a referendum, whether to let it go ahead or not, under the terms of clause 1(9), seems an excessive amount of discretion for the Secretary of State to have.

I invite the Minister to consider the impact on local government and other institutions in the region while such a campaign is going on. There will be serious disruption.

Mr. Swayne: Does my hon. Friend consider that it would be helpful to the Committee if the Minister gave an indication of the circumstances under which it would be proper to have a campaign of less than the 10 weeks

[Mr. Swayne]

that he suggested, and the circumstances under which it would be proper for the campaign to last longer than that?

Mr. Hammond: I am sure that that would have been helpful to the Committee. If the Minister wanted to intervene on me, I should be happy to take such an intervention.

To return to the point about the disruptive effect of the campaign, that will be the final straw in the long disruption created by the whole process: the Secretary of State's consultation, then—most disruptive of all—the boundary committee's work, the jockeying for position, and the political battles that will be fought between districts and counties over the various combinations of unitary authority solutions that might or might not be proposed. All that will be a huge distraction from the issue that really matters to the people of this country—the delivery of good quality public services. That is what they want their local authorities to focus on. That is what they want their county councils, unitary councils and metropolitan borough councils to focus on.

That is what people would like the Government to focus on, instead of diverting their attention time and again to the pet project of some Minister or other and leaving the public to look in dismay at the innumerable broken promises and missed targets that represent the Government's abysmal failure to improve the delivery of public services, especially in those parts of the country that have suffered a further squeeze as a result of the Minister's appalling recent local government settlement.

My hon. Friend the Member for New Forest, West raised the important question of the circumstances in which it might be appropriate for the Minister to propose a period longer than 10 weeks or shorter than 10 weeks. The Minister could speculate endlessly on different scenarios that might or might not arise in relation to any particular referendum. *[Interruption.]* No, I am sorry to disappoint the Minister; I shall not speculate endlessly on those scenarios. I do not need to, because I have proposed the solution: that the Electoral Commission should advise the Secretary of State of the appropriate referendum period, taking into account all the relevant factors.

The Electoral Commission, working from the Minister's preferred period of 10 weeks, and the period of approximately 10 weeks implied in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000, would be able to consider any particular circumstances in relation to the particular regional referendum in question, to decide whether there were any circumstances that called for a shorter period or, conversely, a longer period.

Mr. Swayne: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend that his proposal is the best way of solving the problem. None the less, while it would not be possible for the Minister to speculate endlessly about the circumstances that might apply in respect of a shorter or longer period, he might at least give us the benefit of his speculation for five minutes.

11 pm

Mr. Hammond: I would be most willing to take a short intervention from the Minister, but he does not seem willing to confide to the Committee his innermost thoughts.

My proposal would ensure that, having taken into account any particular and pertinent circumstances in a region, the Electoral Commission would give its advice to the Secretary of State. I can inform the Committee that during the Standing Committee deliberations, we ascertained that the Electoral Commission has clearly stated that it will always be its intention to place in the public domain advice that it gives to the Secretary of State in connection with the Bill, principally by placing it on its website. That is significant because, as the Bill stands, the Secretary of State will take a decision on his own in accordance with criteria that will be invisible to the watching public and Members of the House. He will do so on the basis of information and advice provided to him by the Electoral Commission, which will be available to members of the public to analyse, so the decision that he takes will be capable of being scrutinised in the light of that advice. While I do not suggest that that is a likely outcome—indeed, I would not advocate such a scenario and I hope that it does not come to that, as I for one am anxious not to increase the litigious tendency of our society—it would, at least in theory, ensure that the Secretary of State's decision was practically capable of judicial review where he had not taken the advice of the Electoral Commission or where his decision was clearly at odds with the advice that it had given.

Mr. Leslie *rose—*

Mr. Hammond: I am delighted to see that the Minister at last wishes to intervene. Perhaps he will share with the Committee his thoughts about the circumstances in which a longer or shorter period might be appropriate.

Mr. Leslie: I can certainly share my view about having a longer or shorter period, as I believe in making all contributions as short as possible. The hon. Gentleman is clearly stringing out his contribution to make it as long as possible, so that we will go to the wire on the very last occasion when we will have to sit until this hour on a Wednesday. I think that it is important that we note that point.

Mr. Hammond: It is important that we note what the Minister has said. I am prepared to make a small bet with him that this will not be the last time when we are debating in the Chamber at 11 o'clock on a Wednesday, because I suspect that the Government will find that in their rush to get legislation through the House, they may occasionally have to ask some of their long-suffering Back Benchers to stay a little longer in future than they think they have been promised. However, time will tell.

The problem with this debate, as the Minister knows, is not only the overall timetable, but the intermediate guillotines, which have meant that although the rather small issue with which the amendments deal has perhaps

had adequate time for debate, discussion of some of the very significant issues that had to be dealt with earlier in the evening was curtailed and at least two major groups of amendments were not debated. That is a disgrace.

Having listened to what the Minister said and having—I hope—made my views well known to the Committee, I shall not seek to press the amendment to a Division. I say to the Minister, however, that when we have studied the precise implications of a longer or shorter period, we will return to the issue on Report, possibly by tabling an amendment seeking directly to constrain the Secretary of State's flexibility, rather than simply to pass the issue over to the Electoral Commission for advice. I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Question proposed, That the clause stand part of the Bill.

Mr. Swayne: I have one question for the Minister on clause stand part. Will he explain the status of the order and tell us what opportunities will be afforded to us for its scrutiny?

Mr. Leslie: It is a statutory instrument. The clause is self-explanatory.

Question put and agreed to

Clause 4 ordered to stand part of the Bill.

Bill (Clauses 1 to 4) reported, without amendment; to lie upon the Table.

PETITIONS

Natural Health Products

11.6 pm

Mr. Gwyn Prosser (Dover): I rise to present a petition on behalf of some 600 people in Dover, Deal and elsewhere, who are supporters of Consumers for Health Choice. I am pleased to give the petition my full support.

The petition reads as follows:

To the House of Commons

The petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And The Petitioners Remain, Etc.

To lie upon the Table.

11.7 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): I am delighted to present two petitions. The first is from Janis Larkun of Marple and contains 199 signatures of constituents of mine. The second is from Debra Allan of Hazel Grove and contains 221 signatures of constituents of mine. Both are petitions from Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters. The petition declares that:

Consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies, and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore Request That the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And The Petitioners Remain, Etc.

To lie upon the Table.

11.9 pm

Mr. Michael Jabez Foster (Hastings and Rye): I have the honour to present petitions on the part of Mrs. Pamela Ellis of Bio-Five-O in Hastings and Mr. Crawshaw of Rye in precisely the same terms as that presented by my hon. Friend the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser). I shall not repeat the words, but I request that the House take note of them.

To lie upon the Table.

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I rise also to present a petition, and Members will be familiar with the text of said petition. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) has introduced the same. The petition is from Noah's Health Food Store, and it carries the signatures of more than 500 constituents in Carshalton and Wallington. The petition expresses their concerns about the potential impact of European Union legislation on traditional herbal medicinal products.

To lie upon the Table.

Affordable Credit

11.10 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I rise to present a petition on affordable credit on behalf of several hundred of my constituents in the Dunstable area.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons

The Petition of Constituents Concerned about Debt on our Doorstep.

Declares that millions of people in the United Kingdom struggle with poverty and debt; that this issue should be brought to the attention of Parliament.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Social Exclusion Unit to tackle the issue of extortionate lending and to support affordable credit.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Football Head Injuries

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

11.11 pm

Dr. Ian Gibson (Norwich, North): I rise to introduce a debate on football head injuries, which have emerged as an important issue not only to the football world, but to many people up and down the land who are concerned about events that happened some years ago and which demand a Government reaction. First, however, let me describe the background.

In the treatise "The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy", usually called the "Principia", Isaac Newton proclaimed the three laws of motion and the law of gravity. He addressed the problem of the drag on a spear moving through a medium. One of his laws states that change of motion is proportional to the motive force impressed and takes place along the straight line in which force acts.

Loosely translated, that means that a football's behaviour is covered by the statement that the rate of change of momentum of a football is equal to the applied force. That is often translated as describing football rotation in terms of change of angular momentum brought about by an applied torque. It is Christmas, so I am allowed such a deliberate physical and mathematical analysis of a ball moving through the air.

A book entitled "The Science of Soccer" by John Wesson has just been published. It describes how David Beckham can bend a ball in mathematical and physical terminology that I would not dare to translate in the House. Although I have great respect for the *Hansard* writers, they would not be able to take down the mathematical terms. I do not want to defer to them, as the problem is real.

The book describes the ideal bounce of a ball, kicks, bending the ball, intercepting a pass and rebounds from the crossbar. There is a phenomenon to describe, as it would excite people. Equations have been developed in relation to those particular events. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who represents Norwich, South, is looking for a way to excite people so as they understand physics and mathematics. What better way than understanding such issues as how a ball is thrown in, the torque involved and the forces that apply to a football as it rotates through the air? I suggest that they might return the interest of many young people to science.

Heading, which is the subject of our debate, is also described in the book, which states:

"Sometimes the head is struck by an unseen ball,"—

my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport might avidly remember that from his youth, as he paraded around the playing fields of England—

"or before the player can prepare himself".

That would certainly be true of my right hon. Friend, although earlier this year I managed him very successfully through 45 minutes of sheer magic as he kept out the forces of the British embassy on a Japanese playing field.

The book continues:

"It is then possible for all the ball's loss of momentum to be transferred to the head. In a severe case of a 50 mile per hour ball, the head could be moved an inch in a hundredth of a second., the force on the head corresponding to an acceleration of 50g"—

which would be some speed up the M6, and quite unachievable in transport-torn Britain today. It continues:

"Accelerations larger than this can lead to unconsciousness."

When a sodden leather ball used to hit people's heads, the lace faced a certain way—unless Stanley Matthews kicked it across the penalty area at Tommy Lawton's head; the lace was always facing the wrong way as far as the opposition was concerned, but it hit Tommy Lawton on the head at the right time. When the head is hit by a ball, it moves a few inches. The speed of the head's movement depends on the velocity given to the ball. The head cannot move faster than a kick, because it is restricted by being anchored to the body.

The problem is that people mistime headers. If people are hit on the head by a ball, momentum may be lost and transferred to the head. Many footballers will remember how, in the early years of their careers, they were hit by that sodden leather ball that came out of the sky, and their heads moved back. That sometimes resulted in unconsciousness; it often resulted in sore heads and blackouts, and players in the 1950s and 1960s were frequently taken off the field for such reasons.

Let us think in terms of medical science. The brain can be likened to a blancmange in a bowl. When a certain part of it is hit, it wobbles. It is not restricted to one area; it moves around the circumference of the brain. I would expect the force of a wet ball to be some 180 lb. That might cause bruising, damage to the brain and some bleeding.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): I am glad that my hon. Friend initiated this debate. As he may know, January saw the tragic death of Jeff Astle, the former West Bromwich Albion centre-forward, renowned for his heading abilities during the era of hard, wet, heavy leather balls. At his post mortem the neuropathologist made it clear that years of heading a ball had contributed to his premature death at the age of 59. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Football Association should provide a fund to benefit the families of footballers who have effectively been victims of industrial injuries?

Dr. Gibson: Other players have sustained similar injuries, and they deserve respect and a response from the Government.

The worst that can happen is more extended bruising to the brain. A subdural haematoma can occur—a sort of blood clot. That has happened to many players. In this regard football is not unlike boxing or horse riding. Many injuries are caused to people falling off horses. I am quite sympathetic to riders as long as they do not chase foxes, if I may refer to a debate we had earlier in the week.

We have heard anecdotes about players of the 1950s and 1960s who played with heavy balls before they were changed in the 1960s. The leather coating then became polyurethane, the bladder disappeared, and players now use a completely different kind of ball. In my

professional footballing days, I remember being rather frightened at having to head a ball; however, it was something that we did because, after all, we were real men, we did not flinch and we went for the ball. I remember many of my young colleagues at school being frightened to head a ball, and being called a sissy as the ball descended on them.

A few years ago, Billy McPhail of Glasgow Celtic, who scored a hat trick in the Scottish cup final, tried to take up this issue in an industrial tribunal and failed. He tried to claim that some of his health problems were caused by his frequent heading of a football. The deaths of Alf Ramsey, Danny Blanchflower, Joe Mercer and many other great names have been considered, and it has recently been shown that degenerative brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's were associated with their problems in their latter years. Indeed, as my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) said, the Jeff Astle case marks an epic moment in this struggle to get recognition of the effects of heading.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East): Does my hon. Friend share my view—it is doubtless also the view of my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey)—that Jeff Astle was the best header of a ball since Dixie Dean? Of course, in this day and age the modern footballer would not be subject to the challenges to which Jeff was subjected, because a modern ball weighs only 14 to 16 oz. The new FIFA-standard ball does not have the absorption of older footballs, and the FA is conducting a 10-year study, under the stewardship of Dr. Miles Gibson, on the effects of heading a ball. The study is in its second season, and hopefully recommendations will be made throughout the 10-year programme.

Does my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) agree that another reason why modern footballers would not be subject to such head injuries is the impact of modern coaching? Now, far more young people are taught proper heading techniques, which were not available in Jeff Astle's day. Such coaching is in part the result of the legacy of the late Sir Bert Millichip, who sadly died earlier today. He was a great son of West Bromwich Albion football club—a life president and former chairman—a former chairman of the FA, and a great advocate for the black country. My hon. Friend will doubtless agree that this House should pay tribute to the great man, and wish his family all the best in their hour of need.

Dr. Gibson: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention, and I of course go along with that. Many people say that there is danger in playing football and that such risk is part of the fun, but the real difference is that the technology has changed. As my hon. Friend pointed out, the ball has changed and the risk factor has gone down by an inestimable amount. In that sense, the risk factor differs from some others that have been discussed in relation to rugby football.

The coroner at Burton-on-Trent ruled that Jeff Astle died of a degenerative neurological disease, and of an industrial disease, after 20 years of heading a heavy ball. Perhaps it is time to consider how we can declare a disease an industrial disease. Many Members on both sides of the House will remember the difficulties associated with getting diseases such as asbestosis declared industrial diseases. Securing recognition of the correlation between a particular event and a particular disease involves a long, hard fight.

The neurologist who gave evidence at Burton-on-Trent said that the damage to Jeff Astle's brain was localised at the front. He said that, although it was hard to prove,

"from the evidence the persistent heading of the ball could be a factor in the loss of Mr. Astle's faculties and his behaviour."

Although only 59, Jeff Astle was indeed in the early stages of Alzheimer's. Death by industrial disease was recorded, and at that point the whole argument moved forward 100 years in terms of defining what an industrial disease might be. That is why we should take this verdict very seriously.

It is not just professional players such as Jeff Astle who are affected. Many amateur players have headed the ball 2,000 to 3,000 times in a season. I am aware of studies that are being carried out now, but they are studies of young people who are playing the game with a different football and will be studied over their careers. What about the people who played in the 1950s and 1960s and were subjected to this pressure? It is no use glamourising football in those days. Players did not get £25,000 a day; they got £12 a week maximum, for delighting crowds with their skills and performing in front of much bigger crowds than we sometimes see today. We owe them a lot in terms of the heritage of association football.

A psychiatrist said in relation to Jeff Astle:

"It seems obvious to me that a repetitive mild head trauma over the course of an amateur or professional footballer's career may increase an individual's risk of developing dementia."

If we think in terms of 1,500 assaults on the brain in a year, it is clear that something dramatic could happen to someone's brain cells, and those cells would not be replaced as the individual developed in their 50s and 60s as they would have when they were in their 20s and 30s.

There are those who have tried to ridicule the matter, saying that the next thing we will want is headgear for the players, as for boxers. We do not want that; we want a recognition that the technology has changed and that those people, for whatever reason, were subject to that kind of physical assault on their brains.

I still coach footballers—one or two people in the House tonight have been subjected to my coaching through the parliamentary football team, and rough I am—and we sometimes play with the ball being kept below shoulder height. If that became a rule, it might destroy the Nationwide first division. Having watched my local team, I see that it is a question of getting the ball out to the wing and crossing it for someone to get their head on to it and, with a bit of luck, it will go in the net. It would be good if players could keep the ball below shoulder height.

The question is how we measure an industrial injury. At what point do we take this seriously and not try to ridicule it? At what point do we recognise that players in the 1950s and 1960s were subjected to a hazard that no longer exists? We should recognise that young people heading a ball may be doing damage to their tender brains, and think about some kind of compensation for the older players.

[Dr. Gibson]

I know that Jeff Astle is not the only player affected. A famous Norwich City full-back, Bryan Thurlow—one of the great "59ers" who took the giant-killing Norwich team to the semi-final, beating the mighty Manchester United on the way—died recently from Alzheimer's disease. His nickname was "Unconscious" because he spent a lot of time heading the ball off the line and doing all sots of amazing things because he loved heading a ball. He was fearless and that heavy, water-soaked ball probably did something to his head.

Many people here will remember being taught how to dubbin a ball. How to lace up a ball was a skill that we learned at our father's side, and someone who could do it was real star. Those days are passed, but dubbin did not do much to make the ball less of a deadly weapon.

The dizziness, headaches, stars and unconsciousness came from that ball, as did the later problems that have developed in the brains of players. That seems a rational explanation. An inquiry should be carried out and we should do a real assessment of the players involved who might be developing illnesses now.

I did a programme last night in Norwich about Bryan Thurlow and the station received some 20 calls in which the families and widows of players from Southend, Colchester and so on talked about some of the brain diseases that the players had developed. It seems to me that there is a really good project in that. We should consider whether there is a case to be made for recording such injuries as industrial injuries. In this country, we treat many other illnesses as industrial diseases, and we should compensate the players who have suffered in the way that I have described. We owe it to them and to sport in general to show that we care about people.

The Government could act in concert with the Professional Footballers Association or the Football Association, I do not care which. We should show some respect for the many great players whom many hon. Members grew up watching. They deserve a proper assessment of what, in some cases, seems to have killed them.

11.30 pm

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): I begin by thanking my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North (Dr. Gibson) for securing this Adjournment debate. The subject is clearly important, and I know my hon. Friend has a great love of football: as he said, he continues to coach the Commons football team.

It is fitting that we should be discussing football in the Chamber tonight, and I want to associate myself with what my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East (Mr. Watson) said about the late Sir Bert Millichip, who made a major contribution to football in the UK. We are grateful for that, and send our condolences to his family.

When he described the subject under discussion tonight, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North demonstrated the skill that one would expect from the Chairman of the Select Committee on Science and Technology. It was a great lesson in physics.

I should like to say at the outset that the Government recognise that all sport contains an element of risk, and it would be neither possible nor in many cases desirable to remove that challenge. However, it is essential to look at how sport can reduce and manage unnecessary risks and, in particular, reduce the incidence of serious illness, injury, permanent disability or even death.

As Minister for Sport, I have been actively looking into ways in which we can help sport develop the most up-to-date and responsive safety and medical support in the UK. I therefore very much welcome the opportunity to debate these issues with my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North. My hon. Friend mentioned the death of the great Jeff Astle, as well as the circumstances of other ex-footballers. Football has been aware of this issue for some time, but the loss of Jeff at the young age of 59, and the subsequent coroner's report, have brought this matter to the fore.

It is clear to me that football is taking this matter very seriously. Both the FA and the Professional Footballers Association recognise the importance of this subject and have already undertaken significant work on heading in football. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, East noted, those organisations have invested in a 10-year study to investigate fully the possible dangers of heading the ball. The study started in 2001 and involves 33 elite footballers, who are the subject of regular MRI scans and neurological assessments. As Minister for Sport, I welcome this very important initiative.

Indeed, both FIFA and UEFA have commended the FA's proactive response to this subject. It is only fair to say that England is leading the way in this type of research.

I am also aware that the football authorities have taken significant steps to improve the game, while at the same time making every effort to protect players involved in what is, after all, a hard physical sport. Those steps have included the development of the modern football, which is now non-porous and produced to very strict FIFA criteria. Indeed, the laws of the game regulate the weight and size of modern balls used for both training and playing. Also, the improved football coaching standards to which reference has been made already have included the development of heading techniques, with a strong emphasis on the quality of training and not the quantity. In 2001, FIFA sponsored a symposium on sports injury and safety issues which considered, among other things, head injuries in football.

In my view, football has recognised the importance of the issue and is responding at a national and international level. However, the effect of heading on former professional footballers is a complex matter, which my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, North understands. There is evidence documenting subtle brain injuries among people who have played football for many years, while other studies have suggested that there is no significant risk. A number of experts believe that although there may be risks from heading footballs, these are likely to be relevant only to a small minority of professionals with prolonged careers.

Over the past six years, the FA has monitored papers submitted to it or published by scientific journals on heading footballs and whether that could cause changes in brain structure and function. The FA has given full consideration to the medical evidence and the scientific information on this subject. I am aware that the FA

takes the view that many of these reports and articles have been of questionable quality, based on very small samples of amateur players. Furthermore, as all the studies have been retrospective, the findings can be affected by many other variables.

What is clear is that most experts agree that the data collected so far are inconclusive and that further longer-term studies are required. Clearly, the joint FA/PFA study will go a long way towards addressing the lack of concrete information.

I understand that the Professional Footballers Association is looking at compensation for injuries on behalf of former players, to which my hon. Friend referred. I take the view that it is only right that sport give full consideration to these cases, but many in football would agree that that must be done in the light of greater understanding of the medical and scientific evidence on the subject.

My hon. Friend has focused on football. The Government recognise that safety and medical issues affect all sports at all levels. Improvements in sport safety and medical services not only increase performance but lead to the reduction of unnecessary illness or injury caused through participation in sport. Those in sport have for some time recognised the vital role that those services play in providing the highest standards of care for our top athletes, as well as ensuring that sport in the UK can be safely and sensibly enjoyed by all.

The Government are therefore committed to ensuring that sport can reduce and manage the necessary risks through the development of appropriate safety and medical support. Greater confidence in the quality of these services can increase the number of participants in sport as well as leading to longer participation. That requires a co-ordinated approach and, as such, the Government are promoting a number of key initiatives across the UK to help sport improve its safety and medical services.

In recognition of these issues, the Government commissioned a working group on safety and medical provision for sport in the UK to look at how best we can prevent the incidence of serious injury, illness, disability and death in organised sport. The working group was chaired by the consultant neurosurgeon Peter Hamlyn. Its report raised a number of important issues in relation to sports safety and medicine and highlighted the need for extra help and support to be given to governing bodies to assist them in managing safety issues in their sport.

This work also formed part of the Government's cross-departmental accidental injury task force, which published its report earlier this year highlighting the ways in which the Government are providing a co-ordinated response to injury prevention across society.

The work is being taken forward by UK Sport, which will be producing guidance information on health and safety issues for sport. The aim is to provide support which will be of assistance to governing bodies but which will avoid overly bureaucratic systems and procedures. It will cover three areas. First, there will be a summary of existing legislative requirements for governing bodies. Secondly, there will be sports-focused risk assessment templates that governing bodies could use and disseminate among their member organisations. Thirdly, there will be case studies covering health and safety policies and practices for different types of sport.

That is not the Government's only involvement in such work. My Department is currently working closely with UK Sport, the National Sports Medicine Institute of the United Kingdom, the British Olympic Association and other key sports medicine professional organisations to look at ways of improving the training and development of sports medicine practitioners. In particular, the recognition of sports and exercise medicine as a distinct and essential medical discipline would have a significant impact on the safety and medical support that we are able to provide to people participating in all levels of sport—from school playing fields to people taking part in elite sport. My Department will also be working closely with Department for Health and the Department for Education and Skills on that development.

Those initiatives provide examples of the way in which the Government are addressing the issues raised by my hon. Friend this evening, but I should like to leave the House with these thoughts. We live in an increasingly risk-averse society and there is concern that, because of that, many people involved in sport, either as participants or organisers, may give up their favourite pastime. They may have concerns about personal injury or, possibly, fear of litigation resulting from a sporting accident. Such action is becoming increasingly prevalent in sport in the UK.

Clearly, safety is paramount in all sporting activity, and it is important that we both recognise the risks involved in sport and acknowledge that sport has a duty to reduce and manage those risks. However, I believe that all the wonderful benefits that involvement in sport can bring to our society, such as improved health, social inclusion and education—to name but a few—greatly outweigh the risks. We have to put the risks in context. Sport can come to the rescue of so many youngsters who might otherwise get involved in drugs or other undesirable activities and take them off the streets. We have to keep things in proportion. The great desire to achieve—

The motion having been made after Ten o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned at nineteen minutes to Twelve o'clock.

Deferred Divisions

SECTION 5 OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES (AMENDMENT) ACT 1993

That this House takes note with approval of the Government's assessment as set out in the Pre-Budget Report 2002 for the purposes of section 5 of the European Communities (Amendment) Act 1993.

The House divided: Ayes 275, Noes 153.

Division No. 34]

AYES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Atherton, Ms Candy
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Blackman, Liz
Blair, rh Tony
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, hon. Dr. Lynda *(Edinburgh Pentlands)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobbin, Jim *(Heywood)*
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ewing, Annabelle
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Johnson, Miss Melanie *(Welwyn Hatfield)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Ivan *(Bury S)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Lucas, Ian *(Wrexham)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
MacDonald, Calum
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGrady, Eddie
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mackinlay, Andrew
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Organ, Diana
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Purnell, James
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salter, Martin
Sawford, Phil
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Singh, Marsha
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Squire, Rachel
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Timms, Stephen
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Twigg, Stephen *(Enfield)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Ward, Claire
Wareing, Robert N.

Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woolas, Phil
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

NOES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Ames, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, David *(Bour'mth E)*
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Barker, Gregory
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Bellingham, Henry
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Bottomley, rh Virginia *(SW Surrey)*
Brady, Graham
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burstow, Paul
Burt, Alistair
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chidgey, David
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cotter, Brian
Curry, rh David
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Doughty, Sue
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flook, Adrian
Francois, Mark
Garnier, hon. Edward
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gidley, Sandra
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heath, David
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Holmes, Paul
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Kirkwood, Archy
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
May, Mrs Theresa
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moore, Michael
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paisley, Rev. Ian
Paterson, Owen
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Selous, Andrew
Simmonds, Mark
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Tredinnick, David
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Whittingdale, John
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George
Younger-Ross, Richard

Question accordingly agreed to.

House of Commons

Thursday 19 December 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

PRIVATE BUSINESS

CONTINGENCY FUND ACCOUNTS 2001–02

Resolved,

That there be laid before this House Accounts of the Contingencies Fund, 2001–02, showing:—

(1) the Receipts and Payments in connection with the Fund in the year ended 31st March 2002; and

(2) the Distribution of the Capital of the Fund at the commencement and close of the year; together with the Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—*[Mr. Gordon Brown.]*

NORTHERN IRELAND PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, that she will be graciously pleased to give directions That there be laid before this House a Return of the Memorandum of Reply from the Northern Ireland Department of Finance and Personnel on the First Report from the Northern Ireland Public Accounts Committee, Session 2002–03.—*[Mr. Paul Murphy.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Common Agricultural Policy

1. **Mr. Paul Goodman** (Wycombe): What proposals she has to reform the common agricultural policy; and if she will make a statement. [86762]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The European Commission published proposals for reform of the CAP in July and we expect it to come forward with formal legislative proposals in January 2003. We support the Commission's general approach of market reform, the removal of the link between production and subsidies, and a shift in support towards wider rural development and agri-environment measures.

Mr. Goodman: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer. She says she supports the general approach of the Commission. Will she take this opportunity to make it clear that the Government oppose the Commission's specific proposal to put a ceiling on payments to individual holdings which would penalise British farmers? Will she make that commitment?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, we made it plain from the outset, when the proposals were first announced, that we not only oppose the ceiling on the payments at the top and the franchise at the bottom, but have found, as the only member state with much experience of a modulation scheme—about which many people have reservations—that what made it work at all was a simple scheme that was fair to everyone and easily understood. That is what we are recommending to the Commission.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is time seriously to consider the abolition of the CAP and its replacement with national regimes of agricultural policy? Is it not appropriate to examine now the fiscal implications across the EU of such an abolition?

Margaret Beckett: I understand why my hon. Friend makes that point, but I cannot agree that it would be better to have national schemes. Indeed, one thing that has bedevilled our pursuit of reform is that every time someone says that we need to reform the CAP, those who do not want reform say, "Ah! You just want to return to a national scheme." With great respect, I shall not follow my hon. Friend down that road.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Given the horrific impact of the CAP on some of the poorest people in the world, which arises because it does not allow them access to our markets and prevents them from having a proper reciprocal and fair agreement, are developing countries represented at every level at talks on CAP reform? If they are not, should they not be?

Margaret Beckett: I understand why my hon. Friend makes that point, and I know that she is involved in much work on the issue. Developing countries do not per se have specific representation at such talks. In a sense, it is inevitable that they would not at this stage because the negotiations are between members that subscribe to the existing CAP. My hon. Friend is certainly right, however, that it is important for the wider interests—not least those of the EU as a whole—in and outside the agricultural sector to be taken into account.

Mr. David Curry (Skipton and Ripon): Does the right hon. Lady accept that quite a large number of Agriculture Ministers, her colleagues and some significant voices in Brussels regard the mid-term review as a salvage operation, not a bold and radical reform? In particular, they regard the proposals to levy the production aid to farmers to benefit rural development as dead in the water. What steps does the right hon. Lady intend to take between now and the publication of the detailed plans and thereafter to ensure that there is still momentum behind the reforms, especially on the part of the French and Germans, who obviously have a key role to play?

Margaret Beckett: The right hon. Gentleman is entirely right that the French and Germans have a key

role to play. On the other matter that he raises, I take his point; I have heard people describe the present state of negotiations in that way. However, there is a large element of wishful thinking in that because those who least want reform are most eager to say that there will be no reform. For my part, I do not believe that the position has changed significantly except that we now have a firm ceiling on the budget. I certainly take the view that there is much interest in all member states in being able to do more, to do different things and to have less bureaucracy on rural development and the wider rural economy, and that I find encouraging.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): In view of the agreement reached primarily between the French and Germans at the recent summit, does the right hon. Lady still believe that it will be possible within the CAP ceilings to afford the transformation of the dairy regime and the move out of quotas, to which the Government are committed?

Margaret Beckett: Yes, I do believe that that will still be possible. What is much more to the point, however, is that Commissioner Fischler believes that it is still possible. It will not be easy and is by no means certain, but it is certainly possible.

Mr. Lidington: On a slightly different but CAP-related point, may I invite the Secretary of State to send a Christmas message to her French counterpart to say that the CAP depends crucially on mutual trust and the observance by all parties of the rules of a genuine common market, and that that trust will be seriously damaged if France persists with its plan to impose new controls on British lamb exports, which are due to come into force on 1 January? The French beef ban did tremendous harm to our livestock industry. The new controls would do the same. What representations is the right hon. Lady making?

Margaret Beckett: For once, I am in entire agreement with the hon. Gentleman. He is right—*[Interruption.]* Peace and good will, on this at least. He is right that the beef ban did great harm to the livestock industry, and worse still, it damaged mutual confidence and trust within the European Union. That is never healthy in an organisation of member states. However, we continue in firm dialogue with the French and with the Commission about the beef ban, and we have continued to emphasise the fact that further unilateral action would be damaging to mutual trust and confidence.

I hope that the hon. Gentleman is aware that there have been substantial moves. We continue to discuss with our French colleagues the proposal that came from their food standards agency some considerable time ago. There has been substantial change in the proposals that they now envisage, and those would apply not only to the British industry, but to the French industry. Needless to say, that is causing some reaction. The position is not as it was, but I share the hon. Gentleman's view that unilateral action is not good.

Fish Stocks

2. **Mr. Bob Blizzard** (Waveney): What encouragement she will give to fishing methods which do least damage to fish stocks. [86764]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): One of the Government's aims for reform of the common fisheries policy is the encouragement of sustainable fishing. UK and EU funding is available to encourage fishermen to adopt selective catching methods. The Under-Secretary my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley) is currently representing the UK at the Fisheries Council, where we expect decisions to be taken this week on the future of the common fisheries policy. He will report to the House as soon as possible on the outcome of the Council.

Mr. Blizzard: We all know that our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is doing his best in Brussels, but will my right hon. Friend send him this message: if we want to respect scientific advice in order to conserve fish stocks, and at the same time maximise fishermen's jobs, should we not protect environmentally sustainable methods of fishing, such as long-lining, from the severe restrictions being proposed? Long-liners do not devastate fish stocks, and it would make no sense to impose quota cuts right across the board.

If we value the scientific advice of our own scientists at CEFAS—the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science—should we not value the scientists themselves and support their case for equal pay with DEFRA staff?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend knows that our hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has worked hard with Fisheries Ministers in the devolved Administrations to develop an alternative approach that will secure cod recovery without the effect on the industry that would result from the Commission's proposals as they stand. I shall not enter into pay negotiations as part of this answer.

Andrew George (St. Ives): If the Minister accepts that the proposals under consideration in the Fisheries Council today are of such severity that they will devastate the British fishing industry without necessarily saving the fish stocks, does he agree that we should stop this 11th-hour method of crisis management and move away from the blunderbuss of blanket effort and quota restrictions, in favour of regionalised management? Because of the severity of the crisis, should not Parliament be recalled next week so that we can consider the outcome of the Fisheries Council, which will have a devastating effect on many coastal communities and thousands of jobs around the coast?

Alun Michael: We would certainly welcome an improvement in the way in which decisions are taken in these matters. The hon. Gentleman is aware how hard my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has worked on the matter. We are concerned about the proposals. We are hopeful that different proposals will emerge from the discussions this week, but obviously I cannot anticipate the outcome when the talks are still taking place. We

must have confidence in the ability of my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary to represent our national interest and the interests of British fishermen.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Minister will appreciate that past experience of dealing with sustainability issues must taint the way in which we look forward. Is he aware that Scottish fishermen who have implemented mesh sizes of 110 mm and 120 mm square mesh panels, voluntary tie-up schemes and decommissioning schemes have had all of that disregarded in the current crisis? They face the prospect of 40,000 job cuts in Scotland and the Government seem content to do nothing about it.

Alun Michael: That is far from the case, and the hon. Gentleman should not trivialise the issue. He should be aware that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has worked very hard, with Scottish Ministers, to ensure that the best possible case is presented on behalf of the fishing industry in this country, including Scotland. I am sure that he will be working as hard as ever in the discussions that are taking place today.

David Burnside (South Antrim): There are 2,000 jobs, 700 fishermen and 160 boats operating out of Kilkeel, Portavogie and Ardglass, and the Department has recognised that, through the voluntary help of the Northern Ireland fishing industry, cod stocks have increased and haddock stocks have tripled in recent years in the Irish sea. Will the Department give a commitment that in the current negotiations the British Government will not sign up to a deal that affects the 160 boats operating out of Northern Ireland ports, which will affect the jobs of those 700 fishermen or the 2,000 jobs in the fishing industry?

Alun Michael: No one could give such an assurance before the end of the current negotiations. We have sought a different sort of package from the one that the Commission put before the Fisheries Council, and I hope that we shall see some movement. That is what my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is negotiating on today, and possibly tomorrow as well. They are serious negotiations and we cannot anticipate the outcome until we get to the end of them.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Is it not the case, as the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) said, that the fleet that is fishing the most conservation-minded fishery in the whole of the European Union has been specifically targeted for destruction, despite the fact that haddock stocks are the highest since 1971? This is not a trivialisation. We want to know, in the next day or two, that Ministers who are meant to be representing that fishery will not sign the death warrant of the white fish fleet and the communities that depend on it around the coastline. That is the guarantee that we want from the Dispatch Box.

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman knows full well how passionately my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary has defended the interests of our industry. He should recognise, for instance, that fishermen who already use fishing methods such as long-lining feel that they are being penalised for problems that are not of their making. However, we were able to ensure that English long-liners were excluded from the cod spawning closure in spring 2001. That is an example of looking after our fishermen's interests. We also need to promote the recovery of stocks, because without an improvement in stocks, the industry's future is not sustainable. It is that balance that my hon. Friend will be seeking to persuade his ministerial colleagues to get right in the current negotiations.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): Scottish fishermen will not be convinced by the Minister's arguments about long-lining off the east coast of Scotland. It shows a certain lack of knowledge and a poor mastery of the brief, which I appreciate he is only looking after while his colleague debates in Europe.

Does the Minister agree with the request that I put to him earlier for an urgent statement on these matters today? We need to know precisely the progress of discussions in Europe and what negotiating stance the Government are taking on these vital issues. On what are they prepared to stand their ground? If the Government do not stand their ground, the deal will be done, our fishing industry will be destroyed or at very least depleted in the name of the disastrous common fisheries policy, and the House—we have heard comments from all parties today—will not have a chance to scrutinise or debate the matter until it is too late. It will be a miserable and lonely Christmas for our fishing communities. The Minister owes them at least the assurance of a statement to give them some confidence that the Government care as much as we do about that industry.

Alun Michael: It is disgraceful for the hon. Gentleman to imply that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, who is negotiating on the matter, is not doing everything that he can to look after the interests of the fishing industry in this country. He should also recognise that there is a genuine problem with stocks. We cannot jump ahead and give him information about proposals until we have seen them. We hope that different proposals will come forward. Of course, if we have that information, we will make it available to Opposition Members as quickly as we can, as well as to those on the Labour Benches who are interested in the matter. We still hope that different proposals will come forward.

Air Pollution (Water Treatment Works)

3. **Linda Gilroy** (Plymouth, Sutton): If she will make a statement on enforcement powers available to local authorities to deal with air pollution from water treatment works. [86765]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): There are a few difficult cases that the current arrangements cannot deal with, so I am launching a consultation on proposals for the statutory control of odour and other nuisances from sewage treatment works in England. I will also consult colleagues in Wales on whether the changes should also apply there. Enforcement powers for local authorities to deal with odour nuisance from those sources will be a key proposal in the consultation.

We intend to publish the document next week, and copies will be made available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Linda Gilroy: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. He will understand that no one will appreciate it more than the residents of Cattedown in my constituency and Nigel West and his colleagues in Plymouth city council, who have been doing so much since January, when they discovered that they did not have the enforcement powers that they thought they had. Will he take particular note of the views that I am sure they will express during the consultation and agree to meet a small delegation to ensure that, as they have suffered so much in recent years, their voices can be heard?

Alun Michael: I am well aware of the situation in Cattedown in my hon. Friend's constituency, not least because she has ensured on a number of occasions that I am aware of the problem faced by local people. Indeed, it is her representations and those of other hon. Members that have led to the consultation. I would be very happy to meet a delegation, which would obviously allow those involved to comment on the consultation paper. I shall ensure that my hon. Friend receives a copy as soon as possible.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): The Minister's commitment to legislate will be very warmly welcomed by thousands of my constituents who live down wind of the large Thames Water water treatment plant in south-west London. Will he call in Thames Water and the other polluters to impress upon them the need to invest now in odour control to prevent them being dragged before the courts in a few years time?

Alun Michael: I have had representations on that particular case and I look forward to hearing comments on the consultation document from the local area. The problem needs to be dealt with. In the meantime, it is important that those involved get on with trying to find a solution for the effect on local areas.

Ann Keen (Brentford and Isleworth): I also welcome the Minister's remarks on the consultation document. In Brentford and Isleworth, the Mogden sewage treatment works causes problems that I have brought to his attention on previous occasions. I was in the area on Sunday, and even on a December day the odour was unacceptable, although nothing like as strong as in the summer. The quality of life for my constituents in the area, especially because of the mosquito problem that arose throughout the summer, is unacceptable, and I would welcome anything that will improve it for them.

Alun Michael: Again, my hon. Friend has spoken to me about the particular problems at Mogden and I am happy to do all I can to encourage a resolution of the issue. There is no reason for the company involved—in this case, Thames Water—not to seek a solution. It does not need to wait for enforcement powers to be introduced. The need for the enforcement powers on which we are consulting arises from one or two issues such as those that my hon. Friend has drawn to my attention. They seem to have been going on for a considerable time without a solution being found or reassurance being given to local people.

Cattle Passport Scheme

5. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West): If she will make a statement on the operation of the cattle passport scheme. [86767]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The cattle passport scheme has been in operation for more than six years, and the national cattle database contains details of the 9.4 million animals that make up the national herd. We are currently investing a further £12 million in upgrading the system and improving its performance.

Mr. Swayne: I am told that Royal Mail loses approximately 1 million letters a week, but surely they cannot all be the tear-off slips for the cattle passport scheme. However, that appears to be the experience of many of my constituents. How many slips have allegedly gone missing? Why does the Department continue to issue the passport documents by second-class post when the only safe method of sending them is apparently by recorded delivery?

Alun Michael: The cattle tracing scheme has pioneered the use of e-mail and the web for cattle keepers who deal with the Government. Up to half of cattle movements and approximately one third of birth registrations are now reported electronically. The hon. Gentleman should not make assumptions about the loss of information, which is registered immediately on arrival.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): The Minister will recognise the effects of restricting cattle movements on cattle markets throughout the country. Will he give a positive Christmas message to my constituent, Mr. Jim Rowe of Axminster market auctioneers, about when the 20-day standstill rule on stock movement will be lifted?

Alun Michael: We have indicated that we are considering the matter. The hon. Gentleman should acknowledge that the standstill regime exists because of the veterinary risk assessment and the advice on what is needed to protect the industry.

Bovine TB (Gloucestershire)

6. **Mr. Laurence Robertson** (Tewkesbury): If she will make a statement on the incidence of bovine TB in Gloucestershire. [86768]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): Provisional statistics show that of the 1,549 cattle herds registered in Gloucestershire, some 15 per cent.—that is, 233 herds—had a new TB incident between 1 January and 30 November 2002. That includes confirmed, unconfirmed and unclassified cases.

Mr. Robertson: I thank the Secretary of State for that response. However, when I spoke to the National

Farmers Union a few minutes ago, it was fearful that resources for the state veterinary service would be reduced. Is that the case? If so, the process of testing animals will slow down.

What is the Government's policy towards vaccination and developing vaccines? Will the Secretary of State encourage companies to develop them?

Margaret Beckett: I am not aware of the rumours to which the hon. Gentleman referred. Indeed, 20 additional staff have been made available for TB testing in the Gloucester animal health divisional office area through the extra moneys that we gave the state veterinary service in England and Wales earlier this year.

We are doing what we can to encourage people to work on, and ascertain whether we can develop, a vaccine. However, the hon. Gentleman knows that a general review of overall science research capacity is taking place. Clearly, the serious problems of the disease will be considered in that context.

Diana Organ (Forest of Dean): In developing an effective policy against bovine TB, the Government set up the Krebs trials. Will my right hon. Friend give us some information on their progress? Are they taking place on all 30 sites? Given that they started in April 1998, when does she expect a report on them?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right that the trial started in April 1998. However, she knows that there was a problem during the foot-and-mouth epidemic. The trial is broadly on course, but I cannot give her a date off the top of my head for when we expect to receive the full outcome of the research. We understand the difficulties and anxieties, and we believe that it is right to let the trial run its proper course. Otherwise, we will never have an answer, and groups with opposing views will continue to accuse each other of getting it wrong.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does the Secretary of State accept the principle, or at least the possibility, that the very existence of the Krebs trials in Gloucestershire may to some degree be responsible for the higher incidence of TB in that county and in neighbouring Wiltshire? If she accepts that possibility, does she also accept that those farmers who find themselves in a Krebs trial area have a greater claim to consequential compensation for milk loss than do farmers in non-Krebs areas? If she does not accept it, will she explain why farmers in the Whitminster area of Gloucestershire receive consequential compensation for milk loss even though that is not the case in other Krebs areas? Once again, will she reconsider whether there is an argument for consequential loss payments to farmers in Krebs areas?

Margaret Beckett: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but I simply say to him that the Krebs trial was set up because the subject is bedevilled by suspicion, anecdotal evidence and perfectly understandable concerns for the health of animals and human beings. Of course I accept that people in the Krebs trial areas feel that they are being disadvantaged, but until we have the outcome of those trials nobody will really know what the methods of transmission are and how they would be affected. Consequently, his further question on what might be due to people who find themselves in those circumstances clearly cannot be dealt with. The key thing is to try to get the trials finished and get some outcome. Otherwise, we will go on like this for the next 20 years.

Hunting with Hounds

7. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): What recent assessment she has made of the impact that a ban on hunting with hounds would have on farming and the countryside. [86769]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Burns report, published in June 2000, concluded that hunting, as an economic activity, is so small as to be almost invisible in terms of national aggregates. The Bill that I have introduced is based on principle and will depend on the decisions of the independent registrar and tribunal.

Miss McIntosh: I am grateful to receive that reply. The Minister is obviously trying to strike a fine balance between maintaining a form of pest control through the Bill and maintaining the level of the quarried species in their natural habitat. He will be aware that Vale of York is virtually unique in having about 10 different hunts across its terrain, most of which hunt in part on upland farm land. Does that mean that he can give me a guarantee today that each of those hunts will continue under his Bill?

Alun Michael: Of course not, because cases have to be considered against the criteria. We want legislation that is tough but fair and which deals with the issue of cruelty and recognises the activities that are necessary—the test of necessity is set out clearly in the Bill—for eradicating pests and protecting livestock, crops and so on.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does my right hon. Friend accept that farmers and land managers take conservation and landscaping steps that are an enhancement for game and fish stocks? Will he make it absolutely clear that he and his colleagues have no plans to ban shooting or fishing?

Alun Michael: I can confirm that absolutely, and my hon. Friend is right to point to the steps that are undertaken for the conservation of the environment. What really makes a difference is how we are assisting farmers through the England rural development programme and the agri-environmental schemes that are part of it. That is very much a part of the future in ensuring that we have the right biodiversity in our countryside.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): During the debate the other day, the right hon. Gentleman recognised that if there is a ban on the hunts or a reduction in their number, it will cause particular problems for disposal of fallen stock. Does he recognise that there is a problem, irrespective of whether the hunting ban is introduced, that will be exacerbated by the on-farm burial regulations? Will he introduce the

proposals, which I gather his Department is working on, so that we have at the earliest opportunity a proper solution to the problem of disposal of fallen stock?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to point out that there will be a change in respect of fallen stock, irrespective of the decisions that are taken on the Hunting Bill. It is a real problem that needs to be addressed. On-farm burial will not be an option in future. I can confirm that a great deal of work is going on. Again, the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), has taken a leading part in discussing with the industries—disposal and farming—the best way to achieve a comprehensive solution to the problem that the hon. Gentleman rightly identifies.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is it not the case that hunts cannot always control their hounds? Hounds following a scent disrupt riding schools, and disturb farm animals and people in their gardens. Would a ban not help in that regard?

Alun Michael: That is one of the issues that needs to be discussed in what I am sure will be an interesting debate in Committee over the next few weeks.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): A Countryside Agency report shows that the countryside is in enormous economic and social difficulty. Will the Minister not show a little Christmas good will to people living in the countryside by stopping the nonsense of the hunting legislation and concentrating on what we should be doing—tackling the £25 billion pensions tax and the problem of street crime?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman is right about one thing. The most important issues for rural people are incomes, jobs, health, education and all the other matters to which we devote most of our time in the Department. DEFRA was established to tackle such problems. Hunting is a very small part of the issue for the countryside. Not everyone wants hunting to continue; many country people want a ban. The emphasis should be on the matters that I just mentioned. It is Members of Parliament, on both the pro-hunting and the anti-hunting side, who made hunting such an important issue that the Government made a commitment to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion—which it will do.

Horticulture

8. **Hugh Robertson** (Faversham and Mid-Kent): If she will make a statement on Government policy on horticulture. [86771]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government welcome the contribution of horticulture to the UK economy, which is worth some £2 billion at the farm gate and supports substantial downstream activity in packhouses, processing and the garden industry. We will continue to work with the industry through the sustainable farming and food strategy published on 12 December, by funding research and development and through the England rural development programme.

Hugh Robertson: The Minister will know—not least because DEFRA gave me the figures—that a staggering 10.8 per cent. of the national orchard has been lost in the last three years. That is before the effects of this year's Agricultural Wages Board settlement are taken into account. What specific help is the Minister giving fruit farmers now; and, equally important, what is his long-term vision of the future of horticulture?

Mr. Meacher: I have already answered the last part of that question. We intend, through the newly announced farming and food strategy, to give substantial help to the horticulture sector, which, as I said, is worth about £2 billion.

The hon. Gentleman knows very well that funding to promote specific United Kingdom products is not permitted by European Union state aid rules. The industry, however, receives substantial help to increase competitiveness through research, which I believe is currently worth about £10 million a year. That has helped the development of, for instance, new apple varieties such as Meridian and to increase apple storage, which is a problem in northern Europe. I believe that 73 producer organisations are working in this country under the EU fruit and vegetable regime.

We are keen to work with the industry, as long as that is compatible with EU rules, to promote what we regard as a very important and viable industry.

Climate Change (Air Travel)

9. **Mr. Chris Mullin** (Sunderland, South): What estimate she has made of the environmental impact of the projected expansion of air travel with special reference to climate change; and if she will make a statement. [86772]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): The intergovernmental panel on climate change has estimated that, if current rates of growth are maintained, air travel and air transport could be responsible for between 3 and 15 per cent. of manmade forcing of the global climate by 2050. There is a growing view that the aviation industry, like other industries, needs to pay for the environmental damage that it causes.

Mr. Mullin: My right hon. Friend has obviously noticed that the aviation industry appears to have plans for indefinite expansion. Has she also noticed that the Department for Transport appears to go along with those plans? Has her Department been consulted, and if so what response has it given?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is right to point out that the airline industry, like any other industry, is understandably trying to grow. He is also right to draw attention to growing concern about the potential impact. However, I do not think it fair to my right hon. Friend the

Secretary of State for Transport to say that the Department appears to be considering unrestrained growth.

It is always important for a Government to maintain a balance between identifying what may happen and considering what decisions they need to take as a result, and considering what ought to happen. I can only say that, as ever, we are engaged in dialogue about the possible impact, not only within our own Government but in the EU and with the International Civil Aviation Organisation, where continuing discussions are taking place.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Dialogue is all very well, but if future expansion is to take place we need to know the impact of major airport expansion not just on the global environment, but on the local environment, which concerns people in my constituency who live at the end of the runways at Manchester airport. As her Department sponsors such projects, will the Secretary of State undertake research into the environmental damage that aircraft cause?

Margaret Beckett: I take the hon. Gentleman's point. I am sure that he will appreciate that such damage is difficult to assess. We hope to be successful in reducing other sources of pollution through other measures. If so, pollution from aviation will play a larger part. However, that is not easy to assess, which is why it was not included in the Kyoto protocol agreement. We shall have to consider the problem carefully, but there will not be any easy, quick answers.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Is not the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) right when he says that the Department for Transport is planning for a massive expansion of the airline industry, and caves in to every demand that it makes? Does not that have massive environmental implications, such as the doubling of carbon emissions between 1990 and 2010, and a further take-off after that? Is not the reality that the right hon. Lady's Department, however well meaning, has no power within Government these days, and the Department for Transport and the Department of Trade and Industry do what they want irrespective of the impact on the environment? Is it not time she had a word with the Prime Minister to put the environment back at the heart of Government?

Margaret Beckett: The hon. Gentleman suggests that we should do more to assess the environmental impact of aviation, but there is no easy, separate assessment that we can make. All I can say to him is what I said to my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South. Neither the Department for Transport nor the Government as a whole are indifferent to these issues. Unlike the hon. Gentleman, we recognise that this is a difficult issue to which no one, especially not the Liberal Democrats, has any easy answers.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): In the right hon. Lady's discussions with the Secretary of State for Transport, will she stress the importance of examining the cumulative impact on the environment, especially of the proposed third runway at Heathrow?

Margaret Beckett: As I said, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is engaged in a long and thorough consultation process. He is mindful, as I am, of the varying effects that these decisions have on the environment. As both Conservative Members have observed, there is an impact on the local environment as well as the international effects.

Sugar Beet Quota

11. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When she next expects to meet sugar beet growers to discuss quota arrangements for next year's harvest. [86775]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Ministers have regular meetings with the National Farmers Union, which represents sugar beet growers in the United Kingdom.

Mr. Bellingham: As a friend of beet growers in East Anglia, the Minister knows how vital sugar beet is to the rural economy of the region. It is about the only crop that is currently making a profit. Does he share my concern about "everything but arms" and the fact that Britain is not self-sufficient in sugar production? There is a real fear that our quota will be cut in the future. What hope can he give farmers in my constituency this Christmas that there is a future for sugar beet? What is he doing to encourage biocrops?

Mr. Meacher: I give the hon. Gentleman credit for the fact that he has been active on behalf of the significant number of sugar beet growers in his constituency. As he must certainly know, there has been a recent cut in the quota for the current year, which was enforced by the European Union to avoid breaching the World Trade Organisation ceilings on subsidised sugar exports. I appreciate the considerable problems that that causes for sugar beet growers. They are likely to have had some indication of the cut in advance, but the procedure for making quota cuts in year, after the beet has been planted, is one aspect of the UK sugar regime that we want reformed. That would be of considerable benefit to growers in this country.

As for biocrops, I am extremely keen to see the development of biodiesel and bioethanol. The Government have already cut biodiesel and bioethanol prices by 20p a litre. I am well aware of the industry's argument that a little further cut in duty is necessary to achieve a viable industry, and we are considering that.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): While it is important to do what we can to encourage the use of biofuels because that is the direction to move in, is it not a fact that the sugar cane and sugar beet industry throughout the world is being destroyed because of the very low price that enables Brazil to dominate the entire world market?

Mr. Meacher: It is true that Brazil is the leading sugar beet grower, and that it dominates world markets. Of course, a case is currently being brought by Australia and Brazil under World Trade Organisation rules. In terms of any reform that does take place, it is certainly important to bear in mind the fact that the intervention price is three to four times the price of sugar on world

markets, so reform is inevitable. However, we must take great care to ensure that the benefit accrues not mainly to Brazil, but to the smaller African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. Under the "everything but arms" agreement, which some wag described as the "everything but farms" agreement, and according to the generalised system of preferences and the arrangements in the Cotonou partnership agreement, we have to make sure that the ACP countries—there are 77, some of which number among the poorest in the world—are the ones that gain. That is an objective of British negotiations.

Household Rubbish (Recycling)

12. **Mrs. Anne Campbell** (Cambridge): What steps she is taking to increase the percentage of household rubbish which is recycled. [86777]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The statutory targets that we have set require local authorities to double their levels of recycling and composting by 2003–04, and to treble them by 2005–06, compared with 1998–99 levels. Alongside the targets, a number of funds are available to support local authorities. The national waste minimisation and recycling fund has just approved the distribution of £76 million to 142 successful authorities, and private finance initiative funding continues to provide the necessary resources to enable long-term dramatic increases in recycling.

Mrs. Campbell: I welcome my right hon. Friend's commitment to recycling, and in particular the waste minimisation scheme's grant to Cambridgeshire county council to assist in its efforts. However, I ask him to look carefully at some of the recycling schemes run by local councils, and particularly that of the Liberal Democrat-controlled Cambridge city council. Although it is spending £250,000 more through the use of a kerbside recycling scheme, it is actually recycling 1 per cent. less household rubbish than did the previous Labour administration in 1998–99.

Mr. Meacher: I note my hon. Friend's point, and considering that the Liberal Democrats pride themselves on their performance in this area, I hope that they take it very much to heart. The Government are providing substantial extra resources, but there has to be value for money, which must be measured against outcomes. I am absolutely determined that all local authorities will meet those statutory recycling targets. We will want regular reports from those that are not on track, and we will take the necessary action to ensure that they come back on track.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): The Minister is quite right to emphasise that the Government are giving huge encouragement to the recycling of domestic waste and refuse, and my own Macclesfield borough council has been recognised for its fantastic success and progress in this area. However, why has my council advised me that the assistance that the Government have indeed being giving to it—I am very grateful for that—is apparently being reduced or cut altogether? That will prevent it from continuing with the project, and from continuing to achieve the success that the Government have recognised.

Mr. Meacher: I am not sure what the hon. Gentleman is referring to, as the main financial assistance to local authorities comes not from the £140 million waste minimisation and recycling fund, to which I have just referred, but from the environmental protection and cultural services category of the revenue support grant. From the baseline figure in spending review 2000, in the current year there has been an increase to £1.1 billion in the money given to local authorities. I am therefore puzzled as to why Macclesfield council should feel that there has been a reduction in the money that it gets, when in fact there has been a very substantial increase. However, I remind the hon. Gentleman that the money is not ring-fenced, and it is for the local authority to decide spending priorities. If, at the end of the year, it finds that there is less money available, I suspect that that will be because more of the money has been transferred for use on other purposes. The responsibility does not lie with the Government.

Mr. Win Griffiths (Bridgend): What estimate has my right hon. Friend made of the value of school recycling schemes? In my constituency, a small company called Broughshire Ltd. has initiated schemes with many schools. The schools get income, pupils learn the value of recycling, and there is a small contribution to local employment. I hope that the scheme will be recognised by my right hon. Friend's Department. What does he think will be the impact of the pre-Budget statement on the whole recycling sector?

Mr. Meacher: The pre-Budget report made use of information in the Cabinet Office strategy unit report published just before it, and certainly provides extra resources for the recycling sector. A range of mechanisms exist that should help local authorities. I place great value on schools recycling. It has educative value for the younger generation, who often are rather better than their elders at understanding what needs to be done. Also, schools can play a significant role, as the statutory recycling targets will require all local authorities to engage in kerbside collection. Schools can play a leading part there, and I shall do everything that I can to encourage that.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): Is the increase in landfill tax just another stealth tax, or will it be used to promote the environmental objective of local recycling? If the latter is the case, will the increase in tax be passed to beleaguered local authorities so that they can fund the 100 per cent. collection of separated waste, the promotion of local recycling and the expansion of clean and safe local energy-from-waste plants?

Mr. Meacher: The substantial increase in landfill tax—a near tripling from £13 to £35 per tonne—is essential if we are to achieve our landfill directive targets. I never cease reminding people of the facts: at the current rate, we will double our landfill every 20 to 25 years, yet our very tough target is to reduce that rate by two-thirds in the next 14 years. The increase in landfill tax is an essential mechanism if we are to achieve

that target, as is the Bill introducing landfill permits as a way of reducing the amount of landfilling done by each authority, organisation or company.

The hon. Gentleman wants to know whether that money will go back to local authorities. A ministerial team is following up the pre-Budget report and will examine all the details. I fully understand the purpose behind the question, and the hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to hear that I am quite sympathetic, but there has to be agreement across Government on what is a key issue.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): My right hon. Friend is known for his interest in recycling, on which he has done some good work. May I urge him to stand up against the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury? If it comes into effect as intended, the pre-Budget report will be a disaster for all recycling and environmental initiatives. The landfill tax credit, which puts category C waste into the public sector, will mean that the environmental innovations sector will face a loss of £400 million. Will my right hon. Friend fight his colleagues tooth and nail to ensure that that money remains available to recycling and environmental innovation?

Mr. Meacher: My hon. Friend has already pressed his point with me very vigorously and I entirely understand it. He is aware that the environmental, social and community categories of the landfill tax credit scheme will be fully preserved, at £47 million. With regard to the rest, the problem remains that there have been allegations of dodginess. I am not sure whether that is a parliamentary term, so I shall say instead that there has been uncertainty about the legality of some of the allocations. I am not saying that they are correct but there is a widespread view that the way in which some of the money is distributed may not stand up to examination, as has been said in the media. More importantly, it is crucial that the money be primarily used for the Government's central aim of improving the weakest part of the system, that of local authority infrastructure and recycling—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will the Minister allow me to call Question 13?

Rural Payments Agency

13. **Mr. James Plaskitt** (Warwick and Leamington): If she will make a statement on the operation of the Rural Payments Agency. [86778]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The annual report of the Rural Payments Agency published in October 2002 presents an unqualified set of accounts and the achievement of 16 out of 18 key performance targets. It is also worth noting that the agency has recently achieved the quickest ever start to the payment of the arable area payment scheme claims in England. Some 86 per cent. of claims were made within two weeks of the start of the payment window, amounting to £681 million paid to farmers.

Mr. Plaskitt: Farmers in Warwickshire are reporting to me that payments are coming through much more quickly, for which they are grateful. Can we go further and consider greater co-ordination between different databases in the Department, perhaps even merging some of them so that we can facilitate more filing by e-systems and less by paper?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend is quite right, and a great deal of work is going on towards that end. The support for electronic submission of 2003 IACS—integrated administration and control system—claim forms has been enhanced, and applicants will be able to work offline before submitting their claims. I have no doubt that that will help to improve matters.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger. Not here.

Alun Michael: It is obvious that some people have left for Christmas early this year.

Wessex Water (Low Flows)

17. **Mr. Robert Key** (Salisbury): Whether the Environment Agency and Wessex Water have signed the detailed operating agreement on restoring low flows in the River Wylye, River Piddle and the upper Bristol Avon. [86782]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): In June of this year the Environment Agency, English Nature, the Office of Water Services and Wessex Water agreed a programme of measures on restoring low flows in the Rivers Wylye, Piddle and the upper Bristol Avon. Since the programme of measures was agreed, Wessex Water has been operating in accordance with that agreement. I understand that the text of a detailed operating agreement covering this work has been agreed between the Environment Agency and Wessex Water and will be signed shortly.

Mr. Key: So it has not been signed yet. Has the Minister received the report that was promised in the statement of intent to which he has just referred and which was due to be delivered to his Department in December 2002? I invite him to get tough, because this is one of the most precious chalk streams in Europe. It is a candidate special area of conservation, a site of special scientific interest with a wildlife trust area, and only last week there was a discharge of raw sewage into the river. It is one step forward and two steps back. This simply will not do—the agreement must be signed, sealed and delivered.

Alun Michael: As I understand it, following the statement of intent, Wessex Water has been operating in the spirit of the agreement. Of course I will look at the particular incident to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. The agreement is enforceable by the Secretary of State, so it is essential that it be made at an appropriate level of detail. Of course it is important that the document to be signed is precise and correct. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would support that, and my understanding is that it is very close to being completed at that level of detail.

EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive

18. **Andrew Selous** (South-West Bedfordshire): What recent representations she has received regarding the implementation of the EU directive on the recycling of electrical and electronic equipment. [86783]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Department has received representations directly from the consumer, electronics and IT industries and the printer cartridge remanufacturing industry. We have also received representations indirectly from numerous stakeholders through meetings with local authorities, dismantlers, retailers, manufacturers and small businesses.

Andrew Selous: I thank the Minister for that reply. Given the current difficulty with the implementation of the fridges directive, what assurance can he give the House that electrical goods will not be littering our towns and countryside in future? Furthermore, what assurance can he give us that any costs incurred by local authorities will be fully reimbursed by the Government—unlike the current situation as regards the fridges directive?

Mr. Meacher: There is all the difference in the world with what happened as regards fridges, which, as I have repeatedly said, occurred because the Commission told the UK of the requirements under the directive at far too late a stage—after two and a quarter years.

The differences are, first, that there was regulation on fridges, whereas the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive is to be transferred over a much longer period of time, so there is an opportunity for discretion. Secondly, as regards fridges, the UK had only seven months from the time we finally received the information from the Commission, but we have nearly two years to secure implementation of the WEEE directive. Indeed, under that directive, we have already exceeded the draft collection target of 4 kg per head. There is no comparison between the two directives and we shall be ready for the smooth and proper implementation of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive.

Business of the House

12.30 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Will the Leader of the House please give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): It will be a pleasure. The business for the first week after the Christmas recess will be as follows:

TUESDAY 7 JANUARY—Second Reading of the Local Government Bill.

WEDNESDAY 8 JANUARY—Opposition Day [1st Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion; subject to be announced.

THURSDAY 9 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Health (Wales) Bill.

FRIDAY 10 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 13 JANUARY—Opposition Day [2nd Allotted Day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion; subject to be announced.

TUESDAY 14 JANUARY—Until 4 o'clock there will be an Opposition half day. There will be a debate on a motion in the name of the Ulster Unionist party, followed by a debate on the London bid for the 2012 Olympic games on a motion for the Adjournment of the House.

WEDNESDAY 15 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill.

THURSDAY 16 JANUARY—Motions on the General Synod measure, followed by a motion to take note of various European documents relating to fisheries policy.

FRIDAY 17 JANUARY—The House will not be sitting.

Hon. Members will wish to be reminded that although the new hours start in January, on the first day back after the recess the House will meet at 2.30 pm. The reduced period of notice for oral questions and the opportunity to table electronic questions will commence from the start of the new year.

Following another recommendation in the Modernisation Committee report, the Chairman of Ways and Means has agreed that there will be a cross-cutting question session on youth policy in Westminster Hall for one hour on Thursday 23 January. Questions should be tabled by Wednesday 15 January at 12.30 pm. That will be followed by a two hour debate on "Pathways into Work: helping people into employment".

Mr. Forth: Earlier this week, the Leader of the House asked me—rather plaintively—whether I could bear to be pleasant today. As a result, I took a crash course in emollience and seasonal good will. I want, therefore, to offer my wishes for a happy Yuletide and a very happy and prosperous new year to the Leader of the House and, if I may say so through him, to his mother; to you, Mr. Speaker, to your Deputies and to all right hon. and hon. Members; to both the retiring Clerk and the incoming Clerk and all their staff; to the Officers of the House and the employees—and to the world generally. The pleasant bit is now over.

The Leader of the House has told us that on 16 January there will be debates both on the General Synod and on European documents on fisheries. The fisheries issue is important to many Members of the House and their constituents, so will the right hon. Gentleman give us some idea of the time that he proposes to allocate for the two debates? Given that by that time we shall be finishing early on Thursdays, I hope that fish will not be squeezed by the Church—if I may put it in that way—because it is surely important that the House give the maximum time to the very important issue of fishing policy, and that it is not in any way seen to be neglected.

During yesterday's statement on Iraq, my hon. Friend the Member for Aldershot (Mr. Howarth) said:

"the media were briefed yesterday and the House of Commons was briefed today. We are clearly the poor relations."

That certainly seemed to be the case. The Secretary of State said rather petulantly:

"there was nothing in the briefing to journalists yesterday that had not previously been set out clearly to the House of Commons on two, if not three, occasions."—[*Official Report*, 18 December 2002; Vol.396, c. 846–47.]

Yesterday's edition of *The Daily Telegraph*—for the article to have been in yesterday's edition the journalists must have been briefed before the Secretary of State came to the House—said that the preparations included:

"chartering the ships needed to take British tanks to the Gulf."

I am assured that that had never been said to the House before. This is an absolute example not only of the Government and their Ministers briefing the press before the House, but of their making a straightforward denial. This seems to be a case of DMPs—

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): DMPs?

Mr. Forth: Defence Minister's porkies. I hope that the Secretary of State for Defence is not falling into the bad habits of the Prime Minister. Will the Leader of the House please take the Secretary of State for Defence to one side and quietly give him a crash course in straightforwardness with the House?

Mr. Cook: I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his crash course in politeness and good cheer. Plainly, we can put that down as another success for Labour education policy.*[Interruption.]* In this case, we may have to try harder.

I fully understand the interests of the House in fisheries policy. Indeed, at this very moment an important meeting is proceeding in Brussels, at which the British case is being presented by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs my hon. Friend the Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley). We wanted to make sure that there was an early opportunity for him to report back to the House and for the House to discuss it. Although I cannot give the precise hours of allocation, I anticipate that the House will want to spend longer on fisheries than on the General Synod measure.

No member of the Government is more punctilious in keeping the House informed than my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence. I suspect that if I were to go through those who had made statements over the past 12 months, I would find that my right hon. Friend

[Mr. Cook]

had given among the most, if not the most, statements to the House. Quite properly, he came to the House yesterday, gave a full statement and took questions. *[Interruption.]* Sometimes, the Opposition's questions do not lend themselves to a reply that is comprehensible to the world outside here. Within those limitations, my right hon. Friend has been to the House as often as anybody else and has made full statements. I should have thought that the House might give him credit for that.

As far as I can tell from the past four weeks, the number of oral statements is comparable with any previous period in the history of the House and is certainly well ahead of the number when the Tories were in power.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the Leader of the House give us some advice about the progress being made on reform of the House of Lords? The report was issued last week. Many of us eagerly anticipate a debate on its contents and, in due course, a vote on the issues and options.

What are the Government's intentions on the proposed draft Mental Health Bill, which appears to have been in and out like a fiddler's elbow? Again, the House and people outside are keen to find out what is happening.

Will the Leader of the House assure Members that before military forces are committed to any extended military action in Iraq we will have an opportunity to debate and vote on the commitment of forces?

Mr. Cook: Of course I anticipate the enthusiasm of the House to have a further debate on House of Lords reform, and I look forward to a further debate with the keenest anticipation. I anticipate that the debate will probably be held in the week after the two weeks for which I have announced the business, but I can assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government do not intend to delay the matter. We set up the Joint Committee; we promised a free vote on its proposals, and we want to ensure that they proceed.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that publication of the draft Mental Health Bill has produced many responses. The two Departments concerned are, quite rightly and properly, fully considering the responses and will return to the House once they have had an opportunity to reflect on amendments to be made in the light of that consultation exercise.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in the debate in the House only three weeks ago that the Government have no difficulty whatsoever with the idea of considering a substantive motion in the House and, indeed, want to keep the House fully informed and fully behind any action that we take. That is why he said that he would support the House considering a substantive motion at the appropriate time. What the appropriate time may be will have to be judged in the light of circumstances, but, of course, he indicated that, if possible, we would want to ensure that the House had a full opportunity to express a view before action was taken and, if not possible, immediately after action was taken.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): It is splendid news that we will debate House of Lords reform next month, but will my right hon. Friend tell me a bit more about the House of Lords Appointments Commission, which has not been doing much appointing recently? In fact, no people's peers have been appointed this year. I wonder whether the commission meets and how much it costs the taxpayer to keep it in existence.

Mr. Cook: In fairness, I must invite my hon. Friend to reflect on some of his comments when the Appointments Commission has met and made appointments. He has expressed such distaste and disappointment that I really do not think that he should complain that it has not tried to disappoint him again.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Pursuing the spirit of Christmas good will announced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), may I congratulate the Leader of the House on introducing amendments this week to the data protection legislation to enable Members of Parliament to continue to go about their business? Some people do not like that, but most people think that it is basically a good idea. Does he accept that the Opposition aided and abetted him in that triumph? Will he consider writing a letter to Members of Parliament explaining exactly what the amendments will mean for us?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those comments, and I am very happy to express the view that, of course, that was a result of an approach that embraced all parties in the House and in which he has taken a very close personal interest. I am pleased to confirm that the Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) (Elected Representatives) Order 2002 came into force this week and that from now on it will not be legal for any public body to cite the Data Protection Act 1998 as a reason why it cannot respond to a request from a Member of Parliament. That was the right decision to take because, when our constituents come to see us, they expect us to take action; they do not expect us to say that we cannot take action because of the Data Protection Act.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): May I take my right hon. Friend back to fishing? He knows only too well how important fishing is to the communities of Whitby and Scarborough. Is some facility available to hon. Members, especially those who represent fishing communities, to allow DEFRA to make a written statement following the conclusion of the current important discussions being held in Brussels, so that we can provide the very best service to our constituents, who are feeling hard pressed and very concerned about their futures, and so that we can do the work that we were elected to do?

Mr. Cook: Before I respond to my hon. Friend's question, may I apologise for not responding to the suggestion made by the hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) that I should write to hon. Members? I shall reflect on that, and it may indeed be helpful for hon. Members to have that explanation in writing.

I understand the importance to my hon. Friend and his constituents not only of the fisheries negotiations but of an authoritative statement before the House resumes. I shall pass on his point to the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who may wish to consider writing to him and the other hon. Members most closely involved, but that is ultimately a decision for him.

In fairness, I would say that the Government made provision for fisheries debates before the current negotiations began, and we have taken care to do so again as soon as the House resumes. I know that it is a difficult time for those communities and that my hon. Friend will want a clear statement as soon as possible, but within the constraints of our sitting weeks we have provided good opportunity for him and his colleagues to discuss the matter with the Minister.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): Further to that last question, is the Leader of the House aware that if there is a failure to reach an agreement on fisheries, responsibility falls immediately to the Commission? The current Commission proposals mean the total destruction of the UK fishing industry. The right hon. Gentleman may not be aware of that, but that is the reality, the truth and the fact. Will he respond more positively to the House and to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn)? DEFRA should provide all Members with a statement on what is agreed and what the Government are prepared to do to safeguard the United Kingdom fishing industry, which is about to be destroyed?

Mr. Cook: In fairness, the Minister of State and the Secretary of State have repeatedly made statements on their position. We are fully aware of the severe demands that the proposals will make on fishing communities in Britain. The Minister of State is engaged in very tough negotiations to find the best possible way forward that balances the needs of fishing communities with the unavoidable fact that we need to take action to preserve future cod stocks. Although it is absolutely right that we should seek to find ways in which we can maintain sustainable fishing communities, that will not be possible unless we also find ways of maintaining sustainable fishing stocks.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on revitalising our parliamentary democracy? He has done a lot to modernise parliamentary procedures and to try to modernise Parliament, but many of our constituents still feel remote from the decision-making process. There cannot be a more urgent debate than one on how we more effectively link what happens in this Chamber with ordinary people's lives.

Mr. Cook: I always welcome any opportunity to debate how we can get across the success of this Chamber in exploring important issues of concern to our constituents. Indeed, I noted that one article in the past week recorded the fact that debates in Parliament are often well informed and worth reading. I mention that because, although it may have been only one article in the past week, it is one more than I have seen for most of the previous six months, and we must welcome support where we find it. The Modernisation Committee met this week and agreed that, in the new year, it will look at precisely the area that my hon. Friend suggests: how we can connect with the public and make sure that they understand the work of their Members of Parliament in scrutinising legislation and holding Government to account.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On House of Lords reform, will the right hon. Gentleman follow the recommendations in the report by having two debates: one to take note, and the other to vote on the various options? Will he ensure that the recommendation that each option should be voted on in turn will also be followed?

Mr. Cook: I cannot resist the recommendation that we should debate the matter twice, not just once. I assure the hon. Gentleman that it will be our intention to do that, and I would welcome his assistance with finding something original for me to say in the second of the debates. On the question of the voting method, the report of the Joint Committee is one to which we attach the highest importance, and the probability is that we will proceed exactly as it has proposed.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the House is to be relevant we must debate the great issues at the appropriate time? He knows from the pre-Budget report that some very significant changes to environmental taxation, the landfill tax credit scheme and landfill taxation have tremendous implications for the environment. At the moment, four Ministers are engaged in cross-departmental discussions, which will continue over the next two or three months. It is vital that the House has the chance to inform those deliberations while there is still time. Will my right hon. Friend take that on board?

Mr. Cook: I fully accept that the process of scrutiny must be a continuing dialogue between the Government and Members of Parliament. This place provides many opportunities for that dialogue to be continued, not just in the Chamber but in Westminster Hall and in the many other opportunities that are open to Members to make direct representations to Ministers. Of course, the Chamber proceeds on the basis that we debate Government proposals, and my hon. Friend will understand that I cannot arrange for a debate on the issue to which he refers until the Government have come to a view on their proposals.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Has the right hon. Gentleman seen this morning's edition of *The Scotsman*? It was certainly almost enough to make me choke on my cornflakes. May we have an early and urgent debate on the role and the spiralling costs of the Scotland Office, especially following the bizarre and almost hysterical rant by the Secretary of State for Scotland about *The Scotsman* because it had dared to suggest that she might be under-employed in her new role? Before that debate, perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will take the right hon. Lady aside, calm her down and explain to her that it is not just *The Scotsman* that is wondering what on earth the Scotland Office is up to just now.

Mr. Cook: Perhaps I can assist the hon. Gentleman by giving advice that is consistent with good health. He

[Mr. Cook]

should not attempt to read *The Scotsman* until he has completed his breakfast, is in good heart and has completed his exercises. I find that that is the appropriate moment to face up to a difficult task.

I get a little fazed by the sensitivity of our press. They ladle out criticism not just of Ministers but of Members of Parliament. However, if there is the slightest, merest murmur that the press may be less than perfect, they react in a way that, I am afraid, requires psychological counselling. Those who give it out must learn to take it.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): May we have a debate on the workings of the Official Secrets Act? Did my right hon. Friend not conclude that the sentence that the judge gave to Mr. Shayler clearly indicated that the judiciary were certainly not impressed by the fact that this archaic Act does not provide for a public interest defence? It is against our interest to have abortive prosecutions and we will not be able to use the Act when a matter of real national security, rather than the trivialised Shayler case, is involved.

Mr. Cook: This was not in any way an abortive prosecution, nor was the case dropped. On the contrary, it resulted in a conviction. If my hon. Friend looks at what was said by the judge, he will find that he showed no sympathy for the idea that there should be a public interest defence for a member of the security services who had taken information that he had gained while a member of the security services and had given to the press. Mr. Shayler attempted to produce a public interest defence, but the judge made it perfectly plain that he did not consider that that would be appropriate. I do not propose to rerun the trial in the Chamber, but it resulted in a conviction. I honestly do not think that my hon. Friend can pray it in aid as evidence that the judiciary were in any way dissatisfied.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): Is the Leader of the House aware that, tomorrow, the Convention on the Future of Europe will debate proposals—which will be supported by the British Government's representative—that would give the European Union exclusive competence, usually by majority voting, in new areas? They include not only foreign policy, but internal policy matters such as intellectual property and copyright. Is the right hon. Gentleman further aware that the industries and trade bodies concerned in those commercial sectors have not been consulted in any way? Moreover, when we debated these matters two weeks ago, the Minister responsible for them gave no indication of his intention. Will the Leader of the House therefore ensure an early statement so that the House can at least be aware of what the Government are trying to give away?

Mr. Cook: The right hon. Gentleman sought a debate only a few weeks ago on the Convention. Indeed, I delivered it within two weeks of his requesting it. There was then a full opportunity for us to explore the issue. However, I must confess that we were rather surprised to discover the lack of support on the Conservative Benches for that debate. In the light of that, I am not sure that I feel particularly encouraged to arrange a statement.

It would be unwise of me to comment on the matter of detail that the right hon. Gentleman raises, but I remind him that the Government who accepted majority voting on a wide range of trade matters were his Conservative Government. They did so because that is the only way to overcome the veto of those who want to make no progress towards freer trade.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): Will my right hon. Friend find time early in the new year for a debate to clarify the position on the Department of Health's management of hospitals and, in particular, the management of the Good Hope, which serves my constituency? Only six weeks ago, I was told that the Good Hope had performed well and that it should be proud of its efforts. It scored well

"on many of the key national targets"

and above average

"on emergency re-admission rates and patient focus measures."

I read in the press today that it is to be put out to be franchised. I am still waiting for the letter to appear on the Letter Board informing me of that, but I have been in contact with the Department for a few months about the hospital. Will my right hon. Friend join me in sending the best wishes of the season to all the hard-working and dedicated staff at the Good Hope and other hospitals as they worry about their future?

Mr. Cook: There should be no need for members of staff who work on the clinical side or in many other parts of the Good Hope hospital to worry about their future. On the contrary, it is precisely because we want to secure a good future for the hospital that we are taking the steps that we are taking to make sure that it has a management that matches the commitment, dedication and qualifications of the staff who provide the services. My hon. Friend will be aware that the hospital's chief executive has just been dismissed. In the circumstances, it is entirely proper that we should look to how we can make sure that the best possible management is provided for the hospital, as that is in the interests of both the staff and my hon. Friend's constituents who are its patients.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): The Leader of the House has announced a debate on the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill. Before we have that debate, will he ensure that Health Ministers are not responsible for any delays? Is he aware that I have a letter dated 9 December that says:

"Thank you for your letter of 13 May"?

I have a letter dated 3 December that says:

"Thank you for your letter of 21 March"

and a letter dated 2 December that says:

"Thank you for your letter of 14 January".

Will the right hon. Gentleman ensure that Health Ministers explain why social services departments are to be fined for not discharging a patient within three days, but Health Ministers are not to be fined for not answering a letter within 10 months?

Mr. Cook: I am aware of the right hon. Gentleman's point and of the fact that other points of order have been raised on the issue in the past week. I will certainly seek

to make sure that those points are registered. It is important that Members receive an acceptable service. The intervals that he describes are not acceptable.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the evolving crisis in Ethiopia. I was part of an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Ethiopia, where we were able to see the crisis at first hand. It is clear that there is a short-term food problem. It was pleasing to hear that the Department for International Development is likely to find the resources to help meet the shortfall, so will he pass on the thanks of the delegation for that?

At the same time as we are doing our part, is it not disgraceful that we hear today from Dr. Mula Kasela, the Finance and Economic Development Minister in the Ethiopian Government, that Nestlé is pressing for full reparation of the £6 million that it claims it is owed? Is there something that the Government can do to make it clear that, when people are starving, it is not right for multinational companies to demand their pound of flesh?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the appreciation that he has expressed of the work being done by the Department for International Development and the Government to make sure that we play our full part in the international efforts to contain the famine and meet the needs of Ethiopia.

I heard the interview this morning on the "Today" programme with, I think, one of the directors of Nestlé. I noted his plaintive complaint that he was surprised at the hostility of John Humphrys, but many of us could have warned him of that. I hope that, in the light of the interview, that director is reflecting on the position taken by Nestlé. It is not a matter that is, or should be, within the competence of the Government; it is a matter for Nestlé. However, as he appeared to hint in his closing remarks, if it is pursuing such funds from the Government of Ethiopia, it should make sure that the same amount is available to the hungry people of Ethiopia.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): May we have a debate on ministerial responsibility? I refer to a report in *The Times* yesterday about the Licensing Bill, which stated:

"Ministers have admitted privately that several parts of the Licensing Bill are ridiculous and need complete redrafting. Officials are being blamed for drafting over-zealous rules into the Bill."

Does the Leader of the House agree that Ministers are responsible for their legislation and for what goes into Bills? They should not criticise—even privately—those who cannot answer in the House.

Mr. Cook: I also warn the right hon. Gentleman that Ministers are not responsible for what appears in the press. He should treat with some scepticism what he has quoted to the House. As Chairman of the Legislative Programme Committee, I meet the Ministers who propose the legislation.

I wish to take the opportunity to say that I have the highest confidence in the parliamentary draftsmen and the parliamentary counsel who prepare the texts for this place. They are of high quality and they all could command higher salaries in the private sector. It is their commitment to the public sector and the intellectual rewards of their work that keep them working for us. We are fortunate to have them.

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Following on from earlier questions, it does not bother me where the Secretary of State for Defence makes his statements about Iraq; what bothers me is that he makes them at all. It is clear that America is going headlong towards a war against Iraq and it looks as though the Government will support it 100 per cent. Whichever Minister gives the green light for an attack on Iraq will be responsible for the butchery of men, women and children on a massive scale without any good reason. We should have at least a full-day's debate, and preferably a two-day debate, with a vote at the end so that hon. Members who are opposed to this madness can vote against it in the Lobby. Here, we will be in a minority, but outside in the real world the majority of people are sensible enough to know that a war is absolute madness.

Mr. Cook: Only this week the Secretary of State for Defence said that war is neither inevitable nor imminent. Indeed, the whole direction of the Government's policy over the past few months is to ensure that we proceed through the United Nations and that it gives the regime in Iraq one last chance to avert military action, as Security Council resolution 1441 makes clear. I believe that our action has been successful in ensuring that we get the inspectors back into Iraq. I take it that my hon. Friend is not objecting to the disarmament inspectors returning to Iraq. They are, after all, UN inspectors and are there to ensure that Iraq carries out its commitments not to have weapons of mass destruction. We await their report on the Iraqi dossier early next year. I hope that over the months ahead the weapons inspectors will keep us informed of their progress in achieving their objective, which I am sure my hon. Friend shares, of ensuring that we eliminate the weapons of chemical, biological and nuclear capacity from Iraq that would threaten its neighbours. If Iraq co-operates and we make sure that it understands that we stand behind the inspectors, there will be no war, no need for my hon. Friend to vote against it and, indeed, possibly an opportunity for him to congratulate the Government on the success of our policy.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): Will the Leader of the House urge his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health to end the uncertainty that hangs over the Kent and Canterbury hospital year after year? Now that the legal proceedings are over, yet another leaked plan has come to light involving fresh expenditure different from that contained in the five or six earlier plans. As Christmas approaches, will the Government make an announcement that tells the hard-working doctors, nurses and other hospital staff that they are going to keep the accident and emergency unit and the regional centres of excellence where they are accessible to the people of east Kent?

Mr. Cook: I doubt whether I can arrange for a statement in the remaining six hours of this part of the

[Mr. Cook]

Session, but I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friend and invite him to write to him.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I am sure that many hon. Members share my concern about the unsatisfactory facilities for visiting parties to this place compared with almost any other modern democratic Parliament. Even the new visitor centre is far too small to meet the demand for information and refreshment. What plans are there to improve facilities for visitors?

Mr. Cook: I commend the visitor café, which is off Westminster Hall. I took some guests to it last week and it provides a good service. Indeed, I encourage more hon. Members to use it because at present it has a 50 per cent. usage rate. On the future of the facilities, we are in the middle of examining proposals for a new visitor centre. A feasibility study has been proposed. Our comments on it include the suggestion that we should examine options off-precincts as well as on-precincts. A visitor centre that provides interpretation would help immensely to improve the educational value of a visit to Westminster. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) might like to know that it will not be an entertainment, but an educational visit so that people leave here with a sense of the way in which the institution is a working institution and the heart of our parliamentary democracy.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Further to the comments of the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) on the Good Hope hospital, which is located in my constituency and serves our constituents, may I draw the attention of the Leader of the House to the fact that the inquiry is widely regarded locally as intimidatory and disproportionate? Although I echo strongly what the hon. Gentleman said about the dedication and hard work of the staff, principally my constituents, who work in the hospital, it would help to have a debate on the way in which the health service conducts such inquiries so that hon. Members can share their experiences.

Mr. Cook: Of course I am open to hon. Members commenting on reports that affect their constituents and the public services within their area—indeed, there may well be general lessons to learn that are applicable to other cases—but one cannot ignore the fact that the chief executive of the Good Hope hospital was found guilty of gross misconduct and dismissed summarily. The hon. Gentleman makes a face, but surely in those circumstances he realises that it is in the interests of his constituents that action is taken to ensure that we have a strong management team to match the quality and strength of clinical staff in the hospital.

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): Is my right hon. Friend aware that national health service dentists are becoming an endangered species? My constituents have great difficulty registering with an NHS dentist and have to go private. They often have to pay dental fees that they cannot afford or suffer in pain. Can my right hon. Friend make time for a debate on that important subject early in the new year?

Mr. Cook: I cannot promise a specific debate on the dental service, but my hon. Friend will have many opportunities to raise concerns about provision within the NHS. As she well knows, we are in the middle of a record investment in expanding NHS provision, as a result of which we have more nurses, more doctors and more beds than ever before. We all want to ensure that that investment provides greater access for our constituents so that they receive the appropriate treatment that they need.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): May I extend on behalf of my colleagues the compliments of the season to you, Mr. Speaker, to Members and to the officers and staff of the House?

Will the Leader of the House advise me on whether good will and Lib-Lab relations have developed to such an extent that the leader of the Liberal Democrats is now answering questions for the Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), who is responsible for education in Northern Ireland; or am I reading too much into the fact that a pre-school funding question was answered by the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy), at column 548W on 16 December?

Mr. Cook: I think there may have been too many Kennedys spoiling the broth. If there has been a misprint, I shall certainly ensure that it is drawn to the attention of *Hansard*, which will wish to correct it. *[Interruption.]* I assure my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that my hon. Friend the Minister has a very satisfactory life. I am in no doubt that she will want to ensure that her name and no one else's appears with her answers.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Can we find time for a debate on the Annan Cyprus settlement, which shows both promise and problems? We need to ensure that the terms on territorial boundaries are correct and protect the rights of the original property owners, especially in Kyrenia and Aiyos Ambrosios. We also need to be able to remove all troops and achieve demilitarisation in the island as soon as possible and to give Turkish settlers the deal that they need to encourage as many of them to return to Turkey as is appropriate.

Mr. Cook: We have achieved historic progress on Cyprus. I took an interest in it when I was at the Foreign Office and am well aware of all the great difficulties involved in getting a settlement. I always took the view that the maximum opportunity for resolving the long-standing dispute was connected to making progress on the accession of Cyprus to the EU and the prospect of that for Turkey. That has turned out to be the case and I compliment my hon. Friends at the Foreign Office, especially my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the personal interest that he has taken in moving the issue forward.

The hon. Gentleman illustrates the difficulty in getting an agreement. He produced a shopping list of demands that are the demands of one side only. I hope

that many of the matters will be addressed in a comprehensive settlement, but it will have to show flexibility on both sides.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Does the Leader of the House recall that on 5 December I asked him whether we could have a debate on the social chapter, following the Prime Minister's claim the day before about how influential it was? The Leader of the House responded by giving me details of what he considered to be the benefits to the UK work force. I did not agree with his answer, so I tabled a question along the same lines to the Prime Minister, who replied to me in writing on 11 December. Not one of the seven or eight points in the Prime Minister's response relates to the UK work force, only to the European work force. May I request a debate on the social chapter in Government time? I suggest that it is entitled, "The Social Chapter—What Price the British Interest?"

Mr. Cook: I clearly recall the 1997 general election and the comments on the social chapter at the time, as I was then the Opposition spokesman on foreign affairs. I remember the very public claim made by the then Conservative Prime Minister that if we signed up to the social chapter, it would cost Britain 500,000 jobs. Five years on from the election of the Labour Government and from signing the social chapter, we have 1.25 million more people at work than there were then. Only this week we had further evidence that there are 250,000 more people in jobs than there were a year ago. That is very satisfactory progress and provides no evidence that the social chapter has damaged employment in Britain—on the contrary, it has certainly raised the conditions of employment.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a debate early in the new year on early-day motion 412

[*That this House notes the United States request to upgrade facilities at RAF Fylingdales to enable the possible development of defences against ballistic missiles aimed at Europe or America; and calls upon the Government to respond promptly and positively to this long-anticipated request, not withstanding the opposition to the ballistic missile defence previously expressed by more than 200 Labour back benchers*]

and also on early-day motion 436? Both relate to the American request to upgrade RAF Fylingdales, with a possible view to the creation of a system of ballistic missile defence. The former motion expresses the view of the Opposition, which also appears to be the view of those on the Government Front Bench, that such a request should be seriously considered and should probably receive a positive response. The latter reflects the views previously expressed by more than 200 Government Back Benchers that on no account should ballistic missile defence be supported. Such a debate would obviously be topical, it would obviously be important, and if there were to be a substantive motion, it would obviously give the Leader of the House the opportunity to show the House whether he would vote along with those on his Government Front Bench, as one thinks he might have to, or along with the majority of his Government Back Benchers, as one thinks he probably wants to.

Mr. Cook: Life does not provide enough opportunities to vote alongside my Government. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Deputy Chief Whip will make sure that I know which Lobby is the appropriate one in which to express my support for the Government's excellent record.

On Fylingdales, the hon. Gentleman is aware that there has been an approach and that the Secretary of State has made it plain that he will keep the House informed about what response the Government will make. The matter will, of course, be considered with great care. I very much hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence will take 25 December off from considering it carefully, and that he will also relax a little on 31 December, but at an appropriate time after the House returns, I am sure that he will wish to make a statement to the House.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): A merry Christmas to you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the treatment of those who suffer from heart disease? That will give us an opportunity to raise the fact that in Essex many patients have to wait up to a year for an angiogram, which is a particularly important diagnostic test for those who may be suffering from heart disease. It is unacceptable that in some cases they have to wait up to 12 months for that test to be performed. Finally, in a spirit of good will, may I thank the Leader of the House for what he has done on data protection? That was important, and the change needed to be made.

Mr. Cook: I recognise that the hon. Gentleman ventilated the matter in the House and his attempt to introduce a 10-minute Bill provided a useful focus of debate. We have achieved an outcome that is in the interest of Members in all parts of the House. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says about the waiting period in his area for angiograms, and I shall invite the Department of Health to write to him about the matter. On the general issue, we have invested heavily in better coronary care services and have made good progress in reducing the waiting time to see a consultant for the first time about coronary care. We fully understand the importance of making sure that we provide a world-class service in that respect.

Point of Order

Mrs. Jacqui Lait (Beckenham): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Yesterday you will have heard the Secretary of State for Scotland assert that during the Commons consideration of Lords amendments to the Scotland Bill on 11 November 1998, I voted for the Scottish Parliament to have 129 Members. What actually happened was that a number of Liberal peers' amendments had been grouped together, which, in the nature of the Liberal party, covered all eventualities. My hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who spoke in that debate, made clear the position of the Conservative party and which amendments we supported. In that case, it was an amendment that allowed the Scottish Parliament to make its own decision. Have you received an apology from the right hon. Lady for her inadequate research, or a request to correct the record?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair. Perhaps the hon. Lady should enter into correspondence with the right hon. Lady.

Adjournment (Christmas)

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That this House, at its rising on Thursday 19th December, do adjourn until Tuesday 7th January.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

1.16 pm

Mr. Kevin McNamara (Hull, North): Like all my colleagues, I wish you, Mr. Speaker, everybody in the House and my constituents a merry Christmas and a happy new year.

In the debate prior to the summer recess, I warned that the ruling Liberal coalition on Hull city council was unstitching the regeneration plans put in place by the previous Labour administration. Sadly, my concerns have gone unnoticed by the Liberals and things are getting worse in one of the most deprived areas of the country. In the short time since my last speech in the House on this matter, regeneration in the most deprived areas has halted; the housing demolition programme has ceased partly completed, with no environmental remodelling; and the planned high-tech citywide closed circuit television system for Hull as a whole has been abandoned. In a nutshell, as a result of recent decisions taken by the Liberal Democrats, there is little for residents in my constituency to feel happy about in the run-up to Christmas and the new year.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): My council is also controlled by the Liberal Democrats who, in a spirit of support for the local community, have just put on sale for £28 million a series of community centres, local disability groups and advice centres to any property speculator who cares to buy them and who, given half the opportunity, would redevelop and evict those groups. Does my hon. Friend think that that is a trend on the part of the Liberal Democrats?

Mr. McNamara: That is a difficult question to answer, because half the time I do not know whether the Liberals know what they are doing and what they are not doing. As a consequence of what they have been doing throughout the country, they have made many local communities fear for their future and for the security of their institutions.

In the summer Adjournment debate, I expressed concern that the Liberals would rescind the previous council's commitment to revamp the shopping centre in Orchard Park as part of a joint initiative with the Department of Health's LIFT programme, which included a pledge to build a one-stop health centre, for which the Government had given private finance initiative approval.

Sadly, I have been proved right. The Liberal Democrats have pulled the plug on the regeneration scheme, stating that the Orchard Park shopping centre could be regenerated through the LIFT scheme. However, that option was not accepted happily by the Department of Health, which advised me that it was not possible for the West Hull primary care trust to purchase the ownership of current retail developments. Surely the council should have taken the basic step of checking what the situation was before reaching a decision.

So a council regeneration scheme in my constituency, which scored higher than any other capital scheme in the authority's capital programme review, is being abandoned. The council has been strangely quiet about its reasons for abandoning such an important project. I think I know why. No sooner had they been elected than a document sent to Hull city council's cabinet for consideration recommended that the council rescind the shopping centre regeneration project. In it, the chief financial officer stated that the continuation of the planned regeneration could be justified only if Orchard Park remained a priority. Orchard Park is at the centre of one of the most deprived wards in this kingdom.

So there we have it. The Liberal Democrat administration were given the option to make the regeneration of one of the most deprived wards in the country a priority, but they turned their back on it. We now have a precarious situation in which councillors are supporting a Labour Government initiative to establish a new health centre in the area through the Department of Health's LIFT scheme, possibly providing a council customers' office, a community centre and a citizen's advice bureau through the private finance initiative, whereas what the community wants—the regeneration of the eyesore that is the Orchard Park shopping area—has been stopped.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Will the hon. Gentleman comment on the ruinous policy of the outgoing Labour council, which sold off the telephone company and blew all the money on useless projects?

Mr. McNamara: The money was not squandered. Let me tell the House how it was used. More than £22 million was used for a new stadium, which happened to be opened last night. It was supported by the sporting authorities and aimed at regenerating part of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson). It includes a community centre, special facilities for the whole college and its sporting courses, special facilities for the disabled and facilities for all the schools in the area, all situated under the north stand.

We also spent the money on double glazing houses, installing central heating, and ensuring that roofs were secure and doors draught-proofed. Those seem to me to be reasonable measures for a Labour council to take. They were all done out of capital expenditure, with no impost on the community. We then spent a great deal of money on resurfacing roads and rebuilding pavements. Those were all capital projects requiring no ongoing support. We used the money to repair schools, build new schools and help various community projects. I am proud of what the council did with the money, although I am deeply disappointed that my own Government used our improvement of the highways as an excuse to cut our highways grant. That was disgusting.

The money was not blown, and the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) should be aware that money raised from such a flotation, which was urged on the council by the Government, cannot be used for reducing other forms of Government expenditure: it can only be used for proper capital projects. Had the hon. Gentleman done his homework, he would have realised how the council spent the money. The way in which it was spent had the full support of the citizens of Hull, because it was spent on improving our environment and social amenities. Had the council had twice the amount of money, we could have used it just as well and for better purposes. We would not then have been left with a Liberal Democrat council putting on hold all the schemes to regenerate my constituency.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Can the hon. Gentleman explain whether the citizens of Hull, having had that utopian paradise created, were being ungrateful in rejecting a Labour council?

Mr. McNamara: The citizens of Hull bitterly regret the fact that the Liberal Democrats are now in power because they have opposed everything and created nothing. We are still waiting to see whether the council will deal with those problems, rather than leaving my constituents in Bransholme and the Orchard Park wards with areas that look like bombsites because the council stopped the demolition of buildings and halted the environmental and other urban programmes. That is what we are concerned about in Hull, and I am certain that at the next elections the Liberal Democrats will find that they spend the same time in office as the Tories did in the mid-1960s—at best, a couple of years.

The leader of the council promised people in the area that regeneration would be a priority and that she would listen, care, consult and learn. She said:

"People's opinions are important, and so is our commitment to listening and acting upon their views and concerns."

That was a patronising attitude for her to take having scuppered a regeneration scheme that my constituents had wanted for many years. We now do not know whether regeneration is a priority for the Liberal Democrats, or what the new action team will do. The people of north Hull and Orchard Park are fed up about that, and showed their feeling in a recent strongly worded petition which they sent to the council, to which they are still awaiting a reply.

My second concern is the council's decision to halt the surplus housing demolition programme on the Danes estate and in Bransholme. Many local people were pleased with the programme to demolish surplus houses on the Danes estate. Crowds gathered to watch the pulling down of two blocks of flats, and residents thought that that represented an end to living next to boarded-up houses and vandalised garage blocks. They believed that the demolition programme was the beginning of a fresh start for the estate. There was great excitement about how the estate should be developed, with safe play areas for children and a better environment for families.

Furthermore, the independent councillor Chris Jarvis, a cabinet member with responsibility for housing, raised residents' expectations by telling the *Hull Daily Mail*:

"The city is entering a period of change. Remodelling public and private housing is something we intend to do in full consultation with communities."

He went on to say:

"It is fitting that their views have been taken into consideration and the blocks are to be demolished."

Would that that were happening. Demolition has ceased; there is no environmental regeneration; and the councillor involved has turned down several opportunities and invitations to talk to Danes residents about what will happen in their area.

[Mr. McNamara]

Finally, I want to talk about something that is tied up specifically with living conditions on the estate—the Liberal Democrat council's decision to abandon their share of a proposed closed circuit television scheme in the area. In parts of Bransholme and Orchard Park, mindless vandals frequently set houses alight. One Saturday afternoon, three houses were torched and the council did the bare minimum to deal with the problem, employing just three security guards. Elderly residents are afraid to step outside their homes and, when they go to bed at night, they wonder whether the vacant property next door will be set alight. Areas that were once thriving are now very much in decline, with just a few houses occupied.

Therefore, when my constituents heard with joy that the Government were advancing plans to fund the demolition of surplus houses, they wondered what the Liberal Democrat council was doing on the estate. That point relates to the CCTV projects in Hull. As all hon. Members know, antisocial behaviour and the fear of crime are the main concerns of all our constituents. I fully support Hull community safety partnership's plan to implement a high-tech, citywide CCTV scheme. The digital scheme is based on a model on the Thornton estate in west Hull, where it reduced crime dramatically. Within the first 18 months, overall crime plummeted by 50 per cent., burglaries were cut by 48 per cent. and criminal damage by 49 per cent.

Not surprisingly, the community safety partnership put together a proposal for a citywide digital scheme and, due to its high-tech and innovative approach, secured a £5 million grant from the Home Office and £1.6 million from UK Online. The council had to contribute £3.6 million—a third of the overall cost. The project received international interest and in the light of the innovative approach adopted in the Thornton scheme, the city could have recouped a considerable part of its initial expenditure.

However, the new Liberal council opposed the scheme and it is now questionable whether the £5 million from the Home Office will have to go back to the Government. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister can give me some precise advice about that. Instead, the council wants the existing city centre analogue CCTV system to be expanded when possible, but that is a very poor relation to a citywide project covering the areas where most vandalism and burglary occurs and giving back confidence to people who live in the remoter areas and more deprived estates. It took its decision without consulting the community safety partnership. One worries whether it is serious about tackling crime. We wanted that scheme, especially in our most deprived areas, although it is interesting that the decision of the leader of the council means that people in her own area, where burglary is rife, will not have the satisfaction of knowing that their houses are protected against it in the day and during the night.

The scheme would have been of immense importance to the city. It would have been a pioneering scheme that brought to my constituents and those of my hon. Friends security and the certainty that they were safe to go out in the day and could sleep safely in their beds. That would have had a profound affect on Bransholme, Orchard Park and the Danes, where people could have felt that their interests were being catered for. Instead, the Liberal council's wanton abandonment of the scheme has put the most deprived areas in my constituency into further distress.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will talk about the matters that I have raised with those responsible for housing, as well as the Home Office and the Department of Health, and find out what he can do to ensure that we get the money and get the schemes back on track.

1.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I draw the attention of the House to my interests, which are clearly set out on the register.

I have two purposes today. First, I should like to wish Mr. Speaker and you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all the servants of the House, a very happy Christmas and a prosperous new year. Secondly, I want to do justice to the constituent who approached me in the middle of Sutton Coldfield last Saturday, when I was out dispensing Christmas cheer and seasonal good will, and said—I think that I quote him exactly—"Please, Mr. Mitchell, go down to Westminster next week, and before Christmas, stuff it up this rotten, useless Government." That is my second purpose today, but although the Minister may regard me as the Victor Meldrew of Sutton Coalfield by the time I sit down, I mean no disrespect to him, as he is a decent cove and indeed a fellow cyclist in London. Like me, he has no doubt despaired of Labour's transport policies and is therefore driven to using a bicycle in London.

This is a truly dreadful Government. It is now six years since they were elected. We heard the refrain—indeed, we heard it in music—that things could only get better and many of today's Ministers have made a career out of belittling the achievements of the previous Conservative Government, of whom I am most proud to have been a member. However, this country has now enjoyed 10 years of unprecedented economic growth—there has been no other time since the war when we have seen such extraordinary economic prosperity in Britain—and it derives principally from the groundwork done by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and indeed by Lord Lamont from 1992 onwards. It is because the Labour party has stuck to a number of key tenets of that approach that that prosperity has continued for 10 years.

That is all now turning to dust. Having started so well, the Chancellor has now been shown quite simply to be wrong. His projections are wrong and in the autumn statement, as it used to be called, we did not even receive an apology for the fact that his forecasts had been so seriously awry. We now face the prospect of an old-fashioned Labour spending crisis, enhanced by the new jobs tax that the Government are imposing from next April. It is very likely that next year, we will see the traditional Labour economic crisis of out of control spending and reduced taxation receipts. The Government will be forced either to increase tax, in contravention of their promises at the last election, or to increase borrowing massively.

It would not be so bad if the money was being well spent. The Government are obsessed with inputs and insufficiently concerned with outcomes. In every Prime

Minister's Question Time, the Prime Minister stands at the Dispatch Box and recites a mantra to one of my colleagues, saying that if they do not approve his spending plans, they should please tell him which hospital in their constituency they would close. That is absolute nonsense. What Opposition Members are saying is that it is very important that the Government focus on outputs. We want to improve our public services and that is not always about money; indeed, it is frequently not about money. The Government have missed about 40 per cent. of the targets that they are so fond of imposing on people.

That brings me to the health service. We now see that there has been a 20 per cent. increase in spending on the health service, but only a 1 per cent. improvement in services. That is a classic example of where the Government go wrong. Of course, there is great dissension in the ranks and concern about foundation hospitals on the Labour Benches. I think that the concept of foundation hospitals is extremely good in seeking to improve outputs and patient services. However, on this morning's "Today" programme, we heard the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) reaching for his cudgels to lay into the Government on that important policy. That shows how they will inevitably fail in their bid to improve services, although I am sure that it is sincere. Although they are prepared to throw taxpayers' money at the issue, they are not prepared to take the necessary measures.

During business questions, we heard reference to the Good Hope hospital, which has this morning been awarded no stars for its recent performance and whose chief executive has now gone. Although the hon. Member for Tamworth (Mr. Jenkins) had not received a letter from the Secretary of State, I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for getting one to me before this debate. I do not disagree with the outcome and the fact that a hospital will now be subject to franchise arrangements. However, I believe that the investigation that led to such criticism of the hospital, many of whose staff are my constituents and work very hard and in a very dedicated way on behalf local people in our area of the west midlands, was disproportionate.

I understand that there were 36 reporting errors in relation to almost 10,000 patients. If the same amount of time and money was spent on investigating any hospital in Britain, I suspect that 36 errors might well be found in respect of 10,000 patients. The whole process that the hospital has undergone has been too slow, and I fear that it has also been intimidatory. There is a feeling around that the Department of Health and its Ministers are concerned to demonstrate that hospital managers who do not reach Government targets will be held accountable, rather than to deal with the underlying problems. I am very concerned about that.

Through the Minister, I should like to ask the Department of Health when it intends to address the serious underfunding problem that afflicts the Good Hope hospital. The problem was highlighted in the report produced by the Commission for Health Improvement, which found that the hospital is funded at the lowest reference cost of any hospital in the midlands. I hope that we will have a chance to return to the nature of the inquiries, but I want to put on record my respect for the dedication and hard work of all those who work at the hospital, especially during these very difficult past six months, and have served my constituents and others so well throughout the years.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I hope that the hon. Gentleman does not mind if I do not go along with his general comments despite the season of good will. However, I declare an interest in Good Hope hospital because the former chief executive, Jeff Chandra, is my constituent, and I have been dealing with his case. I do not want to go into detail, other than to say that his allegations are worth investigating. He resigned and was subsequently dismissed, which is extraordinary, but the conduct of the inquiry left him with little alternative because it appeared as though the result was already known. That is not acceptable, and I join the hon. Gentleman in asking for a full inquiry to ensure that natural justice is seen to be done and genuinely done.

Mr. Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right to point out that his constituent, the former chief executive, has been treated unusually. Although he is also right to say that it would be wrong to pursue the matter on the Floor of the House, I hope that the point about natural justice will be heard.

Let us consider the Government's next disaster—pensions—about which we heard a statement this week. When the Conservatives left government, our pensions system was the envy of Europe. In a few short years, the Government have destroyed that position. Means-testing is running riot. Who could believe that more than half of all senior citizens would be means-tested? There is enormous confusion in the system, and the pension credit underlines that point.

The Government may be in danger of being sued for mis-selling the stakeholder pension, given that many people who take out such a pension may not benefit because of the minimum income guarantee regime. Stakeholder pensions are a flop and the Government have presided over a crisis in the pensions industry. I am not sure whether they understand the extent of the problem, although they made a reasonable start with the Green Paper, which was published this week, and contained several good points. However, there is undoubtedly a crisis.

It is generally agreed that there is a shortfall of approximately £37 billion a year in our pensions savings. If the Government do not believe that they contribute to the problem by taking a further £5 billion a year from pensions through tax, they do not have a clue. They have the great advantage of being able to listen to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who speaks such good sense. I hope that they will have also have the benefit of the report of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, on which I have the honour to serve. When possible, those matters should be tackled on an all-party basis, and I hope that the Select Committee will help to do that.

The Government will have to make a decision on pensions. It is not rocket science. Either the employer, the employee or the taxpayer will have to find the extra money that is essential for people to enjoy security in their retirement. Someone once said that to govern is to choose, and the Government will have to make some tough decisions. That is right. Instead, we are wasting

[Mr. Mitchell]

time on ridiculous measures such as the anti-hunting Bill, which is a peripheral matter at best and should not receive the time that it will take up in the House and the other place.

If I had time, I would lay into the Government about their appalling record on crime and law and order. They introduce too many knee-jerk public relations measures and focus too little on the massive increase in violent crime in much of the country, the growth of illegal immigration, which requires their urgent attention, and the loss of speeial constables. The latter has proved a great disadvantage to Sutton Coldfield.

On the "Today" programme, we heard that a competition is to be launched so that people will be able to vote on whom they would most like to eject from Britain. My nomination is the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I refer specifically to her recent attack on British senior management, which she described as "second rate". She has found a learned academic to undertake a study into British senior management, but for the right hon. Lady to make such a comment shows breathtaking arrogance and ignorance.

The Government have drowned business in red tape. They are the prime problem for businesses. Since May 1997, there have been massive changes in employment law. They include the contract workers regulations, discrimination legislation, the information and consultation directive, the Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000, the temporary agency workers directive, the prospectus directive, the climate change levy and the physical agents (vibration) directive.

Many of my hon. Friends know people who run British business. Life is tough out there, and the Government, especially the Department of Trade and Industry, make matters worse. The people who run British business battle day in, day out in a tough, complex and testing market. Many are fired for not performing, regardless of justification, unlike Ministers in the current Government. As they battle away with the problems, many of which the Government created, the Secretary of State lectures them. Yet the Department has missed most of its public service agreement targets. That is breathtaking. I advise the Secretary of State to listen carefully to what business men are trying to tell her and the Government, rather than lecture them on their under-performance. It is astonishing that a bossy, nanny-state Government, who exceed their competence and stray into matters about which the Secretary of State and her ministerial team know almost nothing, lecture business men.

Six years ago, we heard that things could only get better. However, most things in this country, especially in Sutton Coldfield, have got worse. The Prime Minister said in 1997 that we should judge him on his record. Now we can do it. The Government have run out of excuses. Clever spin can buy time but cannot hide the results of bad policies. The problems are crowding in on Downing street, and I hope that 2003 will be the year when the Government are found out.

1.47 pm

Geraldine Smith (Morecambe and Lunesdale): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the Christmas Adjournment debate and raise several issues that affect the people whom I represent in Morecambe and Lunesdale.

There is no doubt that the majority of my constituents continue to do rather well under the Labour Government. Unemployment is at its lowest for 25 years, inflation is under control and at its lowest for decades, and incomes continue to increase at a faster rate. Home owners have seen the value of their properties rise and those with mortgages have benefited from low interest rates. The working families tax credit has enhanced the earnings of many families, especially those on low incomes. They are set to benefit even more from the child tax credit. Pensioners, especially the poorest, have fared extremely well, and I welcome the introduction of the new pension credit next year. It will provide extra cash for pensioners with modest secondary pensions and savings.

All in all, the majority of my constituents are reasonably content with the Government's economic performance. However, I do not believe that the same satisfaction exists with the Government's handling of public services. Although there is undoubtedly widespread support for the Government's massive public service investment programme, even it there is less enthusiasm about paying for it, there is growing dissatisfaction about the provision of high class, modern public services in return for the investment.

Improvements have doubtless been made on some matters, but there is a long way to go on others. We must be honest about that. For example, let us consider education. My constituency has benefited from additional funding to schools and colleges. Hon. Members have only to visit their local schools to see refurbished buildings, extra equipment, new books and clearly visible staffing resources. Thanks also to the literacy and numeracy hour and the efforts of the dedicated teaching staff, standards have risen across the board. I am confident that, as the extra investment continues to flow in, standards will continue to improve.

However, there are still concerns—some of them grave—about the over-testing of pupils and the overuse of supply teachers, as well as question marks over the introduction of the AS-level examination and the expansion of specialist schools. Of course, the shortfall in further and higher education funding needs to be resolved as a matter of urgency. Strong representations have been made to me by Lancaster and Morecambe college in my constituency, which has great difficulty paying lecturers' salaries and keeping up, as salaries are falling behind those of primary school teachers. We must address the issues of higher and further education.

There is no doubt that Morecambe Bay Hospitals NHS trust has received real-terms increases in recent years, but they have been sufficient only to stop the rot. Ever-increasing demands on its services have eaten up the extra resources provided and prevented comprehensive improvements from being made to them. Waiting lists for consultations and operations across the board remain far too high.

I am grateful for the huge funding increases that the Government will provide over the next three years—a massive 30 per cent. in my area—and confident that they

will make an enormous difference, but again I am extremely concerned, as the Government have so far been unable to secure a new contract with the NHS consultants. It is fundamentally important that a deal be reached as soon as possible.

I have a final point to make on the NHS, which I have raised in the House previously. In my constituency, it has become virtually impossible to register with an NHS dentist. Those who can afford it and many who cannot are forced by pain to seek expensive private dental treatment, while the remainder simply have to suffer until they can be dealt with. Although the Government have provided extra funding for a dental access centre in Morecambe, it has yet to open. It will help, but it will not solve the problem on its own.

We have only to look at what is happening in dentistry to see what would happen to the rest of our health service if the private sector held a dominant position across a wide range of medical services. Surely that must be one good reason for not voting Conservative at the next election.

Crime and antisocial behaviour are constantly raised with me by my constituents and frequently debated in the House. They remain matters of grave concern to us all and to our constituents. As Members are aware, a range of measures has already been introduced to combat crime and disorder, with varying success. I have my doubts about how successful antisocial behaviour orders have been. They are right in principle, but the police tell me that they have great difficulty collecting all the evidence required to obtain an order, with the result that not many ASBOs have been issued throughout the country.

Further measures are under consideration by the House, and I am sure that many of them will play a useful role in our efforts to combat crime. The introduction of street wardens and community support officers will prove to be extremely successful, I believe. Wardens and CSOs are already operating in my constituency and I am pleased to say that they are providing a valuable service. They are clearly visible, they gain valuable intelligence and they reassure the public. In fact, they are the eyes and ears of the police; they detect minor crime and help to stop vandalism. However, we must remember that they are not police officers and they should never be used as substitutes for them.

It remains a fact that the vast majority of the public are far from convinced that the fight against crime has been won. Public confidence in the police's ability to win the war against crime will not be restored until the police are able to provide a regular, high-profile and visible presence on the streets of our towns and cities, particularly in the evenings and late at night. There is no doubt in my mind that the vast majority of my constituents feel that it is essential to have more police out on the streets. I entirely endorse that view.

I accept that transport has been a disaster area. I have to say quite bluntly that there is absolutely no doubt that the rail and road systems are in a dire mess and need to be sorted out urgently. The public need to see some improvement in the near future, and last week's motorway improvement announcement by the Secretary of State is a step in the right direction.

In my constituency, there is a long-standing bid to build a link road from the port of Heysham to the M6. There is almost universal acceptance at all levels of government that a link is required, but there is a dispute about the routing of the road. The city and county councils, the North West Development Agency, local businesses and I all favour the western route, which offers the best prospect for economic development of the area. Some Green councillors and the Government office for the north-west prefer the northern route, as it appears that it would have a less adverse environmental impact. Both routes are undergoing environmental impact studies.

Access to Morecambe and Heysham is poor, whether by private car or by public transport. Rail services are infrequent and, in the main, run only as far as Lancaster, where visitors to the town of Morecambe are required to change trains. They frequently encounter lengthy delays. The ticket office and waiting room on Morecambe station are closed from early afternoon and in inclement weather passengers have to huddle together under an open-ended shelter on the platform. After the ticket office is closed, no information on late-running or cancelled trains is available to passengers. I know that from experience. I missed a train to London from Lancaster, because the train from Morecambe to Lancaster was cancelled. No information was available. That does not encourage people to use public transport.

Bus services to our resort are also infrequent and often become entangled in the traffic chaos and congestion that pervade the Lancaster and Morecambe area. Those who travel to the resort by car experience similar difficulties. There is no doubt in my mind that poor access to Morecambe is the biggest single barrier to investment and regeneration. It is therefore vital that, as soon as the difficulties over routing the M6 link road are resolved, the Government provide the funding to complete the link.

It is clear to me that all the problems with the public services, whether it be transport or health, have been caused by years of chronic underfunding and outdated working practices. I lay most of the blame at the feet of the Opposition, who for 18 years let our public services slip into such a terrible condition. However, I warn the Government that, after five years in power, the general public's patience is wearing thin. They want to see real progress being made with our public services.

At the outset, I referred to the fact that the majority of my constituents have done well under this Government, so it is only right to refer to those groups that have done less well. I must begin with the farmers, who even before the foot and mouth disease outbreak were having a very difficult time. Things have certainly not improved, and nine farms in my constituency have gone out of business since January.

Farmers came to see me to ask me specifically to raise in Parliament the 20-day standstill period imposed on livestock movements after the foot and mouth outbreak. It is having a terrible effect on their businesses and they would like it to be removed. I understand that the Government imposed those restrictions to help to prevent another foot and mouth outbreak, but it is important that they obtain a proper risk assessment as soon as possible to establish whether the 20-day rule is necessary. Is it not doing more harm than good for British farmers?

[Geraldine Smith]

Farmers are also concerned about illegal meat imports, which they consider a much more likely cause of a future foot and mouth outbreak. We must think about what can be done, through Customs for instance, to stop such imports. British farmers need a level playing field. They must abide by high animal welfare standards and regulations, and that is right and proper, but those standards and regulations often do not apply to countries whose meat is being imported into Britain and can be produced much more cheaply. Consumers still need clearer labelling on products, although some progress has been made. Many dairy farmers are struggling with poor milk prices. I urge the Government to take all possible steps to deal with the serious position of British farmers, and to help the farming community to survive a difficult time.

Equal consideration should be given to those who are desperately trying to earn a living in tourism. The collapse of the holiday trade means that a huge stock of former guest houses and hotels in Morecambe are now sub-standard houses in multiple occupation. The proliferation of HMOs has acted as a magnet for the urban poor, in much the same way as the Sangatte centre in France attracted asylum seekers and economic migrants. HMOs in Morecambe have attracted many socially disadvantaged and mainly transient people to the town, which has put enormous strain on all our public services. The Government recognised the need to work with France to break the magnetic attraction of Sangatte, and took exceptional steps to do that. Now they must do the same for Morecambe: they must break the magnetic attraction of HMOs.

High unemployment is endemic in several wards, and deprivation and social exclusion are widespread. Much of Morecambe's infrastructure is old, decaying and in need of refurbishment. The resort's premier attraction, Frontierland leisure park, has closed, as has Bubbles leisure complex, and it still has no theatre. Productions are occasionally put on at the local market hall, but stallholders must forfeit their businesses to accommodate them, and shops in the main Arndale centre and the surrounding area continue to become vacant with alarming frequency. In short, the resort urgently needs regeneration.

The North West Development Agency has been helpful, paying consultants to produce a report and an action plan to assist Morecambe's regeneration. Early in the new year I will seek funds from the Government to make the plan's implementation possible, but we need more than money: we need assistance and expertise on the ground. Councils often do not have the resources or the expertise to engage in regeneration projects, especially large regeneration projects. I would welcome further assistance from both the Government office for the north-west and the North West Development Agency in the new year.

Finally, I wish everyone a happy Christmas and—hopefully—a peaceful new year. I shall watch closely to ensure that improvements are made in our public services.

2.4 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): It is the season of good cheer. Let me convey the Liberal Democrats' best wishes to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to Mr. Speaker's team and to the House authorities.

So far the debate has been lively and entertaining. Let me start by saying that on many previous occasions I have sympathised and agreed, to an extent, with the hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara)—particularly on Northern Ireland matters—but on this occasion I think he got it wrong. I am sorry to say that the elections that disposed of his party in local government in Hull did exactly what local elections are supposed to do: clear out the bad guys and give a once proud city an opportunity to make a fresh start.

Contrary to what the hon. Gentleman said, the district auditor and others have criticised the council strongly, and it was recently judged one of the 13 worst councils in England in a comprehensive performance assessment. The new administration has inherited ruinous housing policies—and, of course, it replaces an administration every one of whose members was elected in the Labour cause only a few years ago.

I am sorry not to be able to agree with the hon. Member for Hull, North, who I think is showing himself to be something of a bad loser.

Jeremy Corbyn: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have every reason to agree with me. Liberal Democrat-controlled Islington council has decided to sell off community centres, advice centres and many other buildings. Some are licensed and some are leased out, but all of them could be bought for redevelopment by property speculators. That is the only reason anyone would buy a community centre now. Would the hon. Gentleman be so kind as to contact Councillor Steve Hitchens and tell him that he is working outside Liberal Democrat policy?

Mr. Stunell: I am in frequent contact with Councillor Hitchens, and I am sure we will discuss many things when we next meet. Let me point out, however, that not just Islington but a number of other Liberal Democrat-controlled authorities, including Liverpool, have been at the cutting edge of implementation of new Labour's policy of using private funds to improve public services at a time when it is impossible to persuade the Labour Government to provide enough public money.

We could have an interesting discussion about local government around the country and I would be more than happy to engage in such a discussion either now or some other time, but I do not want to strain your patience, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will say this, however. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) set out to "stuff it up the Government"—I think I quote him correctly. I felt that his subsequent comment that the Conservatives' pensions policy was the envy of Europe rather spoilt a speech that had some factual material buried deep within it; but then such a description of the Conservatives' pensions policy would be somewhat beyond the pale at any time.

One of Hazel Grove's small claims to fame is that when the first state pension was introduced—by a Liberal Prime Minister—there was such a surge of

people wanting to collect the pensions, which in the early days were issued by police stations rather than by post offices, that the police came out with their truncheons to try to quell the enthusiastic crowd. I think it fair to say that pensions policy has been contentious ever since.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), a fellow North-West Member, had some wise words to say. I hope the Government takes note of them. I was particularly struck by her observations about the difficulty of securing NHS dental treatment. That is a problem for many Members' constituents, especially those who move around the community. Those with long-standing arrangements with NHS dentists may be protected. In my constituency, as in many others, dentists have swapped into the private sector, leaving established patients with little option but to pay substantial private fees or to cast themselves adrift and look for alternatives.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Liberal Democrat party cannot possibly oppose private dental treatment, because the party political literature put out by its chairman, the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten), is sponsored by Denplan.

Mr. Stunell: I am sure that my hon. Friend can speak for himself. If private enterprise companies are prepared to support the Liberal Democrats I would not stop them. *[Interruption.]* It might be wise to move on.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale made a further point about transport. We have a shared interest in the development of the west coast main line. I am sure that, like me, she is disappointed that the first phase of renewal is to be the last, and that the improved links from the north-west that she and I want will be a long time coming.

During the year, as well as considering issues that affect our domestic and local circumstances, the House has discussed important international issues in some depth. They include global terrorism, the crisis in the middle east and the plight of the world's poor. The House has had many opportunities to quiz Ministers and to hear about the Government's work on these matters. I ask the Minister to bear in mind the recent impressive lobby of the House in support of the third world and the need for debt reduction. The Government sent a strong team to Johannesburg, and the Prime Minister spoke there. There are plenty of good intentions, but on outcomes Johannesburg gave at best a six out of 10 performance. A great deal more remains to be done on the world stage if those key matters are to be tackled.

I am sure that the Government would acknowledge that unless we tackle the underlying problems of poverty, disease and the absence of education, the more immediate problem of global terrorism and the difficulties in the near east, the middle east and elsewhere will become more deeply entrenched. The words that the Prime Minister uttered in Johannesburg should be translated into positive initiatives by the United Kingdom in the coming year.

It would not be right for me to move away from international affairs without drawing the House's attention to the deep unease in the country about developments in Iraq. Liberal Democrats believe that it is of the greatest importance that the House has an opportunity to decide prior to the commitment of UK military forces to the Iraq conflict. It cannot be right in this day and age, and with our new, proper and developed understanding of what accountability means, for the House to be bypassed when such major decisions are taken. When that debate takes place, many of us will want to make it clear that it is not solely about the feasibility or legitimacy of military action, but about the utility of military action in an inflammatory situation such as the conflict in the middle east.

When we have got rid of Saddam Hussein and have successfully completed the conquest of Iraq, what will happen next? Many of us find it difficult to understand plan B. If the House is unable to understand clearly what the Government believe should happen with regard to the international situation, to express a view and to vote decisively on it, it will be a struggle to convince the public of the legitimacy of military action.

It would also not be right if I did not give the Minister and the Leader of the House credit for their efforts over the past year to make the House more effective and to improve our law making, our work on behalf of our constituents and our ability to hold the Government to account. I welcome the decisions that the House has taken this year to make our Select Committees more effective, to provide for more draft Bills to be considered by the House and by outside experts, instead of their being introduced in a fossilised form for the ritual, formulaic debates that we so often have, and to improve the pre-legislative scrutiny system.

I am looking forward with great anticipation, as the Leader of House ironically suggested earlier, to the debates on the reform of the House of Lords and to the changes in the upper Chamber in due course.

Unless we make changes and improvements to the workings of the democratic system in both Houses we cannot expect the public miraculously to come to the view that we are doing a good job. If we want the public to be engaged in politics, we must do a good job, and the mechanisms of the system must work properly. Although I entirely support the view that we should develop our visitor centre, make it easier for visitors to come here and give them a proper education in democracy, I also firmly believe that unless we improve that democracy we cannot expect greater respect from the general public.

I hope that all Members of the House enjoy a peaceful 2003, and that our constituents may continue to look forward to an improvement in public services and public safety.

2.18 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): I hope that the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) will forgive me if I do not follow him down some of those important avenues. Third world poverty and the situation in Iraq are matters that I would use other opportunities to raise. I have just returned from Mozambique, which has come through a fantastic transformation. It is 46 years since I did my national service in Iraq, which led me to take a key interest in development in that country. I do not want the people of Iraq to be subject to invasion, mayhem and cumulative damage.

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

I want to refer to the problems surrounding certain trading schemes. A person who runs a business under a franchise from a company falls under such arrangements. The company is known as the master franchiser, and the smaller business, which is often run from a person's home, is referred to as the franchisee. I have been pursing this matter with the Department of Trade and Industry since May 1999. Unfortunately, the individuals about whom I am concerned have lost their livelihoods through no fault of their own. They suffered at the hands of two sources: first, the illegitimate actions of their master franchiser; secondly, the failure of the DTI to use its legislative powers and duties to regulate or to prosecute the offending master franchisers.

I want to begin by covering the illegitimate moves undertaken by, and the pressures brought to bear by, the master franchisers Chem-Dry Midlands and London, and Chem-Dry Northern and Southern. First, they obliged franchisees to register for VAT in order to continue receiving Chem-Dry's insurance work, irrespective of the franchisees' turnover. This probably involved the tort of conspiracy. Secondly, franchisees were forced to purchase non-compliant Velda machines, which proved an entry barrier to their operations. Thirdly, franchisees were not offered revised contracts under the terms of the Trading Schemes Act 1996. Fourthly, the master franchisers did not exercise good faith and care in executing contacts with the franchisees. Other points, which could be added to my list, have been presented fully to the DTI.

I turn to the failings of the DTI in this matter. The relevant legislation that the DTI should have acted on when the matter was brought to its attention was part XI of the Fair Trading Act 1973, as amended by the 1996 Act, and its subordinate legislation; and regulation 3(a) of the Trading Schemes (Exclusion) Regulations 1997, as amended. Much rests on exactly who was exempted from the DTI's controls under the 1997 Regulations. Companies that are excluded from DTI controls are known as "single-tier" bodies, as defined in the relevant statutory instrument. It took an inordinate amount of time for the DTI to agree that Chem-Dry was not single-tier, and that it was therefore subject to the DTI's regime. Even then, the DTI still did not act. I tabled five parliamentary written questions on the matter. They were bundled together, and a written answer was given to me on 18 April 2002. It stated:

> "Where a breach of legislation over which the Department has oversight is identified, and that breach is addressed by way of criminal sanction, the Department will consider bringing a prosecution, taking account of the evidential and public interest tests set out in the Code of Crown Prosecutors."—[*Official Report*, 18 April 2002; Vol. 383, c. 1152–53W.]

However, that was not acted on in the cases that I am referring to.

In the meantime, some people left the franchise system, as they correctly believed that Chem-Dry's contractual arrangements were in conflict with the legislation. They were then in no position to sell their businesses on, and they folded. Unfortunately, a control of, or prosecution of, Chem-Dry by the DTI is probably no longer feasible, because the DTI had previously sent a letter to Chem-Dry Northern and Southern incorrectly stating that it is a single-tier body and is thus exempted from the requirements of the legislation. The letter is both incorrect and inconsistent with later DTI responses to me and to others, including the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young).

Matters have now reached the stage where the DTI should provide compensation for the former franchisees, who have lost their businesses and suffered considerable disruption and stress. The DTI should at least meet some of the franchisees and the MPs involved, such as the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire and me. My requests for such meetings have been rejected in the past. The DTI's suggestion that the franchisees should take civil action against Chem-Dry is inappropriate. The responsibility rests with the DTI; the franchisees have suffered enough traumas, having held on for a long time, waiting for the DTI to undertake its duties. Nor does the parliamentary ombudsman constitute an avenue that can effectively be turned to—although we did attempt to do so—as this matter is overlaid with strong legal considerations.

Although the DTI seems to me to be guilty of serious acts of maladministration—if not illegality—it is clearly time for it to act and clear up this mess. When this account is relayed to it, I hope that such action will begin, perhaps initially through a meeting such as I suggested.

It will not be a very happy Christmas and new year for the franchisees, but I wish them the best. I hope that, by raising their concerns, I have advanced their cause in some way, so that we can attempt to rectify the problem. To Members, my constituents and everyone else, I offer the best wishes of the season.

2.27 pm

Mr. Peter Viggers (Gosport): The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) made effective use of the time of the House by raising a significant issue; however, in the interests of brevity I shall not seek to follow up the important points that he made.

I would not be doing my duty if I did not seek to discuss today the state of the national health service in my constituency, because the situation is indeed dire. I plead for the gift of tongues to do justice to the anger, frustration and disbelief of my constituents about the withdrawal of services, and the bad services that are now being offered, in my area. I want to make it absolutely clear that I am not in any sense criticising the staff of the national health service, whom I have always found to be devoted, committed and very hard-working; it is the system that is wrong. The staff are trying to cope with enormous organisational problems that are simply insuperable.

I want to discuss five issues, the first of which concerns podiatry, chiropody and general foot care. Under the breathtaking headline "Improvements to Footcare", a circular was sent out to those who had chiropody services in south Hampshire, in effect pointing out that their service was being terminated. It stated that, although some individuals have specialist problems such as diabetes, those with "ordinary problems" would be left to cope for themselves. Such people include a woman in her 80s who is blind, and who suffers badly from in-growing toenails. How on earth is she to cope with her problem, which to her is serious?

I have received scores of angry letters from constituents who simply cannot believe that their foot-care service is being terminated. The problem is not confined to my area, although it is worse there than in many others. A number of Members, including me, signed an early-day motion on the matter. It notes that

"the Government is fully aware of the situation but has failed to act; and calls on the Secretary of State for Health to publish the report of his review, known as Feet First II, and to make a statement on how he intends to respond to these concerns."

These are serious concerns for those affected, and it simply is not good enough for the Government to turn their back on people with serious foot-care problems.

The second problem in my constituency is dentistry. One dentist has exercised his right to leave the NHS, which means that 2,500 patients are now without NHS dentistry care. They are advised to contact NHS Direct, which refers them to Cosham, Southsea, Farlington, Havant and Chichester, which many hon. Members will know is a long way from Gosport. One constituent—unemployed and a non-driver—was referred to Bracknell in Berkshire. We think that that was a mistake, but we do not know how he would have got there. For those who do not know my area, I should explain that non-drivers who are referred to Portsmouth must travel by bus, then boat, then bus again. The last leg of that journey to a simple NHS dental appointment might even require two buses.

Time and distance studies by primary care trusts specify how far and for how long NHS patients are expected to travel to receive NHS dentistry treatment. The PCT in my area is making valiant efforts to encourage dentists to opt back into the NHS and provide emergency treatment for local people. At the moment, however, no dentists in Gosport are taking on new adult NHS patients. People seeking NHS treatment have to travel for as long as an hour to reach a dentist providing NHS treatment. That is completely unacceptable.

The third problem in my constituency to which I wish to draw attention is the situation at the Gosport War Memorial hospital, which used to be a cottage hospital. There was a campaign to close it, but I was part of a campaign to keep it open and it became a community hospital. It is very highly regarded, conveniently located in Gosport and has caring staff, and its league of friends—as active as any in the country—is very successful at raising money for what is a much appreciated and loved hospital for which people used to have nothing but praise.

In the long period during which I have represented Gosport, I never received any complaints about Gosport War Memorial hospital until a woman who lives in Eastbourne complained about the death in the hospital of her mother, who was in her 90s. Deeply though one regrets that lady's death, the complaint was that she had been put on diamorphine. In those days—we are talking about 1998—prescription practice was rather less specific than it is now. It was not unusual for a doctor to prescribe a range of diamorphine levels and leave decisions about how much a patient needed to the discretion of nurses.

That practice is what I would expect in a hospital where doctors and nurses know and trust each other. However, that did not satisfy the woman, who complained bitterly and demanded a police inquiry into the alleged illegal killing of her mother. The police conducted an inquiry and concluded that there was nothing further to inquire into. The woman made a further complaint, and a second police inquiry reached the same conclusion as the first.

Further agitation, and by that time the keen interest of local newspapers, led the PCT and others to decide that it would be appropriate to hold a further inquiry so as to reassure all the people dealing with the hospital. The Commission for Health Improvement carried out that inquiry and produced an action plan that is now being followed. That brought the total number of inquires to three.

However, the complainant kept going. By then, other people had begun to wonder whether they might have something to complain about after their 80 and 90-year-old relatives had died in the hospital. Eventually, Sir Liam Donaldson, the chief medical officer, appointed Professor Baker to carry out a clinical audit of the hospital. That made four inquires. However, the press was by then building up interest, and 57 people complained that their relatives might have died because of inappropriate treatment. Another police inquiry—the fifth inquiry overall—has been launched, and a firm of solicitors that took part in the Harold Shipman case has also become involved, possibly helpfully, although the name Shipman means that newspaper reporters have become even more excited.

The strategic health authority decided that there should be a further inquiry into the hospital's management over the past 10 years, and the chairmen of the two PCTs concurred. That makes six inquiries. Meanwhile, the General Medical Council is carrying out a seventh inquiry, and the Nursing and Midwifery Council an eighth.

The House can imagine the cost, and the effect on management, of all those inquires. I only hope that they all conclude quickly. I have visited the hospital twice recently to meet patients and staff and to say that I know the hospital to be highly regarded. I want to thank again all the staff and everyone involved in the hospital for what they have done to maintain a high standard of care in the Gosport area. I hope that the matter is resolved soon.

The fourth problem centres on my area's district general hospital, the Queen Alexandra, which is the sixth largest hospital in the UK. In a letter that I received this morning, the Secretary of State for Health told me that the hospital has once again received no stars. Waiting times in its accident and emergency area are up to about six hours, and the hospital has been criticised for its lack of cleanliness. On several recent occasions, ambulances with patients waiting to be admitted have queued up outside the hospital in serried ranks, but the patients could not be admitted because no beds were available.

The hospital is in crisis. I pay tribute to those working desperately hard to improve matters, but there is a risk of catastrophe there. I wish the hospital well in the forthcoming private finance initiative bid, which may result in its being improved in the next five years. However, I mention the Queen Alexandra hospital in my contribution because it has an impact on another hospital in my area, the Royal Hospital Haslar.

[Mr. Peter Viggers]

Hon. Members who know me well will not be surprised that I should raise the fate of the Royal Hospital Haslar as my fifth point. That hospital was scheduled for closure, although not before 2002. It is dependant on the PFI bid at the Queen Alexandra hospital, and is presently scheduled for closure, but not before 2007. It is being built up as a diagnostic and treatment centre, and is very successful. Its accident treatment centre is being reviewed with a view to its being more widely used, which would take some pressure off the Queen Alexandra hospital.

I had a meeting with the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health, the hon. Member for Salford (Ms Blears), on 19 March, at which others from my constituency were present. I pleaded with the Minister to bring joined-up Government to bear on the issue of the NHS taking over Haslar hospital, so that its undoubtedly superb facilities can be used for the benefit of the NHS and all patients in the area.

I have not yet heard from the Minister following that meeting on 19 March, although I have submitted verbal and written reminders. I hope that I will hear from her soon. I yearn to hear that she is reviewing the possibility of reconfiguring the hospitals in my area and making sure that Haslar is used in the longer term for the benefit of everyone in the area.

I shall look now at the effect of all that I have recounted on one family in the area. I was talking to my constituent Mr. Barry Martin last night, and have his permission to use his name. What has been the cumulative effect of the defects in the NHS in my area on his family?

Mr. Martin is a war pensioner. He used to receive foot care for about 15 minutes every quarter. He told me that the treatment used to make him feel that he was walking on air. He has a war wound, and problems with his spine mean that he cannot bend. He needs foot care, but he is not getting it.

Recently, his daughter was admitted to Queen Alexandra hospital. She was discharged at 1.30 am with no money, and had to negotiate with a taxi firm to take her home. The firm was paid the next day. Mr. Martin's wife took a friend to the same hospital to see another friend who had undergone an operation, and found herself stuck in a big traffic jam that surrounded the hospital. That is not unusual, and Mrs. Martin's friend had to walk the last few hundred yards as it was impossible to drive closer. So bad are the traffic problems around the Queen Alexandra hospital that buses often do not complete their journeys there but have to stop at the bottom of the steep hill that leads up to the hospital. Patients and visitors then have to walk up that hill.

Whose fault is all that? It is not the fault of the people involved, who work very hard and are devoted and committed. It is the system that is wrong. Many decent constituents have said to me over recent years, "I wouldn't mind paying a bit more for health care if I thought that it would improve." Well, they are paying much more but are getting a much worse service. Why should that be?

Let me share two vignettes with the House. First, a senior NHS manager said to me, "I know that people are not getting the service that they should be getting from the health service but I promise that I will improve the situation. I will increase the size of the public relations department and I have dramatically increased the size of the complaints department." Those were his priorities. Secondly—and I love this one—someone in education, whom I know quite well, said to me recently, "We have a problem with funding in education; schools take 88 per cent. of all the spending, leaving us with only 12 per cent. for administration."

These examples show that the Government are wrong. Thinking that they know best and that services can be centralised and controlled leads not to improvements but to deterioration. I hope that the Secretary of State for Health will read the report of this debate and respond to the points that I have raised, because there are serious concerns about the national health service in my area.

2.41 pm

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I should like to take the opportunity of today's Christmas Adjournment debate to raise a subject that is a matter of grave concern to me and many of my constituents in north Fulham, namely the proposal of the Post Office to close a Crown post office in North End road. That area of north Fulham has recently been the subject of a successful bid for the new deal for communities regeneration programme, which I cite as evidence of the fact that it is a deeply deprived area, certainly the most deprived and poorest in my constituency.

The area served by the post office is bounded by the Queen's Club tennis estate and Baron's Court underground station to the west, Talgarth road to the north and Lillie road to the south. The area has five housing estates built between 1912 and 1977 and the housing tenure in the area is 67 per cent. social housing, 14 per cent. privately rented and 19 per cent. owner-occupied. The area has been in long-term decline and the rate of unemployment is well above the local average at 11.2 per cent.

Some 12 per cent. of the households in the area have an income of less than £5,000 per annum and 25 per cent. of households have an annual income of less than £10,000. Single parents head 15 per cent. of the families living in the area, which has a significant non-white population—well above the Greater London and national average. Eighteen per cent. of the population have English as a second language and, of that figure, 15 per cent. have no or little English. Educational attainment is significantly below the borough and regional average. Some 36 per cent. of residents of working age have no recognised qualification, compared with a borough average of 12 per cent.

Crime in the area is high—nearly 50 per cent. higher than the regional average. Victims of crime are much more likely to be black, from an ethnic minority community or to be elderly residents.

Poor health is a fact of life for far too many of my constituents in this area. The social services have a much higher mental health case load and the area has a disproportionately large number of children on the child protection register. Because of poor diet, very high levels of smoking and drug and alcohol abuse, life expectancy is well below the national average.

I should like to outline concerns not only on the decision to close an extremely important local facility but on the manner in which the Post Office conducted the whole consultation exercise.

On Monday 25 November my office received a telephone call from Ms Jackie Illsley, a senior regional Post Office manager, asking my staff whether they had received a letter posted on the previous Saturday—23 November—advising me of the Post Office's proposals to close the Crown post office in my constituency. Bearing in mind the poor record of the mail service locally, I was frankly surprised that the Post Office had any realistic expectation that a letter posted on Saturday would be likely to arrive in my office by Monday morning. My office said that no such letter had been received; an hour or so later, a fax arrived from Ms Illsley advising me of the Post Office's intention to close the Crown post office.

I learned later that at the time that the letter physically arrived in my office, the staff at the local post office had already been informed of the intention to close their place of work, despite the fact that under the Post Office's own procedures, the local Member of Parliament is supposed to be given adequate prior notice of any closure proposals.

The next day I met Ms Illsley in the office of the leader of the council, Andrew Slaughter, and one of the other local ward councillors, David Williams. The three of us made clear our strong objections to the proposal to close the post office. I asked Ms Illsley whether she could advise me why that particular post office had been singled out for closure and how much money it would lose in the current financial year. She advised me that she was unable to inform me of that figure, although she said that it was somewhere between £100,000 and £500,000.

During a rather acrimonious meeting, the leader of the council and I made it clear why we thought that it was inappropriate to close the post office and why the proposals for other locations for people to use as an alternative to North End road were unacceptable. One alternative that Ms Illsley gave us was a post office in Earl's Court, which is more than a mile away from the North End road post office and extremely inaccessible, particularly to the many elderly clients who use the one in North End road.

At that point, Ms Illsley admitted that she was unaware of the fact that the Earl's Court post office was in a different local authority. It was quite clear to Councillors Slaughter and Williams and me that no real thought or effort had gone into identifying other appropriate alternative locations.

At the end of the meeting with Ms Illsley, I spoke to a journalist from the *Fulham and Hammersmith Chronicle* who advised me that earlier that morning she had been sent a press release from the Post Office informing her that the North End road post office had to close because it was losing £107,000 a year, a figure that Ms Illsley was unwilling to give me, the local Member of Parliament, later that day.

Last week I attended a public meeting at the Bhavan Indian cultural centre in Castletown road, which is next to the North End road post office. It was extremely well attended given the short notice and bearing in mind the inclement weather and the fact that it was so close to Christmas. Councillor Slaughter and representatives of the Communication Workers Union were present, as were three senior managers from the Post Office, including Ms Illsley.

It was the unanimous view of those attending that the Post Office proposal was unacceptable and that the Post Office had failed to take into account the damaging effect that the proposed closure would have on this very disadvantaged community. The overwhelming view expressed by local residents about the proposal was that no serious effort had been made to analyse the effect of the closure on the area and that the Post Office had made no attempt to take into account its duty as a public body to provide a key public service for the local community.

I am pleased to report that following representations that I know were made by Kay Dixon, the chairperson of Postwatch—the independent body that is supposed to look after the activities of the Post Office—who chaired last week's public meeting, the Post Office has now agreed to extend by one month the consultation period on its proposed closure.

Throughout this whole débâcle, the Post Office has claimed to the leader of the council and to me that this was and is a genuine consultation exercise and not a "done deal", to use Ms Illsley's phrase.

The council is running a very vigorous public consultation exercise and more than 1,000 postcards have already been returned to the office of the leader of the council expressing residents' grave disquiet about the proposal.

I am pleased to report that the local Labour party has run a vigorous campaign and that more than 500 signatures have been received separately by my office expressing support for the campaign to keep the post office open. Only last night, Hammersmith and Fulham council passed a unanimous resolution, with support from all the parties represented on the council, calling on the Post Office to reverse its decision. I am hopeful that, bearing in mind the strength of feeling locally, the Post Office will recognise that its proposals are unacceptable and that the decision will be made to renew the lease on the post office, which Ms Illsley has confirmed is an option, and that this important local facility will remain open to serve the interests of some of the poorest people living in this area of London.

Thank you very much, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to bring this important matter to the attention of the House. May I take this opportunity to wish you and all hon. Members the compliments of the season?

2.50 pm

Mr. David Atkinson (Bournemouth, East): The House should not rise for this Christmas until it has heard about the experience of my constituents whose Christmas three years ago was ruined because their homes were flooded, and who now realise that they are very unlikely to be better protected in the future.

The area under threat is the Iford bridge park on the banks of the River Stour, the site of about 100 so-called mobile homes although, like many such homes, they are actually permanent homes—in this case for retired or semi-retired people, some of whom are disabled. Some of them have sunk their life savings into their homes.

[Mr. David Atkinson]

On Christmas night 1999, the river overflowed its banks and the homes were flooded. The residents were evacuated by the police, to whose efficient response I paid tribute at the time. I visited the site as the residents were returning home to assess the damage and to retrieve what they could. Twenty years before, in 1979, the site had been even more seriously flooded when it was under water for more than a week, after which it was understood that measures would be taken to reduce the risk.

In response to representations that I made about the experiences of Christmas 1999, I was amazed to learn from the then Minister with responsibility for fisheries and the countryside, now the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), that after the 1979 experience the then owner of the site had declined the offer of flood protection at public expense. That was also news to residents of the site when I arranged for officials of the Environment Agency to meet them. It was then agreed that a new protection scheme should be investigated.

Last year, the agency proposed a one in 15 to 20 year protection scheme and the residents were willing to accept it. Sadly, however, at my public meeting with the residents on 25 October this year, we were told that the scheme would not meet DEFRA criteria for public funding. Instead, a much more modest one in seven year defence scheme, costing about £170,000, was to be investigated. However, there was unlikely to be any funding for it because we are located in the south-west region, which is not to benefit from the Government's new funding for flood protection—apparently.

The week following that meeting the river overflowed again and the residents were evacuated. Two weeks later, on 14 November, nearly all of them were evacuated for a third time because the site was under two feet of water, which internally damaged 13 homes. Two homes were severely damaged and one was written off. Power to all the homes could not be restored for several days.

This Christmas, after three major evacuations in as many years, my constituents understand that they cannot expect any better protection from the Government in the future.

I have asked Bournemouth borough council to produce a report on the situation for its members to consider. The council is the planning and licensing authority for the site and is responsible for providing emergency services. My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) and I look forward to supporting the representations that I anticipate members of the council will want to make to the Government.

In the meantime, it will be helpful to learn from the Parliamentary Secretary, when he replies to the debate, whether the Government's flood protection policy differs for the residents of mobile homes and those who live in more conventional properties. Do the Government give the same weight to mobile home parks and permanent dwellings in the provision of flood defences in flood risk areas? Will any of the extra £150 million funding for flood defences announced by the Government in June this year be available for the south-west region? I am told by the Environment Agency that it will not. If the answer to that question is yes, it will give some hope to my constituents this Christmas that £170,000 of that amount might fund some protection so that they do not continue to face the prospect of no protection.

Finally, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I wish you and Mr. Speaker, the other Deputy Speakers, the Officers of the House, every hon. Member and all my constituents a very happy Christmas.

2.54 pm

Mr. Tom Cox (Tooting): I want to talk about Wandsworth prison, which is in my constituency. First, I pay the warmest tribute to Jan Croxford, the chairperson of the Wandsworth prison board of visitors and to all her colleagues for the many hours that they spend in the prison each week. I pay equal tribute to all members of the Wandsworth branch of the Prison Officers Association, especially the branch secretary Stewart McLoughlin and the chairperson Jim Shaw, for their involvement in the day-to-day running of the prison. Far too often, their work is not fully appreciated.

Wandsworth is an old prison; it was built 150 years ago and is the largest prison in the United Kingdom. At any one time, the prison's population is more than 1,400 inmates. The certified normal accommodation figure is only 1,163, so the approved number of inmates is exceeded by more than 200. The governor, the board of visitors and the POA have the right to ask how long that overcrowding will continue.

I often wonder whether the Home Office authorities fully understand exactly how such overcrowding affects the day-to-day routine of a prison. For example, in Wandsworth, more than 700 inmates are two to a cell. The daily regime suffers enormously because the problem of overcrowding has gone on for a very long time.

Association is extremely important in prison, but there is little association in Wandsworth owing to the pressures on staff. Phone calls are essential in enabling prisoners to keep in contact with their family and friends, yet they, too, have to be limited. Inmates are unable to take showers as often as they should.

Wandsworth has a vulnerable prisoner unit whose inmates follow a special regime. Their parole is dependent on their completing an offending behaviour programme, but that programme is subject to great pressure.

There are problems in scheduling adequate booked visits to inmates. I am sure that Members will understand the great anger often experienced by family members or friends when they phone the prison to try to arrange an appointment for a visit but receive no answer owing to the difficulties faced by the staff at Wandsworth.

All those problems are caused by prisoner overcrowding. When I have outlined such problems in previous debates, colleagues with prisons in their constituencies have often described similar experiences.

An adequate number of prison officers is vital to the running of a prison, as are their skills. Staff retention in Wandsworth prison is difficult. Often at weekends there

are fewer than 50 officers on duty for a population of over 1,400 inmates. No one can possibly claim that that is acceptable; indeed, it is unacceptable because of all the potential risks and dangers that could result.

We now have a ban on the transfer of prison officers from Wandsworth simply because few officers wish to work in Wandsworth or, indeed, any prison in the London area. Can we really blame well established officers for not wishing to be transferred into the London area? To start with, where can they live? At one time we had prison officer quarters; now we do not. The price of local property in the borough of Wandsworth is well beyond the means of a prison officer. A housing allowance is urgently needed. Without doubt it would help recruitment and retention.

Officers who have moved away from the Wandsworth area and drive into work at the prison face problems finding somewhere to park their car, because Wandsworth borough council gives them absolutely no help with parking facilities. Those are the problems facing skilled officers who stay and work in Wandsworth prison.

When I chat to experienced officers who have worked in the service for a long time it becomes clear that the salary of a prison officer is far too low. Moreover, London weighting for prison officers is only £3,500. They often ask me why their London weighting should be considerably lower than the £6,000 paid to an officer in the Metropolitan police. I have never been able to find out from questions to Home Office Ministers why there is this substantial difference.

Let me give the House an idea of the attitude of prison officers. A prison team is responsible for re-profiling—namely planning exactly how long each job takes and designing a strategy to enable the prison to deliver a proper service to the inmates. Members of the Wandsworth branch of the POA voted to accept the plan by 182 to 82. That shows clearly the willingness of officers to accept and work with change.

The Butler trust award was made to the prison's probation officer for developing good practices for dealing with foreign nationals held in prison; I understand that foreign nationals in Wandsworth and other prisons present a real problem. Foreign nationals who when sentenced were also recommended for deportation wait in prison for weeks and months before that deportation order is served on them. That adds to the pressures.

I understand that it is intended to close E wing, which holds some 160 inmates. The men will be transferred to other accommodation within the prison, not to other establishments. That will add further pressures to an already overcrowded prison. The Home Office may have good reasons why it wants to close E wing. It may want to do work on it, but because of the excessive overcrowding it should rethink whether that wing should be closed at this time. I have been in the House for a long time and Wandsworth prison has always been in my constituency. I have seen some real ups and downs there. At times I wonder whether the Home Office has a strategy, irrespective of what party is in Government, and a policy to deal with prison overcrowding. We have the largest prison population in Europe and it is increasing. We are told that it will continue to increase. I cannot honestly believe that we can be proud of that.

Bob Russell: The Home Secretary is proud of it.

Mr. Cox: If he is, I am not proud of it and nor are many hon. Friends who sit on the Labour Benches.

Another major issue resulting from the overcrowding pressures in Wandsworth prison and many other prisons is assaults on prison officers. Tensions build up among inmates when they are doubled up, denied association and face problems getting visits from family and friends, and prison officers are first in line. It is not right that prison officers should run the risk of being assaulted by inmates. What am I supposed to say to a prison officer who has been assaulted? Am I to say, "I am sorry that has happened to you. I hope it does not happen again"? We often know the reasons for such assaults and we have a right to ask for urgent action from the Home Office.

In March early-day motion 1072 was tabled, entitled "HM Prison Service and Golden Jubilee Medal". It called on the Government to award prison officers with more than five years' service with a medal. It was not done, it still has not been done and I have no idea why it has not been done. The refusal has caused great anger within the prison service. Why were officers not awarded the medal? Why are prison officers not awarded that medal or a proper long service medal? May I tell my hon. Friend the Minister that, even at this late hour, it could be done and it should be done? I ask him to make very clear to the Home Office the very deep disappointment and concern that many hon. Members and I share about the lack of the award of that medal to prison officers.

My final comment to my hon. Friend is that it really is time that we were allowed a proper day's debate in Government time on the Prison Service in England and Wales, and I ask him to convey that request to the Home Office. We need to debate the number of people now in prison, the great cost of that to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Home Office and why we have been told repeatedly that the prison population will continue to increase.

At meetings that I have attended in the House, I have been told that the prison population could well increase by some 10,000 inmates over the next 10 years. I ask my hon. Friend to make known to the Home Office my concern—I am sure that it is shared by many of my hon. Friends and Opposition Members who represent constituencies with prisons in them—that we should have the opportunity to have a full day's debate on prisons early in the new year.

In all fairness to my hon. Friend, I do not expect him to be able to deal with the many points that I have made in this debate, but I am sure that he will convey my remarks to the Home Office and, in due course, I will look for a very detailed reply.

3.12 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Hon. Members who regularly attend these end-of-term Adjournment debates, such as myself, like to start with the matters arising from the previous term's debate. I commend the Minister on the way in which he has

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

regularly picked up the issues that we have raised and fed them through to Ministers, but things are not quite as good as they could be because, only yesterday, I received a letter from the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, picking up a point that I made in the July Adjournment debate about the problem of gaining access to broadband in my constituency.

The fact that I have now received a letter makes me think that someone is saying, "If she is going to stand up and bat on about this again tomorrow, we'd better get a letter off to her quick." All I would say to the Minister is that, whatever issue I raise today, I hope that I will not have to wait until Easter to get a reply.

The Minister is, of course, my near neighbour in Devon—I hope that we enjoy cordial relations as neighbours—so many of the things that I want to touch on briefly today will be familiar to him. I am encouraged that, having come to office with a real vendetta against the motorist, the Government have decided this week that roads and motorists are good, so first I want to raise matters relating to roads in my constituency. I have raised these matters before, but I hope that, in this new, enlightened age of the motorists under new Labour, they will now receive more serious consideration.

The first issue is the desperate need for a bypass around the town of Crediton in my constituency. When I have raised this issue in the past, Ministers have said that Devon county council has not really made the case for a Crediton bypass, but I have to share with the House some information on road accident figures, not on the road through the town centre but on the road that approaches Crediton from the north. I have recently received information that has come to light in Crediton.

The chairman of Crediton town council, Mr. Charlie Haydon, has informed me that the council has just discovered that recent accident figures show that there were eight fatalities in six accidents, six serious injuries, 61 slight injuries and 90 accidents involving damage only, making a total of 163 accidents, on a two and a half mile stretch of road just outside the town in the five years from 1997 to 2002.

In the past, Devon county council has written to tell me why it does not think that traffic analysis suggests that a bypass should be built around Crediton on traffic grounds alone, but, clearly, those figures were not disclosed and shared with those of us who have taken a close interest in the needs not just of the local population, but of the travelling public for a bypass around the town. I have to tell the Minister that I shall put pressure on Devon county council, as will Crediton town council, and I hope that we shall have his support because he will know that the road from Crediton eventually leads to the outskirts of his constituency.

The Minister will be only too familiar with the other roads matter that I wish to raise with him. In July 2000, he was standing shoulder to shoulder with the Prime Minister when the Prime Minister visited Exeter and made a personal promise to my constituents that the A30 dual carriageway from Honiton to Exeter, which goes through my constituency, would be resurfaced because it is a very noisy concrete road. Despite my many attempts to get Ministers to tell me when that promise will be met, as yet, I have still no idea. We keep being told that it may happen any time in the next 10 years.

I repeat to the hon. Gentleman, who was there at the time, that when a Prime Minister personally involves himself in something so localised and when he is put on the spot by a local newspaper and makes a commitment, the least he can do is flex his muscles, show his authority and make sure that that promise is delivered. So I am now looking for a date, as are the people who live near that road, and I look to the Minister to assist me in getting a date so that we can know when the road will be resurfaced.

I have just one note of disappointment: the Secretary of State for Transport told us this week that he has decided not to dual part of the A30. The Minister is now giving me a hand signal—I know that he is a cyclist, but I do not recognise it. However, I wish to tell him that the decision not to dual the A30-A303 from Honiton to Ilminster is wrong.

I agree that the road should be dualled from Ilminster to the Taunton junction on the M5—I made that clear in the House this week—but the Minister will know that we need more than one main arterial route in and out of Devon and Cornwall to develop the south-west's wider economy. Again, I seek his assistance in supporting me and many others, including the CBI in the south-west and all those parish councils along the route that support the proposal, to ask the Secretary of State to think again and consider dualling that piece of road.

I want to deal with just one other subject today that has local and national resonance. Again, the Minister will be only too well aware that several wards at Wonford general hospital in Exeter, which serves both our constituencies, are currently closed because of infection. We have not yet grasped the fact that some solutions to hospital-acquired infections could be implemented very quickly.

I know that some of the so-called superbugs are resistant to antibiotics and some new drugs, and I realise that there is no single solution. However, as someone who once worked in a hospital operating theatre and who taught cookery many, many years ago—in those days, hygiene was taught automatically as part of the cookery course—I know that some basic practices in hospitals wards, among trained and untrained staff, could be corrected tomorrow, without a huge tap into the national health service budget.

Of course all members of staff at whatever level, including doctors and nurses, should wash their hands, but recent hospital practice in my area has been reported to me. For example, to clean the floors, the cleaners have moved things from the floor on to the beds. Anyone who knows how infections travel and how germs are passed on knows that as much distance as possible needs to be kept between the patients and certain things that could come into contact with them, particularly those with open wounds post-surgery. Basic things like that are important.

Nurses have been observed putting things into pedal bins on wards without using the foot pedal. They have been using their hands to open bins and put things inside. They then touch things that come into direct contact with the patients. For years and years, people of all political persuasions have demanded that Hattie

Jacques return and that matrons are reinstalled on our hospital wards. I agree with that, and if I were not so busy I would offer myself to the Government as someone who could go round and put best practice in place.

The cost need not be great. It is a question of good management and good supervision and it could greatly reduce the number of hospital-acquired infections. This is a serious matter. Without mentioning names, I have no doubt, having read the medical records, that following routine orthopaedic surgery one of my constituents acquired methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus in hospital, and, as a result, he is now confined to a wheelchair for the rest of his life.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. She said at the beginning of her remarks that her proposal could be achieved without a great tap on NHS resources. Does she agree that the National Audit Office report on this issue suggested that up to 5,000 lives a year could be saved in this area, not by putting one tap on NHS resources but by putting one tap on each ward, so that nurses were able to wash their hands each time they touched a different patient?

Mrs. Browning: Absolutely. Those practical measures are so simple and low-budget that I do not know why someone does not get a grip and implement them tomorrow.

MRSA is a killer, as are some of the other hospital-acquired infections. I do not agree with those who say that people who acquire an infection in hospital or whose treatment in a public service causes them pain, injury or even death should not have the same rules applied to them in terms of compensation. I realise that vexatious complainants exist, and that there must be a sense of balance in terms of the public purse to make sure that people do not bring forward negligence and compensation claims that create an industry that benefits only lawyers who want to fly kites, but as in any other business, professionals must be accountable for the work that they do and the service that they provide. People who, in all innocence, go into a hospital expecting routine treatment and come out with a different problem that affects the rest of their life or even kills them should not have to put their houses on the line to battle through legal action for fair and just compensation. I hope that the Minister will take that on board.

3:23 pm

John Cryer (Hornchurch): Like most other hon. Members who have spoken today, I want to raise one or two constituency issues.

Problems related to antisocial and criminal behaviour have occurred in the Elm Park area of my constituency, near a tube station, which is the main issue. A few months ago, a constituent of mine called Chris Ingrouille was almost beaten to death in the Elm Park area by a group of people who seemed to have travelled into the constituency by tube. My point is that whenever I use Elm Park tube station, which is on the District line in outer east London, the barriers are always open. The station is either completely unstaffed or there is just one member of staff sitting in the kiosk by herself or himself. If there is antisocial behaviour in the station, which reverberates around the area outside, that individual is not in a position to try to prevent it.

What sticks in my throat is that, in a long correspondence going back many months and probably even a year or two, London Underground Ltd. seems to have an obsession with trying to convince me—and, I assume, other London Members who have had this problem, particularly in outer east London—that the station is adequately staffed for, say, between 96 per cent. and 97 per cent. of the time. Clearly, that is mendacious, according to my experiences and those of my constituents. Conjoined with that is the fact that, often, trains travelling out of central London, particularly late at night, stop at either Barking or Dagenham East, as I know full well. Travelling back late at night to my constituency and my borough, I have often been turfed out of a tube train at 11 o'clock or 12 o'clock at night at either Barking or Dagenham East. That raises a safety fear, as women in particular—and, to some extent, men—travelling back late at night and abandoned on a platform for perhaps half an hour at Dagenham or Barking could be left vulnerable to attack. At times in the past they have been attacked.

The second constituency issue that I want to raise is that of the c2c railway line, which I have raised probably two or three times on the Floor of the House in previous Adjournment debates. The line runs from Fenchurch Street in central London out to Shoeburyness; at least, it should run from Fenchurch Street, but, late at night, after 10 o'clock, the trains run from Liverpool Street. After 10 o'clock, therefore, people catching trains to, say, Upminster, Shoeburyness or West Ham, must go to Liverpool Street. Occasionally, however, c2c, in its wisdom, decides to run all its trains from Fenchurch Street, so people arrive at Liverpool Street to find out that trains are running not out of Liverpool Street but out of Fenchurch Street.

I recently received a letter from one Dominic Booth, the managing director of London Lines, the parent company of c2c, which contains this explanation:

"The reasons for the arrangements are the need to maintain the line between Fenchurch Street and Lime House, an intensively used stretch of line."

Well, it is not the only intensively used stretch of line in the country—I do not remember British Rail or its successor companies telling the nation that they had to start running trains out of St. Pancras instead of King's Cross because the railway lines outside King's Cross were pretty intensively used and they had to do maintenance work on that stretch of line. It is an exercise in mendacity. Recently, a report by the London Transport Users Committee made it clear that a majority of those passengers surveyed wanted all trains to run out of Fenchurch Street, but I do not seem to be able to get an adequate answer from London Lines, c2c or the managing director, Dominic Booth. That is another lesson arising from the folly of privatising railways. I want to make it absolutely clear to my hon. Friend the Minister that we should renationalise railways without delay and without compensation.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Dominic Booth has told me that the reason why c2c switches to the Liverpool Street line occasionally is to maintain driver familiarity and training on that line, so that when they need to switch, the drivers are able to do so.

John Cryer: Mr. Booth gave me an entirely different reason. There we go—let us renationalise the lot. Do not just play around with Railtrack. Take it all back into public ownership. That is what we want.

The next issue that I wish to touch on briefly is policing in the borough of Havering, which I represent. I have outlined before on the Floor of the House the problem faced by the people in my area—particularly those in Rainham, Elm Park and Hornchurch—because of the number of night clubs in Romford. The hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) is in his place, and he will be aware that night club capacity in Romford is between 12,000 and 14,000, which is the biggest in the south-east of England outside the west end. That draws police officers away from other parts of the borough and particularly from my constituency. The rest of the borough is bereft of policing. If there is an emergency late on a Friday or Saturday night in my constituency or that of the hon. Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson), there are often not sufficient police officers to deal with it.

The Government should seriously consider charging night clubs for the policing of the disturbances that emanate from their premises. I know that legislation is coming up to cover such matters, but we should tell night clubs that we will charge them for the 60 or 70 police officers who are needed to deal with the criminal and antisocial disorder that emanates from their premises. Police and local authorities should also be able to tell night clubs that they will withdraw their licence. That could be done for a trial period of two or three weeks. We could then see how the night clubs get on, and we could return their licence to them provided that they behave more decently and keep an eye on the behaviour of the people who use the club.

The length of GP lists in Havering, Barking and Dagenham is another constituency issue. My health area tends to have fairly lengthy lists, and there are historical reasons for that. There is no doubt that more resources are going into primary care, but we do not seem to be attracting the younger GPs that we need. We have many older GPs who are coming up for retirement. Many of them have done a very good job, but they obviously want to retire at a decent age. Many of them will retire within the next five years, and that will present us with a serious problem. I hope that the Department of Health will deal with that specific problem in the Barking, Havering and Brentwood health areas.

I recently tabled a written question to the Department of Health about the length of GP lists, but it refused to provide me with the details. It said:

> "We are not able to provide information on which individual practices have list sizes higher than the national average and what the size of the list is in each case. The GP census data held by the Department is collected for the purposes of research and statistics, as defined by section 33 of the Data Protection Act 1998. As such, we are unable to release identifiable data on GPs where it is possible the data could be used for purposes other than research and statistics."

I assume from that answer that the civil servants at the Department of Health think that I have an ulterior motive in asking for the information. I want to use it for research and statistics, but they seem to think that I have a wicked ulterior motive and that I might use it for something else. That demonstrates an element of contempt among senior civil servants in the Department of Health for elected Members of Parliament.

I know that elected Members are a bit of a pain and that they put down awkward questions that need answering. They can make life difficult. However, such questions should be answered. To hide behind the Data Protection Act is absolutely absurd. I want the answers to those questions for the benefit of my constituents. I represent them and they send me here. I hope that the Department of Health will take notice of that.

I wish to raise the local and national issue of medals for the servicemen and women who served in Suez between 1951 and 1954. *[Interruption.]* That got a cheer from the Liberal Democrats. There is a first time for everything. I raise the issue because I recently attended the unveiling of a memorial at the Larkhill base near Salisbury, with the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) and the former Member of Parliament, Geoffrey Johnson Smith, who campaigned for a long time on the issue. It was a unique ceremony because the plaque is to the people who served in Suez between 1951 and 1954 and not just to those who were killed.

Those who served in Suez in 1956 received a campaign medal at the time, but those who served there between 1951 and 1954 did not receive any sort of campaign medal. I have many constituents who are still around and who are still campaigning strongly. They want that omission rectified. Historically, we do not treat our former servicemen and women particularly well in this country. The sovereign's head on campaign medals from past eras often dates the medal at 20 or 30 years after the campaign took place. In this case, the campaign took place nearly 50 years ago. About 200 servicemen were killed in Suez in the early 1950s, so the idea that has been put around that it was not much of a conflict is illusory. It was a serious conflict, but international sensibilities at the time meant that it could not be recognised as such and that a campaign medal could not be issued to the people who served there. That point should be recognised.

The issue is now before the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals. I hope that it gets on with its consideration—it has had enough time to do so—and issues a medal to put right a folly of many years ago. It just remains for me to wish you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, the servants and Officers of the House a good Christmas.

3.34 pm

Bob Russell (Colchester): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) on his comments about the medal and hope that he achieves his aim. I also support what the hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox), who made an excellent speech, said about the Jubilee medal for prison officers. I hope that the Minister will take on board the needs of those in the retired officer corps who served king, queen and country for 30, 40 or 50 years. Technically, they are civil servants, but they must be the only civil servants who serve in uniform. It was pretty mean minded that those people and the prison officers were deemed unsuitable recipients of the Queen's Jubilee medal.

I welcome the opportunity to speak in the debate and hope that the Minister and his colleagues take on board my concerns about important issues to do with roads in my constituency. Perhaps in the spirit of joined-up government we will get the results that the people of Colchester want.

Those of us who represent constituencies in the east and south of England know that for the last half century successive Governments have decreed that our communities must take increasing numbers of new populations. The only question is whether local councils are allowed the freedom to decide roughly where the new developments take place. The county of Essex has had more than its fair share of urbanisation. Indeed, more land has been urbanised in Britain's oldest town in the past 40 years than in the previous 2,000 years, from the time when the Romans arrived and made Colchester the capital. That cannot continue, but if we do release additional land for development, we should let the local community determine where it should be.

The problem is that central Government are delaying the connection of a road link between Colchester's northern approach road and the A12. The developer and the Highways Agency are unable to agree where to put the junction. The irony is that the main developer is the national health service and the second largest landowner is Colchester borough council. The greatest length of the road is virtually complete and only the last section leading to the A12 has to be finished. In answer to a parliamentary question in July, I was assured that just a few of the finer details needed to be resolved, but when I asked a virtually identical question two weeks ago—some five months later—I was told that those issues have still to be resolved. That comes at the end of a 10-year debate that has been going on since the land was released.

The project is important to the NHS because it affects a former mental institution, which is part of a large landholding in north Colchester. There are also massive new developments in the garrison and the Hythe urban regeneration area, so not just one part of town is affected. The borough has carefully planned where it must absorb the new housing and other development that successive Governments have said we must have.

With the closure of large mental institutions under previous Conservative Governments and the Labour Government—there is no political divide on that—the NHS has had to dispose of those institutions, realise the assets and reinvest the money in the health service. The NHS, which is one arm of government, has to sell off surplus land and reinvest the money, but the Highways Agency, which is another arm of government, has not reached an agreement with the developer, which is the NHS or whatever the privatised wing of the landholding part of the NHS is called. I urge the Minister and his colleagues to get to grips with that. The big loser is the development in that part of north Colchester. If it does not go ahead there, it will be moved somewhere else. As we will get it one way or another, we might as well have the development where it will benefit, rather than disbenefit, the community.

I have mentioned the borough council and other landowners. Some of us would say that if the scheme does not proceed, an even bigger loser would be Colchester United football club. The new stadium for the club is an integral part of the development. In a week when two smaller clubs have gone into administration—Port Vale and York City—I am sure the Minister will appreciate that the smaller clubs need all the help that they can get. We do not want to be kicked in the teeth.

I take the opportunity to place on record my appreciation to the chairman of Colchester United, Mr. Peter Heard, who by my reading of the balance sheet must be putting in about £10,000 a week to keep the club going. As a keen Ipswich Town supporter, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you will know that my club can survive only by moving to a new purpose-built ground with modern facilities. I urge the Minister to take the message back to his colleagues that this is one road junction that the local community wants.

I move on to a road junction that the community does not want. Although this may be a constituency issue, I ask hon. Members to listen carefully to what could well be a national precedent if the junction is allowed to proceed. Those of us who represent urban constituencies can visualise our neighbourhoods as areas of streets built 100 years or so ago, mainly terraced or semi-detached houses close together, some with small front gardens and some without, but in virtually every case no off-street car parking.

I have an area of Colchester known as New Town ward, which I had the honour to represent on the council for 31 years. In this area there are backland allotments that can be reached only by a narrow track. Vehicle access to serve an estate on this privately owned allotment area is being acquired by stealth—that is the only way to describe it—by a local property speculator. The only way to gain access is down the track, which of course does not meet highway standards. The speculator has come up with a cunning wheeze to overcome that slight problem.

Up till the summer of this year, every time an application was made for residential development on that backland, Colchester borough council rightly refused it for a variety of reasons, one of which was inadequate access. The solution is simple, my friends. The developer has comes up with a scheme that encloses half the width of the road in front of a dozen or more houses, turning a two-way road width into a single width, and builds out the pavement where the narrow access is, in front of houses on either side, thus creating the sightline that he cannot otherwise obtain.

Those of us who have been in local government long enough know that usually, when a developer wishes to develop a piece of land that he does not own, he has to buy up property to get the sightline, and he has to acquire what is known as the ransom strip. The value of the ransom strip, according to a formula, can be anything between a third and a half of the value of the development land. In this case, the developer, with the acquiescence of the local highway authority—I hope that that will change, because of the national precedent that would be set if the scheme were allowed—is acquiring part of the Queen's highway at nil cost to himself, other than the cost of the roadworks. That is land that would cost more than £600,000 to buy. That is the low estimate; other estimates put the value at nearer £1 million.

Surely it cannot be right that the Queen's highway—public land—can be appropriated in this way by a private developer in order to secure access to his land by taking the road from in front of other people's houses, which he does not own. The national precedent is such that I have already been approached by the PR consultant of one of the national building companies, who said, "Please let me know what the outcome is.

[Bob Russell]

I think my clients would be interested." I bet they would. All of us who represent constituencies with such backland development must be fearful.

If appropriating the public road is now part and parcel of what a property developer can do in Colchester, hon. Members can rest assured that the big boys will do it elsewhere in the country. It is a worrying precedent, and I urge the Minister to make sure that the matter receives a full public inquiry. I am talking not about the principle of development on the allotments, but about a private developer appropriating the public highway to secure a development, which he could not otherwise do because he does not own all the land or have control over it.

3.45 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Colchester (Bob Russell). He and I worked on a serious issue that arose in his constituency, and although I was not able to produce a result that was completely satisfactory to him, the only fault that I could see in the hon. Gentleman was his misjudgment in changing political parties. I hope that the House will forgive me if I do not follow the hon. Gentleman down his highways and byways, but he has raised a serious issue about the appropriation of public land.

I want to talk about corporate governance, because it is an issue that we rarely address in the House. There is an inverse relationship between economic success and the exposure of corporate wrongdoing. When times are good, the forces leading to the discovery of wrongdoing are weak, but with an economic slowdown, bad practice comes to light. In extreme cases when businesses become insolvent, outsiders such as liquidators start to pick over the bones, and sometimes the carcase is not a pretty sight.

Let me begin with the assertion that this country cannot be complacent about our standards of corporate governance. When the wrongdoings of Enron and WorldCom came to light in the United States, the reaction in some parts was that this country did not face the same problems. For example, our auditors did not have a tick-the-box approach, but adopted a more rounded assessment of a company's health. That might be true, but it is not an excuse for inaction.

We have a great deal to learn from the United States in adopting good standards of corporate governance. They have thought about it more than we have. The American Law Institute's two-volume "Principles of Corporate Governance" contains a great deal of valuable learning. The Americans also have much more practical experience than we have. After all, they introduced anti-competition legislation more than a century ago in the Sherman Act of the 1890s. They were the first to introduce a sophisticated securities regulation regime in the 1930s. They introduced a foreign corrupt practices Act when we in Europe had barely thought about the problem. Now, they have the Sabanes-Oxley Act.

Unlike the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), I come to praise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, not to bury her. She has given a lead in addressing problems that have arisen in this country as a result of Enron and WorldCom. She established the Co-ordinating Group on Audit and Accountancy to look at matters such as auditor independence, financial reporting and auditing standards. Although an interim report has been published, the final report will not be published until early next year and I hope that it will address matters such as audit firm rotation.

Nor has the rest of Government machinery been idle: the Financial Services Authority has been reviewing the listing rules and addressing auditor independence issues, and the Office of Fair Trading has looked at competition. For example, there was concern about the increased concentration and supply of audit and accountancy services. The OFT inquired into that, but has found nothing to act on for the present. As a result of the OFT report on competition in the professions, certain anti-competitive practices of the accounting and auditor professional bodies have been removed.

Business itself has not been idle, either. The Business and Society report published earlier this year—the second report on corporate social responsibility—pointed out that CSR has become part of the culture of many organisations. I am not one of those who will not give credit where it is due. When corporations adopt good practices, we should praise them for doing so. For example, in respect of financial services, the so-called FORGE group has produced guidance on corporate social responsibility management and reporting. The Pensions and Investment Research Consultancy has led the campaign for more independent directors of companies to run audit committees. Again, we can learn from the American experience, as the most recent PIRC report pointed out that the New York stock exchange regulations are tougher in requiring a fully independent board. Incidentally, the PIRC reports also provide a useful monitor on the cash emoluments of directors, to which I shall return in a moment.

However, while I applaud business initiatives in this area, we also need legislative action. Without basic legislative standards, there will be a temptation to slackness and sin to which some will succumb. On general legislative standards, I shall start with company law. Our company law has been built up by an accretion of provisions over the past century and a half and contains arcane provisions on, for example, the reduction of corporate capital and financial assistance to companies in the purchase of their own shares. Lawyers such as me have made money out of advising on those provisions, but frankly, they do not contribute to economic progress and a thorough review is needed.

I welcome the first stage of that process as it is set out in the White Paper "Modernising Company Law", which was published earlier this year, and I should like to flag up two provisions in that regard. On the disclosure of information, there is a proposal for an operating and financial review that would set out the environmental and social impact of companies. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) and other hon. Friends have tried to refine that proposal, but I welcome it in principle. In addition, the White Paper talks about codifying directors' duties. Although there is some ambivalence among corporate and company lawyers about that proposal, I certainly

support it. I also support extension of the duty of directors to all of a company's stakeholders and not simply a limited number.

Historically, our company law has tended to emphasise the disclosure philosophy—the notion that, if information is disclosed to shareholders and others, it will act as incentive to good practice. However, we need enforceable standards as well. For example, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) spoke about the relationships between franchisers and franchisees in the business community. We need enforceable standards in that area. On phoenix companies, I am sure that many hon. Members have had the same experience at the consumer end of the market and have seen companies come along, perpetrate bad practices and then dissolve themselves. Often, the directors will start another corporation the next day to carry on the same practices, so we also need controls in that area.

I should like to spend a little time on three specific areas of direct regulation. First, let me give two statistics on director remuneration. In 2000, directors' pay rose on average by about 28 per cent., while shareholder return fell by 11.5 per cent. That does not go down well with the public. Moreover, in the past 18 months or so, we have seen examples of directors receiving golden goodbyes—in some cases, they have been paid as much as £7 million—after presiding over spectacular corporate failures. Marconi is the most often cited example of a company in which employees have lost their jobs, but directors have walked away with very substantial sums. We need to do something about that.

Earlier this year, the directors' remuneration report regulations went through the House. They take a naming and shaming approach to directors' remuneration. The idea is that the performance conditions for directors' pay will be disclosed and that performance graphs will be produced for shareholders. The latter will also have some say about the report on remuneration. However, in a spirit of seasonal cross-party agreement, I welcome the principle behind the private Member's Bill that the hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) promoted. He proposes to deal with the problem of directors walking away with golden goodbyes by providing for the law to override the contracts that may legally entitle them to such a payment.

Secondly, I want to consider corporate killing. Approximately 18 months ago, on 10 July 2001, I obtained an Adjournment debate on the topic. Several hon. Members have mentioned the issue, which arose in the context of catastrophic events such as the Herald of Free Enterprise disaster, the King's Cross fire, and the rail crashes at Clapham, Southall and Ladbroke Grove.

The law of corporate manslaughter cannot deal with the matter. Perhaps it can do so in the context of small companies, when directors can be identified with their behaviour. However, it cannot deal with large companies. The Law Commission reported on the matter in 1996 and the Labour party's manifesto commits us to a law on corporate killing. I appreciate the difficulties; for example, if corporations are guilty of the offence, does liability follow for directors? There are also other practical problems. However, it is high time that we took action on an ageing Law Commission report.

Thirdly, I want to consider whistleblowing. The Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, in which I played a small part, provides the country with an adequate law. It began as a private Member's Bill, which the hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr. Shepherd) promoted. Consequently, we have an advanced legal framework to deal with whistleblowing. However, the practice does not appear to be adequate in some private and public sector organisations. If PIDA is invoked, it has failed, because it is designed to change the culture of businesses and public bodies so that they welcome employees' disclosure of practices that may lead to fraud, health and safety offences or other wrongdoing.

I want to raise a specific case, which I would like my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to examine. It involves British Transport Police, for which I understand the Strategic Rail Authority is responsible. An appeal to the Court of Appeal was recently abandoned and the case is therefore no longer sub judice. I have read the two employment tribunal decisions and that of the employment appeal tribunal on the case. Something about it has featured in the press, and I know little beyond what I have read.

It appears that a lawyer called Irene Bhadresa blew the whistle on an inspector in British Transport Police who had thrown 75 live prosecution files in the bin. I understand that he resigned from the force before disciplinary action was taken. Meanwhile, Miss Bhadresa was dismissed. British Transport Police ultimately made a substantial payment to settle her claim. In fact, *The Guardian* reported that it was over £250,000, so clearly BTP was wrong to dismiss her.

As important as that individual case is what was uncovered about a force order promulgated by BTP, which apparently required all members of that force to inform their commanders if they were to give evidence in support of other members of the force or BTP employees such as Irene Bhadresa and that any character evidence given must not bring into question the integrity of members of the force. Is that general order still in force? We in the House recently legislated to bring police officers within the protection of PIDA. If there is such a general order still in force, it seems to me that it is contrary to the spirit, if not the letter, of what we, as legislators, have said.

For me, there remains only to wish season's greetings to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to all those who work in the House and give us such good service as Members of Parliament.

4 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am pleased to have the opportunity to put to the House before it adjourns a series of issues that face my county of Bedfordshire and my constituency of North-East Bedfordshire, some of which have wider ramifications.

We have all listened with admiration to a number of colleagues who have spoken this afternoon. We shall remember the passion and honesty with which the hon. Members for Hornchurch (John Cryer) and for Tooting (Mr. Cox) put their cases. We shall remember also the remarks of the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), who is still in his place, who spoke with apparent warmth and relish of the time when the police, under a Liberal Government, took truncheons to

[Alistair Burt]

pensioners! We shall certainly remember the moment when the hon. Gentleman was stopped in his tracks by my hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), who put to him a point illustrating something that remains shocking to members of the public, although it is familiar to Members from every other party in the House who have trodden the streets in a by-election: the Liberal party says and does one thing in one place, but says and does something totally different in another.

I do not envy the Minister, who has to deal with all the points raised by colleagues this afternoon. I know that if he cannot deal with certain points in detail, he will pass our comments on to the relevant Minister. I would appreciate him doing so in the cases that I shall raise. May I start with matters affecting the rural parts of my constituency of North-East Bedfordshire, which is predominantly rural?

I pay tribute to the work done by my parish councils, and I am sure that we would all do the same for the parish councils in our constituencies. I have met mine during the year and dealt with a number of matters on their behalf. Will the Minister pass on to his colleagues parish councils' growing frustration in dealing with the bureaucracy and extra regulation under which they are being forced to work?

Parish councils are staffed by valuable local social servants who are doing their best around our country. Their responsibilities are not enormous, but they carry them out conscientiously, so asking them to live under a greater burden of regulation, scrutiny and audit is probably overdoing it. Will the Minister say how many parish councillors have resigned over the past year as a result of the introduction of new regulatory measures? We would all be grateful if he took back a note saying that we could do with rather less regulation in this area, provided that there is sufficient to enable parish councils to do their duty. Perhaps the Government could ease up in certain areas.

A particular issue relating to youth provision has been brought to me by Mr. Andrew Gell, chairman of Riseley parish council. The council is looking to help youngsters in the village to establish a youth club. It has been in touch with Bedfordshire county council, which says that it would like to help, but that, owing to the provisions of the Connexions service, which puts the emphasis on youngsters aged between 13 and 19, resources for those who are younger are stretched.

Accordingly, I would be grateful if the Minister considered passing on to his colleagues the information that a number of other areas may find themselves similarly stretched. In developing youth provision through Connexions, will the Government ensure that much-needed support for younger people is not lost? Of course, the youngsters whom we may want to look after most could best be dealt with rather earlier. I would be grateful if the Minister took that issue on for me.

As I am sure the Minister knows, over the last six years some 67,000 jobs have been lost in the United Kingdom's farming industry, and my constituency is no exception in that regard. May I ask the Government again to bear in mind the difficulties caused to livestock farmers by the 20-day rule, which was introduced at the time of the foot and mouth outbreak but is still in operation. Inability to move stock quickly is a real problem for many small farmers, whose livelihoods are being affected. In September, the *Farmers Guardian* quoted Lord Whitty as saying that parts of the farming industry could be wiped out if the rule continued; yet it does continue. I know that it is under review, but the farming community would welcome any action the Minister could take to hasten that review.

Let me make another plea for the rural parts of my constituency. I support the demand for broadband access in as many rural areas as possible. BT recently brought the service to my constituency through its exchange in Sandy, and I went to see what was happening during the recess, but other parts of the constituency are not so fortunate. Broadband is particularly relevant to businesses and agricultural communities that are spread out in our rural areas. It could make a real difference to them, and anything the Government could do to help promote broadband would be welcome.

Bedfordshire is a small county, but it is being asked to take on more and more housing without regard to the consequent problems relating to infrastructure and congestion. Only this week, following a statement from the Secretary of State for Transport, I had an opportunity to raise the whole issue of joined-up government. I asked the Secretary of State why his congestion plans and railway plans—and the targets containing them—could be torn up like so much so much waste paper, when Bedfordshire and other counties were being asked to stick rigidly to Government targets requiring them to accept more and more housing. Bedfordshire has been due to take 50,000 new homes in the 20 years between 1991 and 2011. The Deputy Prime Minister suggested in July that the figure would be increased again, and the county council was told recently that as a result of the Milton Keynes study the county might be expected to take yet more housing.

When I mentioned the connection between increased building, more housing and congestion, the Secretary of State declined to answer. He said it was a matter for the Minister responsible for housing. He may not be able to see the connection between increased building, more housing and congestion, and he may not feel that he ought to answer questions such as mine—but the rest of us see the connection. Let me again make a plea for joined-up government, and ask this Minister to deal with such issues.

The county is greatly stretched. Its health services are stretched, and its police force is stretched. There will be more congestion, and more pressure on social services. There will be an impact on the services that the council can provide. Will the Minister convey my view that if the Government find it possible to relax their plans when they are under pressure, councils in a similar position may be able to relax the Government's housing plans for them?

I thank the right hon. Member for Warley (Mr. Spellar), who visited my constituency this week to open the Clapham bypass, for the courtesy he showed. May I repeat something that was said at the time, although perhaps not in the best possible circumstances? Will the right hon. Gentleman, as Minister of State, Department of Transport, consider the problems affecting areas of new development where the provision

of roads has been tied to planning gain? In my constituency, where new housing is planned, a road that will act as a major link between two important areas will be begun only when 750 houses have been built. The section 106 provisions put a huge amount of power in the hands of the developers. What happens in such cases is that the houses are built and the amount of traffic increases before a new road is available to support it.

Bedford borough council has suggested to the Government a provision under which they, the Government, could provide up-front funding for necessary road schemes and then claim back the money. That would release funds for the much-needed road, and the Government would not lose any money in the long term because they could recoup it. I wrote to Lord Rooker in September, and he said that the matter was under consideration, but did not give a favourable response to what I thought was an extremely good idea. Could the Minister refer this suggestion back to his colleagues for further consideration, because many areas would benefit enormously from such a provision?

I received a letter this morning from the Secretary of State for Health, who informed me that Bedford hospital NHS trust, which had been zero-rated in July, had made satisfactory progress in the months since. I pay tribute to the hospital, which I visited this week, and to the chief executive and chairman, Andrew Reed and Helen Nellis, for the progress that they are making. The zero star rating was unfortunate, but the response of all hospital staff was to roll up their collective sleeves and see what they could do to improve services. I am grateful for that. It would assist an area where there is an increasing number of people and the health service is fighting under a deficit if those factors could be taken into account when targets are set. Many health workers work extremely hard, but sometimes the Government do not take all those problems into account when setting targets for them.

I remind the House that it is almost 12 months since the incident at Yarlswood in my constituency. The asylum centre was badly damaged by fire, and more than 300 people could have lost their lives. The Government instituted an inquiry, which began in the summer. It reported to the Home Secretary in September, but since then we have seen nothing of the report. The Home Secretary knows that court cases are pending, and we all appreciate the fact that certain material in the inquiry may be held secret until those cases have finished. However, the House badly needs to have other information that may not be pertinent to criminal cases. What were the reasons behind the decision not to fit sprinklers in the building that burned down? What was the reasoning that led to the change in the nature of detainees being held at Yarlswood, contrary to the assurances given to those who live around the area?

The Home Office has compounded the problem by announcing in October that it intends to allow new detainees to go to the remaining Yarlswood building, which is of the same construction as the one that burned to the ground and which will be reopened in April. How safe will those detainees be? How safe will the rest of us be, given that they are going back into the centre before we have any information from the inquiries into why the other building burned down?

The Minister should ask the Home Secretary to consider the matters that I have raised. I appreciate that some parts of the report may be kept secret, but other information needs to be brought out into the open sooner.

Jeremy Corbyn: What the hon. Gentleman says about Yarlswood is important. Many Labour Members are equally concerned about why the fire occurred, what the circumstances were and the terrible danger that many of those people suffered as a result of the way in which the fire was dealt with. I am not critical of the fire service, but of others, as the hon. Gentleman knows. I agree with him that the centre should not be reopened.

Alistair Burt: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. His hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) has also taken a keen interest in the issues surrounding Yarlswood and the implications for my constituents. Unless further information is available to the public, why should the centre be reopened? For the reasons I have given, I should be grateful if the Minister would take those matters back to the Home Secretary.

It only remains for me to thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to speak in the debate, and to wish you, your colleagues and all hon. Members the very best for Christmas and the new year.

4.15 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): In the five and a half years during which we have had a Labour Government and I have been a Member of Parliament, have the lives of the people in Hemel Hempstead improved? It is important to deal with this question, because if the answer is no, there is an agenda there that the Government must address. Even if the answer is only "a bit", that still leaves an agenda for them to address, because perhaps their ambition is for life for my constituents to improve rather more than just "a bit".

Of the observations that we have heard so far, I was particularly struck by those of my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith), who commented extensively on the Government's achievements, such as low unemployment. On the employment chart, Hemel Hempstead is in the top group, with consistently high employment. On looking at such a constituency, we would say that the Government have done very well by these people, and that they have done very well by the Government. This is leafy Hertfordshire, where life is clearly good, jobs are readily available, house prices are rocketing, and so on.

An occasional visitor to Hemel Hempstead who gets out at the train station might be a bit surprised to discover that it is about a mile from the town centre, and they might wonder quite how they are going to get there. On leaving the station, they will discover, in the middle of the town centre, a field that often contains rare breeds of cow. It is a lovely field that belongs to the publicly owned Boxmoor Trust, and which is part of 411 acres of beautiful land. Among other things, the Duke of Burgundy fritillary butterfly is being introduced into a field of wild cowslips, away from plodding feet. So Hemel Hempstead is a lovely place, which has an arguably high starting-point, but perhaps the question whether the lives of its people have improved is one that is none the less still worth asking.

[Mr. Tony McWalter]

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale rightly said that particular progress has been made in primary schools. On visiting the primary schools in my constituency, I am struck by the sea change that has taken place between 1997 and now. However, it is worth reflecting on how that has come about. Three mechanisms have produced those changes, the first of which is a commitment to quality in numeracy and literacy schemes in particular. Secondly, there has been a commitment to make modest improvements to Hertfordshire county council to help it to perform its functions—they are many but often unsung—and to do a good job. Indeed, it has achieved an excellent rating for local authorities.

Thirdly, and crucially, it has been recognised that head teachers need a fair degree of autonomy in the performance of their functions, as well as the resources to exercise that autonomy. I disagree profoundly with the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), who pooh-poohed the extra money that the Government are providing for services. Money is a necessary condition—but not, of course, a sufficient one—for the kind of improvements that we have seen in our primary schools.

However, the issue is not simply that we have had the opportunity to improve some things. I have sometimes pointed out in the House that the Government are insufficiently mindful of philosophy, and the Prime Minister has sometimes been inclined to disagree with me. I want to bring two smidgens of philosophy to what otherwise might seem a rather parochial fixation on my constituency. There are two laws of which the Prime Minister and the Government in general should be much more mindful, the first of which is the law of protracted time. It sometimes takes time to develop good ideas; and when one has developed such an idea and decided to implement it, it sometimes takes time to get it to make a real difference to the lives and the lived experience of the people whom we are trying to represent. The bigger the idea, the longer it takes to have an effect. For instance, the splendid idea of curbing disorderly behaviour with antisocial behaviour orders in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was supported by many hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary once asked me what I wanted for my constituency, and I told him that I wanted the number of antisocial behaviour orders handed out to be multiplied by a factor of 10. That would be a start on improving something that oppresses the day-to-day existence of many people.

The antisocial behaviour order was a good idea, but how far has it got? Senior police officers embraced the concept, but constituents are still faced with foul and irresponsible behaviour that makes their lives a misery, and local police officers say that there is nothing to be done. The original idea has not percolated through to the consciousness of those responsible for its implementation. As a result, constituents' lives have not been improved.

Hon. Members of all parties have said that people want more police on the beat. I said as much to an officer the other day, and I was given the following statistic—an officer could walk the beat for 80 years before coming across a crime being committed. That may be true, but the idea was less to do with crime than with intelligence, understanding and working with communities. It was intended to root out a person's capacity for crime before it was translated into behaviour that wrecked people's lives. The idea exists, but it has not yet got through and effected the change that was intended.

Another law of a philosophical character deserves the Government's consideration—the law of unintended consequences. The Government have had good ideas in many areas. They must be frustrated that they have had comparatively little effect, even when combined with significant resources, but some of the ideas need to be questioned.

It is a very good idea, is it not, for people to have very high-quality health care? Of course it is, but implementing that idea a little too rigorously means that inspectors are sent in who find that the quality is not excellent. The result is that the facility involved is shut down and, instead of there being health provision that may be ropey but which gets people by, there is no provision at all. Setting standards too high lowers overall provision so that people end up with lower-quality provision. That is a most unexpected and unintended consequence.

I advert to that idea with some passion, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has been my ally in my attempts to prevent the closure of Hemel Hempstead maternity hospital, which was only five years old when I was first elected in 1997. It is being closed because its special-care baby unit was one nurse short of its full staff complement. I was told that it was difficult to recruit nurses in Hertfordshire and that London weighting meant that people wanted to go and work in the capital. The result is that my constituents face a unique problem in that their maternity unit, even though it is so new, is to be shut down. That is in leafy Hertfordshire, and it is not a good experience for my constituents. A petition has been sent to Downing street and one has been placed before the House, with signatures from 88,000 people. That is what I call a community concern. Three weeks after the second of those petitions got the Prime Minister's personal support, the special care baby unit was shut down on the grounds that it gave cause for concern.

A month after the unit was shut down, two babies died in adjacent Watford general hospital in circumstances that I can only describe as appalling and exhibiting the utmost neglect. Staff there were inundated by the 3,000 maternity cases that had been shunted out of Hemel Hempstead. This is not a small maternity unit, but a middle-ranking one in terms of maternity provision. So their experience is worse.

Some 88,000 people have expressed their concern—four times the number who were wise enough to vote for me in the last election. It is a massive number. There is a sense in the community that sometimes the Government get an idea such as introducing higher standards for health and implement it in a way that has the unintended consequence of producing a lower standard of health. The Government must sometimes do more than introduce interesting initiatives. They must do more than have a good idea and back it with money. They must also realise that they have to work effectively with the people who will implement their good idea. The example of schools is vital. Many head teachers are now giving competent people the capacity to exercise their judgment over resources.

The worst examples in my constituency concern the way in which the Government relate to local government. I am sure that other right hon. and hon. Members will agree with me here. The Minister responsible for local government is the Minister for hard sums because local government finance is so complicated. Every time the hard sum is calculated the Minister tells me from the Dispatch Box that we have had an increase in resources in real terms, yet the situation seems to get worse.

The only community provision in my area is a venue for rock concerts. A thousand kids went there on Friday and Saturday nights to hear the sort of music that only kids can listen to, and it has been knocked down. It is tempting to say that it is because of the Conservative-controlled council, but in fact the Government are still saying to local authorities that giving them extra resources means that they have a lot more extra things on which to spend the money. As a result, it is hard to see a real-terms gain. A 4 per cent. increase also means new duties such as having a community safety partnership that brings the police and the local authority together. That is a great idea, but it is wrapped up in the local authority settlement; it costs extra resources and the authority does not know where it will get the money for the other duties. My police authority is pleased with its new duties but has pointed out that it needed a lot more than 4 per cent. just to keep the show on the road.

I have taken my quarter of an hour, and that is probably as much as one should impose on the House. I conclude with the thought that the Government need to attend more to the submissions that so many Members have made today about how these matters impact on their area. Hemel Hempstead is in leafy Hertfordshire, but it is a new town and many parts of it are crumbling. The town has a wonderful environment and unemployment is low, but there are major pockets of poverty and deprivation. Its hospital is under great threat, even though the figures may look good on the charts.

On balance, despite everything that I have said, there has been an advance, but storm clouds are gathering. That could mean that when we hold next year's Christmas debate, I shall have to say that things are worse. The Government should attend to those storm clouds by paying more attention to the laws of protracted time and unintended consequences.

4.30 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) spoke a great deal of common sense. He is a Government supporter, so I hope that his Government will listen to him.

I want to raise a number of matters before the House adjourns for the Christmas recess. However, before I do so I want to clear the air about something that has been troubling me. The last time I spoke in this place, I said that I and a number of colleagues would be examining the Swedish model.

Several hon. Members—whether deliberately or not—misinterpreted my words, but I can now report to the House that we have examined the Swedish model and found it somewhat wanting. I refer to the debate on the Second Reading of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill and the Government's decision to adopt proposals based on the Swedish model. The week before last, we discussed the matter at a meeting of the Select Committee on Health and the House will be interested to learn that, after two years, the Swedish Government are quite concerned about their solution to the problem of delayed discharges. It does not seem to be having the desired effect; beds are still being blocked in Swedish hospitals. I hope that the Government will reflect on their ideas, as they certainly did not work in the country from whence they originally came.

Several hon. Members have mentioned crime. If only I had a penny for every time that I have listened to Members on both sides of the House say that there was too much crime. What is happening about the problem? What are the solutions? The crackpot ideas for dealing with truancy are certainly not going to help one iota. They can only make things more difficult for the police.

Southend is no different from any other area. My constituents complain that youths gather outside their houses and disturb their general well-being. Such youngsters know their rights only too well so little can be done about them. What is the answer?

Even hon. Members who are more into high technology than me want to see more policewomen and men on the streets dealing with the problems. Are there more police officers on the streets of Southend or Essex? There are not. That is of huge concern, so it would be wonderful if the Government were able to come up with some positive, deliverable proposals in the new year.

My local authority advises me that young offenders from other local authority areas are being moved into Southend-on-Sea. That does not help our youth offending team, as moneys allocated by the Youth Justice Board to such teams throughout the country do not take account of the fact that offenders may be moved into an area from another authority. The Southend youth offending service has to make up any shortfall in funding. That is crazy.

The youth offending team in the authority that has moved the offenders to another area still receives money for them even though it no longer has responsibility for them. I am also advised by my local authority that although many local authorities are willing to be billed by the receiving authority, many others are not. Given the disappointing financial settlement that Southend had recently, it will make our situation difficult.

I now come to single-handed doctors. The Prime Minister said in the House:

"There has been a move over time away from single-handed practices so as to improve the quality of care that people receive."—[*Official Report*, 3 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 219.]

Does he have any idea how damaging that statement was to single-handed GPs the length and breadth of the country? I applaud *Doctor Magazine* which has started a campaign on this issue. A petition will be presented at 10 Downing street in the early part of next year, with which I and other hon. Members hope to be associated. Single-handed GPs discussed the situation with me at my surgery. Apparently the Prime Minister cited a 10-year-old study which said that the number of partners failed to explain variations in standards. The health service faces a number of challenges and to insult and devalue the wonderful professionalism of single-handed GPs does no good, so I hope that the Prime Minister will take the opportunity in the new year to correct that impression.

[Mr. David Amess]

On any number of occasions I have drawn to the attention of the House what hon. Members might think are my prejudiced views on mobile phones. I was extremely excited when last week I got a letter from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the hon. Member for Harrow, East (Mr. McNulty) letting me know that the Government have launched a new £7 million research programme into the health implications of mobile phone base stations and masts. That is splendid news. The House needs a clear decision on this. My local authority in Southend asks me, "What is the good of us turning down applications when we go to appeal, the appeals are overturned and the hard pressed council taxpayers have to pay?" This is a serious matter. I am not convinced that the health implications are trivial. Moreover, how often have Ministers stood at the Dispatch Box and said that it is illegal to use a mobile phone while driving a car? Not only does that happen every day, but people are now stopping suddenly and dramatically because they have reached an interesting point in their conversation. There is no point in Ministers saying that that is a dreadful practice when nothing is done to enforce the law.

I recall making a speech from the Government Back Benches on the Third Reading of the Bill to protect badgers. I have now had a well attended meeting with constituents that has made it clear to me that I had not entirely realised what I was signing up to. I am not prepared to give names and addresses of where we have a badger problem in Southend because when the Government tried to do something positive, violent demonstrations took place. A few years ago a crowd of badgers must have got together, walked down this particular road and set up home in a back garden. They did not stop in one back garden; they have now built their homes underneath the garages of a number of terraced properties in an urban area. I would not have believed that those cuddly animals could do so much damage. Walls are now collapsing and residents cannot go out in their gardens. No one could be stronger on animal welfare than I am, but, although badgers are beautiful animals, they should be approached at some peril because they can do considerable damage.

A representative from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and two other organisations visited the area, and we had a wonderful, positive meeting. I had no idea how difficult it is to exclude badgers from properties, but a course of action has been agreed that will, I hope, deal with the matter sometime next year after the breeding season.

The cost of dealing with the issue—putting up gates and chains—will all fall on the local residents, and I cannot believe that that is right because, obviously, the local residents did not say, "Come on badgers, come and occupy our gardens." All that will be very expensive and a number of the residents are elderly and certainly cannot afford the cost, so I hope that the Minister will have a word with his colleagues to find out whether something can be done about that.

Many hon. Members have referred to Cliffe airport, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink). I applaud the two local authorities for successfully extending the consultation period. All this has been said already, but an airport operating on 24-hour basis would be environmental and social disaster for my constituency. I have heard people say that that is a red herring. Well, if it is, it is a jolly expensive one because all local residents are being invited to become involved in the consultations. I hope that, given the extension to the consultation period, the Government will consult properly and ensure that all residents in my constituency receive a proper information pack and that we have some properly conducted meetings.

Finally, before I give my usual Christmas salutations, I wish to refer to the death of a local constituent. I must tell the Minister that I do not think that I can do justice to the circumstances surrounding her death now, so I am applying for an Adjournment debate, but I would be letting down Joanne Martinson's parents if I did not mention her death.

On 7 November last year, that young lady—she was 19—was driving with her partner, Adam Seomore. They were both wearing seatbelts. She was fit, in good health and not under the influence of alcohol or drugs. She was driving at approximately 25 mph. Adam has confirmed that there was no harsh acceleration and no high engine revs or any sharp braking. He was looking out of the nearside passenger window when he became aware that the car had swerved sideways and was moving towards a tree. Joanne was gripping the steering wheel with both hands. He did not see what caused Joanne to swerve, but clearly recalls that she was not distracted by anything in the car. According to her parents, she was a very careful driver, and I am sure that that is the case.

There were seven witnesses to the accident, and I am sure that all hon. Members would wonder how someone driving at less than 25 mph could end up losing her life, but she did. I make no criticism of the Crown Prosecution Service because my hon. Friends the Members for Rayleigh (Mr. Francois) and for Castle Point and I spent some time with the CPS last week, learning at first hand the circumstances under which its operates, but, according to two other witnesses, another vehicle seemed to be absolutely crucial in making Joanne swerve. The owner of the vehicle only had a provisional licence and only had sight in one eye. There was also concern about the vehicle's insurance and tax. This individual, however, has not even been prosecuted. I hope that I will be successful in obtaining an Adjournment debate on the subject in the new year, when the appropriate Minister can respond to the issue, because the parents simply want this matter to be dealt with fairly, and they owe it to their daughter to ensure that a proper investigation is completed.

Do I lament the passing of this year? Not really—I had been looking forward to it, but I have been disappointed by any number of issues. In fact, I seem to have spent most of my time attending funerals. I was at a funeral this morning, I will be at another funeral on Monday, and my secretary phoned me earlier to say that someone else had died and that I had been asked to conduct the funeral. That is going a bit too far. I am much happier in the role that I will play tomorrow as Father Christmas.The Government have not served the country well over the past year. In so many respects, they could be doing better than they are at present.

I should like to conclude on a non-political point. You and I will recall, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that we had a splendid regatta on the River Thames. The Thames is a wonderful asset, and I shall ask Mr. Speaker if he might consider giving permission to us to have a regatta in 2003, perhaps we can celebrate that next year. I wish all hon. Members and staff a happy Christmas and good health, peace and prosperity in the new year.

4.47 pm

Mr. Alan Hurst (Braintree): I am particularly obliged to my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) for introducing philosophical notions into this debate, especially that of protracted time, of which I had not heard previously. His mention of that has caused me to make an addition to what I was going to say about a road scheme.

Those who follow these debates assiduously and study *Hansard* daily might be aware that on several occasions I have raised the Hatfield Peverel to Witham road. Several Essex Members are present who will be familiar with the A12 road, the number of vehicles on it, and the particular hazards if one travels out of Hatfield Peverel on that road on the way to Witham. As a novice Member, I was particularly pleased when, following an Adjournment debate, the Minister responsible announced that, for safety reasons, a link road would be built between the village of Hatfield Peverel and the town of Witham. I am about to congratulate the successor Minister on the fifth anniversary of that announcement in January—the road, however, has not yet been built. It has been approved, it has been in the hands of the Highways Agency, and it is about to be subject to a public inquiry, but not a single grain of sand has been put down.

Mr. McWalter: My hon. Friend is aware, of course, that, according to the law of protracted time, the bigger the idea, the more protracted the time to achieve it. As the idea to which he refers does not sound that big, what is the other reason for the extended period during which nothing has happened?

Mr. Hurst: It is a good job that those responsible were not planning to build the Great Wall of China, as the extended time would have been even greater. I might add that the road to which I refer is one mile in length from one end to the other. I pass it four or five times per week. If I had got out of my car, put down some sand each evening and eventually put down some concrete, I imagine that I could have built that road single-handedly in those five years. But the road has not been completed. Ministers have come and gone—some have come to and gone from the constituency, and a number have gone from office—but the road is still not there. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will pass that information on to the current Minister responsible, who is welcome to come down and see the site any time.

I also want to make a few remarks about an aspect of agriculture—the present plight of pig farming. It is a particularly interesting sector in the sense that it is unsubsidised. The big debate in agriculture at present is about moving away from subsidy and into a free market, and perhaps we can see the future if we look at pig farming, which does not have the benefit of support payments.

All of us had a notion about what pig farming was like. Some of us would have conjured up in our mind a picture of Lord Emsworth and his particular devotion to the activity. However, that was a pastime breeding of pigs rather than a commercial operation. Traditionally, farms in England had a pig. In the main, farms were mixed and a pig would form part of that mixture. Further back is the idyllic view of pigs running loose in oak woods and eating acorns. That is a rustic and attractive vision, but those methods would not serve our present consumerist society. A few pigs running in the oak woods would not suffice to meet our needs. Over time, pig farming has obviously become more commercial.

Pig farming was always something a farmer could move into when times were good and move out of when times and prices were poor. It required less capital investment than other forms of farming. One did not need vast acres of land or expensive equipment and it did not take years to build up a good breeding herd. Like poultry farming, one could move in and out of the sector.

Circumstances have changed as time has gone by. Although pig farming was always cyclical—it was subject to ups and downs—we now appear to be in an extended downturn that concerns all those Members who have pig breeders and pig farmers in their constituencies. In the early 1990s, the price was high and I suspect that produced a degree of overproduction, with the natural consequences of the law of supply and demand. Other factors have now come into the system and they do not bode well for the future.

By 1997–98, the price of pigmeat was down to 70p per kilogram, and the break-even figure is thought to be 90p per kilogram. I visited farms at that time and they did not know how they would survive. The truth is that a number of them have not survived and the number of pig-breeding units is down. The national herd is down, as is the whole production of pigmeat.

One could argue that the cycle will turn, prices will pick up and all will be fine. Prices have risen to more than 90p, which is about the break-even point, but they seem to have stuck at that level. Other factors, once unknown, now exist firm and hard. The major one is the strength of our currency against the euro, and the obvious conclusion is that imports have become cheap and exports have become expensive. In some products, that would not matter too much, but just across the sea are traditional producers of pigmeat who benefit.

We all know that Danish bacon has been advertised in this country, certainly since I was a child. An advertising campaign has been run for the best part of 40 years almost always on the basis that bacon equals Danish. Our producers have never been able to match that type of advertising. When economic circumstances are favourable to foreign exporters, they come into their own. The figures clearly show that, in the past two years, the amount of Danish bacon sold in this country has gone up from about 20 per cent. to about 25 per cent. of the market whereas sales of our product have gone down from about 43 per cent. to 37 per cent. There has been quite an imbalance in the change of trading circumstances. At one time, we would have had an export market perhaps to Russia or eastern Europe,

[Mr. Hurst]

but because of the difficulties in that region and the strength of the pound, that market has almost entirely disappeared.

In addition—it is one problem on top of another—we have rightly attained the highest animal welfare standards in the world. At the same time, we have gone a long way down the route of pollution control and environmental protection. We support all those measures completely, but they come at a price. At one time, pig breeding was an economic matter. It could be done on spare land and the owner could go into something else. Now, the amount of plant and investment is greater and greater in a market in which the margin is narrower and narrower. We also have the scourge of disease. Classical swine fever is a problem, and pigs currently have a wasting disease. Although diseases come and go in any form of agricultural breeding, pig farmers want the Government to invest more in research into animal diseases, on a co-operative basis with our European neighbours, so that a pool of information can be applied to protect native herds.

Another issue grows apace, although it is difficult to put one's finger on it as it is like a will-o'-the-wisp—the power of the supermarkets. It is almost impossible to pin down where the profit disappears for the grower and the breeder, and where it comes into the hand of the retailer. A number of Select Committees have considered the issue and there have been other inquiries in the House, too, but we have never got to the bottom of the mystery.

There is no mystery in the figures, however. Supermarkets account for about three quarters of retail bacon sales in this country. So in the main, someone in the pigmeat business has to be in the supermarket business too. Supermarkets exert an enormous contractual power over those who sell to them. The margin between the price of pigmeat at farm gate and at retail is widening. In January 2000, the profit margin was 221p; it is now 248p. It is growing step by step during an agricultural depression. The Government should approach the way in which the supermarket monopolies control almost the whole market with greater vigour than has hitherto been the case. That practice must be detrimental, not only to the producer, but ultimately to the consumer as well.

The Government could do more about labelling. We know that steps have been taken on that and that the Government, rightly or wrongly—many of us agree with them—are keen on clear labelling. We especially need that on food products. We are about to have lurid announcements on tobacco products so that the possible consequences are abundantly clear to the purchaser, but we often need a magnifying glass in a supermarket or store to track down a product's country of origin. I am not talking about the country of processing or packaging, but where the product was bred or grown. That is what the consumer wants to know. We make much of freedom of choice, but choice has to be based on knowledge. If the knowledge is so elusive that one cannot put one's finger on it, that choice is denied.

If that problem is severe enough in a supermarket, how much greater is it in a restaurant? If one says to a waiter, "Are these English pork sausages for breakfast?", he will undoubtedly say, "Certainly, sir," but there is no way of knowing for sure. When one looks at a menu, there is no way of knowing where the product comes from unless the restaurant chooses to advertise it. If we are to give our own producers and growers a fair chance, we must go much further down the route of clear, unconfused, large-written labelling, so that there is freedom of choice.

I shall say no more about the matter because I know that interest usually palls after the first few minutes of any speech, except that of certain hon. Members present today. I join others in offering you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and all other Members and staff the very best wishes for the Christmas season.

5 pm

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), who made a fine speech with which I heartily agreed. I am not sure about the roads that he mentioned at the beginning, but the rest of his speech certainly rang a bell with me.

I shall speak briefly about what will not be a happy Christmas for many of my constituents. On 7 July this year, *The Sunday Times* carried an article with the banner headline "Britain is to get a robot air force to fight terrorists as part of a multi-million-pound overhaul of its armed services". The article went on to refer to pilotless planes, which, it states,

"were the success story of the Afghanistan conflict and were credited with killing Mohammed Atef".

The article reports:

"An American Predator, flown from McDill air force base in Florida, located a building where Atef was staying near Kabul and attacked it with an anti-tank missile."

It refers to the strategic defence review and continues, interestingly:

"British equipment in future will be bought to be more compatible with that of its allies. That is bound to cause consternation among opponents of Britain's increasingly close military ties to America."

For once, I am not critical of that aspect, and I shall explain why. The article went on to state:

"The planes will be flown by a pilot sitting in a cockpit in a ground station in Britain or from a mobile command centre."

It refers to one location already shortlisted, Llanbedr in Gwynedd in my constituency,

"from where the drones can be flown over Cardigan Bay during training."

Within a few weeks of the article appearing, the Ministry of Defence announced its intention to close that airfield. The announcement was met with shock and dismay. Several hundred constituents have worked there for many years and their loyalty was beyond doubt. It seems that the company was gearing up for that shock announcement at Christmas 2001, and that redundancy processes have not been followed. The unswervingly loyal work force have been kicked in the teeth by QinetiQ, a company in which the Government are a major shareholder. They have not been treated in the way that one would expect staff to be treated.

The decision to close the airfield at Llanbedr and with it the Jindivik target service seems to have been taken in the face of several contrary requirements. The current role of Jindivik is to provide the Air Force with an

effective airborne target system at a reasonable cost. In order for the trials to be realistic, a full-scale representative target is required. That has been done successfully at Llanbedr for many years. Unfortunately, neither the UK nor the BVRAAM—beyond visual range air-to-air missile—partner nations have a full-scale target available. Jindivik was selected as the nearest representative target available.

That is no longer an option, because the company and the Government preferred Mirach, which will be selected for trials. The Mirach costs are based on each target completing 25 flights before loss. The longest-operating Jindivik has completed 204 flights, and the largest number of flights by a UK Jindivik is 265.

Given the above, it is difficult to follow the logic of closing Llanbedr airport as a cost-saving exercise. Each of the lost Mirachs cost £200,000, and on their trial runs in the Hebrides many failed. The most illogical aspect of the proposed closure of the Llanbedr target service is that when a UK project, or the Royal Air Force, requires a target, there will not be one available if Mirach does not come up to standard. If QinetiQ cannot provide that target, money will be spent on improving an overseas range to enable it to meet the requirements of the UK trial. Essentially, experts say that money would be spent in Sweden, France, South Africa or the United States to meet the UK's trial requirements rather than on improving range facilities in the UK, thus allowing UK plc to be a leader in ranges and target facilities.

The other concern about closure of the airport comes from the RAF. The airport is very important for emergency landings. Indeed, the RAF uses the base hundreds of time a year and, typically, 86 times a year for emergency movements.

On 24 September, a meeting was held with the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Kirkcaldy (Dr. Moonie), together with members of his staff, the unions from Llanbedr airport and my Welsh Assembly colleague. The response that we received was not encouraging, but the Minister said that he would reply in detail on each point raised. To be fair, he did so within a reasonable time. We heard earlier today about some Departments' huge delay in responding, but on 12 October the Minister wrote to me with a detailed response to the many points that had been raised at that meeting. I wish now to analyse the points in his letter, as it is important to have those on the record.

Significantly, the Minister's letter did not mention either the combined aerial target service procedure—he referred to a period before the CATS contract was being discussed—or the cost of introducing Mirach. Although the Minister said that he undertook to reply to all the points that we had raised, he responded only on the Jindivik-specific points. Many other issues were raised relating to the airport at Llanbedr. In particular, we required a response on use of the airfield by RAF Hawk aircraft and on the potential to use the airfield for testing and development of future unmanned aircraft vehicles.

The Minister said:

"QinetiQ's proposals followed an extensive review of the facilities it currently operates on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. The review confirmed that the MOD owns a large number of diverse sites and capabilities, and that a substantial surplus exists within the T&E"—

test and evaluation—

"environment as a whole. This highlights the fact that provision of T&E is not currently being conducted in a cost effective manner and that significant transformation is required to provide better value for money for the MOD and hence for the taxpayer."

That shows that value for money is key to the MOD's thinking. Alas, the interim use of Mirach pre CATS will not provide that.

The Minister then said:

"In terms of aerial target provision, no single system can provide all the capability needed for all weapon systems. Jindivik has met our requirements well, but it does have limitations. Mirach"—

the new one—

"has limitations too."

He goes on to sing the praises of Mirach, which is, unfortunately, misleading. He says:

"Mirach can for example fly multi targets and in formation and is designed to be a fully mobile system."

Jindivik also has a proven capability to fly multi-target and in formation.

The Minister then referred to the relative sizes of the Mirach and the Jindivik, and said that

"the requirement for a full-scale representative target is not so robust as stated. The choice of target for any T&E activity is inevitably based on an assessment of many factors and the choice of Jindivik as the nearest representative target for ASRAAM and BVRAAM in itself involved necessary compromise. QinetiQ has evaluated the performance of Mirach against the RAF's usage of Jindivik and in terms of flying performance and signature characteristics, the build standard of Mirach will provide an adequate replacement for Jindivik. Any target system has a series of limitations—no single system can provide all the capability needed to assess each and every weapon system."

The experts' response to that argument is that the visual signature of Jindivik is substantially larger than that of Mirach. Jindivik is 7.1 m long with a wingspan of 6.3 m, while Mirach is 4.1 m long and has a wingspan of 2.3 m. The difference is likely to result in a substantial increase in the number of aborted missile firings, due to the fighter being unable to acquire the target. The wasted fighter target sorties come at a cost that will ultimately have to be borne by the MOD.

The Minister went on to say:

"QinetiQ has confirmed that Mirach is the replacement target for Jindivik."

However, on 13 September, an announcement was made under the heading "Invitations to Negotiate" to three bidders for the new system—Team Firecats, Insight Global Target Systems and a team led by QinetiQ, in which the Government have a stake. They were bidding for the CATS contract. It seemed that no one would know which target would be the long-term replacement for Jindivik until the winner was chosen. Mirach has a guaranteed life of only a few months beyond the proposed demise of Jindivik. The point that I am making is that the Government were actively pursuing the Mirach system with their preferred bidder while inviting two other companies to submit bids for replacement. I think that that procedure is rather skewed. I question whether it is morally right and I do not know whether it was legally right either.

[Mr. Elfyn Llwyd]

The Minister went on to state:

"The suggestion that no hardware costs remain is incorrect . . . There are also other costs associated with the retention of Jindivik which have to be included",

and so on. Keeping Jindivik in operation for the short period between its proposed retirement date and the start of the CATS contract should not incur any extra cost. In contrast, procuring and introducing Mirach to run from the middle of 2004 until the introduction of CATS and then scrapping it if it does not form part of the CATS solution will be extremely costly. That will certainly not be a cost-saving approach for the Government.

The Minister also states:

"Our understanding of the capabilities and limitations of Mirach will develop as we gain operational experience".

He thereby says that it will not be perfect when it goes into operation—a rather strange thing for a Minister to say. He goes on to state:

"the system and QinetiQ's processes will be modified where necessary",

which is again questionable in terms of the way forward. That statement implies that many months, if not years, will be needed to identify, design and produce modifications to the airframe, system and procedures. Unless the CATS contest has been prejudged, Mirach has a guaranteed life of only a few months.

In referring to Jindivik and Mirach, the Minister said:

"Both systems have the capability to recover towed targets by a number of means. Depending on exactly which towed target is used, Mirach targets are either ditched into the sea after use (as with Jindivik), recovered with the aircraft if undamaged (as with Jindivik), or parachuted into the sea for recovery".

The Jindivik solution of bringing the target back with the aircraft is superior. The targets do not have to be searched for by a helicopter or with boats before they can be recovered. The recovery of Jindivik is unaffected by sea state. In those circumstances, Jindiviks would not be lost where Mirachs would be.

As I said, until the CATS competition has been decided, the long-term replacement for Jindivik is not known, or should not be known. I am extremely unhappy about the way in which the base has been treated. The work force have been through a long period of indecision, the privatisation of the company, and limited contracts three or four times in the past 25 years or so. Their loyalty and specialisms are beyond question and they deserve better.

Mr. Viggers: Having shot down an RAF Meteor target from Llanbedr in 1968, I pay tribute to the concerned manner in which the hon. Gentleman makes his case. I understand that, after such a long period of dedicated service, the work force would feel deeply about the closure of the station.

Mr. Llwyd: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention. It would clearly be a great shame to close the station and I cannot understand why the Ministry of Defence is considering mothballing it. As the hon. Gentleman knows, it is on the coast and does not affect populous areas. It has been run excellently over the years and is now doomed to close in 2004 under a procedure that is morally and possibly legally questionable. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's support and for his comments based on his experience. I am no expert—I have never shot anything down.

Bob Spink: A few defendants.

Mr. Llwyd: Not while defending them, I hope.

Jindivik has a capability for simultaneous flight of multiple targets. The information that QinetiQ staff have witnessed four target operations by Mirach is spurious. Jindivik will be replaced not by a better model, but by one that has yet to be proven. Yet the Ministry of Defence is apparently hell bent on doing that. Almost the whole cost of Llanbedr airfield has been allocated to Jindivik. Charges to the Air Force and the Army for their use of the facilities are well below the proportionate rate. For example, RAF Valley Hawks are charged significantly less per aircraft movement at Llanbedr than at RAF Valley or RAF Mona. Again, that gives the impression that there has been a conspiracy to close down the place for some time. If it transpired that use by the Air Force in Valley required Llanbedr to be kept open, the airfield operation costs would pass to them. The overall saving to the Ministry of Defence would be much smaller—more than half the savings might not be achieved.

I do not want to go into further detail this afternoon. Suffice it to say that I am worried about the work force. As the hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) confirmed, they are dedicated and they deserve better treatment. I call on the Government, even at this late stage, to reconsider the short-termism and the odd, questionable procedure that has been adopted to mothball an airfield that could be considerably useful not only to the military but to the civil authorities. That makes no sense in the short, medium or long term. I urge the Government to reconsider.

I extend the compliments of the season to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to all hon. Members, but I remind the House that, as a direct result of the Ministry of Defence's conduct, many people in my constituency will not have a happy Christmas.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that time is running on and I fear that some hon. Members will not be able to speak. It would therefore be helpful if hon. Members could make their remarks as brief as possible so that not too many people are disappointed.

5.18 pm

Mr. Neil Gerrard (Walthamstow): I shall be brief. I want to raise two issues: one involves my constituency and the other is a national matter. The constituency issue concerns the way in which public money has been used on a portfolio of roughly 3,000 properties. I must relate a little of the history so that hon. Members can understand the point that I am making.

The properties constitute an estate that was built by a company called Warner Estates probably 100 years ago. For many years, it acted as a private landlord and was regarded as fairly philanthropic. It gradually decided to

get out of the rented market and started to sell the properties, leasehold so that by about 1998, approximately three quarters were leasehold and a quarter were tenanted.

Late in 2000, the company decided to dispose of those properties. At that point, negotiations went on, which involved Circle 33 housing group. The focus was on the quarter of the properties that were tenanted or empty, because, quite clearly, if a social landlord could acquire those properties, that would be useful in an area with a rented housing shortage. All those who had the matter raised with them, including the local authority and me, thought that a sensible way to proceed.

In addition to the tenanted properties, however, there were about 2,000 leasehold properties and about another 300 properties involving two flats—one leasehold as well as one still tenanted—within a building. There were negotiations with Circle 33. Warner Estates had a subsidiary company called Benchlevel, which had a further subsidiary called Finalbrief. Warner Estates stripped out all the assets from the two subsidiaries and transferred all the freeholds to the ownership of Benchlevel.

Circle 33 then acquired the share capital of Benchlevel. In turn, it split the properties and took all the leasehold properties into the further subsidiary, Finalbrief. The share capital of Finalbrief was sold on to a company called Freehold Managers (Nominees) Ltd., in which all the shareholders were directors of HSBC Trust Corporation, which is based in the Isle of Man.

The question that arose involved the reason for using that mechanism to transfer the properties. The freeholds were transferred between companies that had been associated with one another for a number of years and the share capital of those companies was sold, not the freeholds. So, every single leaseholder was unable to apply the right of first refusal to buy their freehold, which they would have been able to do if the freeholds were being sold between the companies. That is why this mechanism was adopted.

Circle 33 said to me, "We have done that because Warner Estates insisted on selling the portfolio as a whole, and of course it moved the properties to its subsidiary before we bought them." That may be so, but I find it difficult to believe that all that was not thought out beforehand. Shell companies were created, which were then transferred along with the properties.

A lot of other issues arose involving the failure of Circle 33 to give leaseholders information on what was happening, the ownership of the freeholds and problems with the companies that had become the new owners. Many of those we can now solve, however, partly because of the good leasehold reform legislation that the House passed last summer, which gives leaseholders many more rights.

The central issue that concerns me is that public money—Housing Corporation money was involved in funding Circle 33's acquisition of those properties—has been used to fund that purchase through mechanisms that were deliberately engineered to prevent leaseholders from being able to exercise the right to first refusal of purchase of the freehold. Nothing illegal has been done, but there has been deliberate engineering to achieve that outcome, which causes me considerable concern. That is not how public money should be used through a social landlord.

A lot of problems remain. Those properties have been in place for many years. In all the years that I have been involved in politics in Waltham Forest, I have received very few complaints from Warner Estates leaseholders or tenants. Within 18 months of a social landlord taking them over, we have packed public meetings attended by several hundred people who are all concerned about what has been happening to their properties. The matter should be looked at by Ministers who were involved in some of the decisions at the beginning, when approval was given to Housing Corporation money being used in such a way.

Let me now raise a national issue that is likely to affect many Members early in the new year. The Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 contains a provision, which will come into force on 8 January, denying people applying for asylum in-country any support unless the National Asylum Support Service is convinced that they can produce a good reason for not having applied at the port of entry. Thousands of people could be destitute as a result, with no possibility of an appeal—but there will of course be appeals, because those denied support will end up in our advice surgeries.

I do not want to argue the case as to whether we should have acted as we did because I made my views clear when we were debating the Bill, but a good many questions were raised at the time—I raised some of them with the Home Secretary—about the way in which the scheme would operate, what criteria would be used to decide whether someone had waited too long before making an application, and what was meant by "special needs". The Act says that those with special needs will be exempt from the provision. What will happen if someone has a health problem? What will happen to a woman who is pregnant? I was told that we would be given the information; indeed, a Minister in the House of Lords suggested that codes of guidance might be issued. Nothing has been issued so far, however.

Mr. Gardiner: Are not those who can show that their destitution is a result of pregnancy, age or illness, including mental illness, specifically covered by the National Assistance Act 1948? Did not a recent court case prove that?

Mr. Gerrard: Some people will still be able to go to a local authority and cite that Act, but local authorities themselves will have to decide whether the Act covers those people. We need codes of guidance and criteria so that local authorities know where they stand, non-governmental organisations know where they stand, and we know where we stand when people turn up at our surgeries—as they undoubtedly will when they have been refused support by the NASS. We need to know the rules of the game.

I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will draw that problem to the Home Secretary's attention. As I have said, from 8 January it is likely to affect many Members of Parliament.

I join others, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in offering you and the staff of the House the compliments of the season.

5.28 pm

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Let me offer you, Sir, and everyone at the Palace of Westminster Christmas greetings and good wishes. I extend those good wishes to the Minister, to Labour Members, and even to my own Whips!

I have a sad task to perform. I wish to pay tribute to Madam Mayor of Castle Point, Councillor Vera Elworthy, the charter mayor, who sadly passed away on Saturday last week. She was a lady of great dignity, charm and grace. She was one of the finest councillors that Castle Point, or any council in the country, ever had. She was loved by everyone, particularly the council officers. She had boundless energy and enthusiasm, and, even when she was in a wheelchair, she never failed to see residents when other councillors were often not to be found. She visited them and supported them when they needed her help.

Vera cared deeply for others, and her civic duties and service were eclipsed only by her voluntary work. She was chairman, president or fundraiser of more charitable institutions and good causes than I could possibly remember. She was always warmly and well supported by her husband George, who is a fine gentleman.

This is a significant point in the history of Castle Point, because it has lost a great servant to civic society. It is also a great personal loss to me, as Vera was a good and loyal friend. Her passing will be deeply regretted in Castle Point.

There are two other emerging local heroes in Castle Point, both of whom are ladies. Kate Meager has taken by the horns the problem of the local multi-modal study, which threatened many quiet communities with roads and changes to traffic management. Those proposals were deeply regretted by many local people. Kate Meager has been the voice of her local community, and has taken the battle on through the press and through councillors. She has done a great service to the community on the Bird estate. In particular, she has fought the Jotmans lane proposal.

It is recognised that Castle Point suffers from enormous congestion problems. Canvey island needs a third road, and I shall keep on mentioning that until we get it. These problems need to be solved. I do not point the finger at any political party. I just want to congratulate Kate Meager on the excellent work that she does for her community.

The other local hero to emerge recently is Jackie Byrne, who has taken up the cudgels on behalf of residents who oppose Cliffe airport, and that is virtually every resident in Castle Point. That airport is an inappropriate Government option. It is environmentally, economically and socially disastrous for Essex, yet Essex has not been consulted by the Government on this matter. That shows what little regard the Government have for the people of Essex, and how bankrupt and arrogant they have become.

The airport will have five runways, the nearest of which will be only 2,500 yards from my constituency. Planes coming in to land on the fifth runway will fly right over Canvey island and Hadleigh in my constituency, and it will be in use 24 hours a day. Despite all the problems of noise, aviation fuel smells, air pollution and the environmental damage that that would cause, the Government did not see fit to consult my community. When I persistently and repeatedly ask the Government to send a Minister to a public meeting that I would organise in my community, so that he can explain that option and answer questions, they refuse even to answer me. Ministers do not have the courage to explain to the community what their Cliffe airport proposal is all about.

A lot of money has gone into the health service nationally over the past two years. There has been an increase in funding of about 22 per cent., yet the number of patients admitted to hospital in that period has fallen by 0.5 per cent. There are 55,000 fewer patients admitted to hospitals. The gold standard is the number of finished consultant episodes, which is up only 1.6 per cent. as opposed to the 22 per cent. extra cash. That shows that the Government are failing to deliver on public services. Locally, we have difficulties with health, and we need improved health care services.

I welcome some of the changes that are taking place. We in Castle Point have great difficulty with succession planning for GPs who are coming up for retirement. Recruiting new doctors is a big problem, and one way in which the primary care trust has tried to tackle it is by setting up a single centre for health on Canvey Island, at the Paddocks. Various facilities will be provided there, including training, which will help us to attract junior GPs; a smaller practice would be unable to attract them.

But we must avoid over-centralisation, and be aware that we need centres for health care excellence on the east of the island and on the north. As my hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) said, the Prime Minister's attack on single-handed practices was absolutely intolerable; it was quite wrong to paint all such practices with a single broad brush. Members will know that many single-handed practices deliver an excellent, high-quality service, and we should be prepared to stand up and thank them for that, rather than criticising them in the manner of this Government.

On the problem of the post offices, as we know, the Government have said that they expect to close 3,000 of them over the next two years. Hon. Members may remember Labour's 1997 pledge that only it could be

"trusted with the future of the post offices."

Labour said that it would

"maintain the network of post offices".

Those are the words, but as I said, the actions show that the Government plan to close 3,000 post offices over the next two years. I give the Minister notice that we in Castle Point will fight for every single post office to stay open. They are more than just shops, or part of the economic infrastructure; they are an essential and deeply valued part of our community and social fabric. I repeat: we will fight to save those post offices in Castle Point.

Youth street crime is a great problem, and antisocial behaviour is a major issue in Castle Point, just as it is elsewhere. I was therefore sorry to discover that, through the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, the Government have removed the police's power to confiscate from people aged under 18 unopened cans or bottles of alcohol. I know that the Government realise that they have got this wrong, and that they plan to change the provision; indeed, I intend to introduce a 10-

minute Bill that would do so. I know about this issue because it was me who introduced the legislation that originally empowered the police to remove alcohol both opened and unopened. If a group of nine to 11-year-olds are on the street at 10 o'clock at night—when they should not be there—with a six-pack, only one of which they are drinking from, the police can confiscate the three-quarters empty can, but they must leave with those children the five unopened cans, to be drunk as soon as they turn their backs. Then, those kids will get into trouble. It is a question of protecting not just our communities but those children. It is while under the influence of alcohol that most children are first exposed to drugs. This is an important issue, so I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will support my 10-minute Bill, which I shall introduce on 15 January.

I have a five-point plan to tackle street crime and antisocial behaviour that is very simple. First, we need more police officers on the street. That means not only more bobbies, but using those whom we already have more effectively, rather than their sitting in the police station doing their administration. They must have the new computer systems that will release them for policing duties on the streets.

We need police stations to be kept open longer, so that people have better access to the police. We need zero-tolerance policing, so that youngsters know where the firm lines are drawn. My police force in Essex has been talking about going out on the street with social workers to negotiate acceptable behaviour contracts with gangs of youngsters. I have never heard such nonsense. The House fixes what is acceptable behaviour and decides the laws of the land, and the police enforce those laws. Social workers should not be involved in this.

We want parents to take seriously their duties to control their youngsters and to know what they are doing. We want there to be more facilities to distract youngsters from bad behaviour. In my constituency, for example, the excellent Legacy XS is opening a new youth centre and a skateboard park. We owe it to youngsters to give them viable alternatives, so that they are kept out of trouble and we are kept safe.

I visited internally displaced people in the Burma jungle two weeks ago. I went over the border from Thailand, and I also visited the 20,000 refugees on that border. I have seen for myself the disaster taking place in Burma, which is getting worse by the day as Burma's economic problems worsen.

The Burmese military junta, the SPDC, has made some positive moves, such as releasing Aung San Suu Kyi from house arrest. Also, about 10 per cent. of political prisoners have been released, but that is a small first step in a long journey, and much remains to be done. There are still massive human rights abuses against ethnic peoples such as the Karen, the Shan, the Mon and the Chin.

I hope to secure an Adjournment debate in which I can tell the House about my visit to Burma. We can then debate the two key things that need to be done there. The matter has attracted great support in the House, as it does not involve party politics. First, we must review the gut-wrenchingly awful human rights abuses being carried out against the ethnic groups. We must get the international community to focus on them urgently.

Secondly, we need to debate the longer-term constitutional framework that will give justice and stability to the Burmese people. In that way, the problem of drugs from that country which affects Britain, of the drug money that funds terrorism around the world, and of the human rights abuses in Burma can be resolved permanently.

Homelessness is a problem in my constituency. I am meeting the chief executive of Castle Point borough council tomorrow to talk about the way in which homeless people in the area have been betrayed by the council's failure to deal with the problem. I expect to raise that issue in the House at a later date.

Finally, I want to talk about medals. Another Member spoke earlier about the need for a Suez medal, and I agree entirely. However, I want to raise a new matter in connection with medals.

Christmas is a time of good will. Will the Prime Minister consider awarding a campaign medal to recognise the service given and sacrifices made by the men who served in Polaris and hunter-killer submarines during the cold war? They maintained the peace for many years, but the people involved in the campaign have received no recognition. They were effectively on active deterrent patrol all year round, including at Christmas and the new year. A constituent of mine once left his wife over the new year to go on patrol, leaving her with one child aged five years, and one aged three days. There was no paternity leave for him, and I think that he deserves a medal. The Prime Minister had paternity leave so I hope that he will award a medal to reward those people. At this time, many of our service men and women are getting ready to fight for world freedom from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, and they go with our blessings and good wishes.

5.45 pm

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North): I will be brief and speak on only one subject. This may well be the last debate that we have before this country is at war over the situation in Iraq and the middle east. While we are spending a huge amount of time, effort and money in preparation for war, the entire population of the country is involved in various festivities that are supposed to be about peace and justice.

I reflected on that when I visited a local school last night. The Islington arts and media school had a wonderful Christmas celebration, in which children from every religion and no religion took part. They had recently celebrated Eid, Hanukah and Diwali, and now they were celebrating Christmas. They were happily working, playing and learning together. There is something very poignant about young people's preparedness to work together and to have some understanding of the way in which the world is set. Many are refugee children who have come from war-torn communities; they have seen brutality that one hopes never to see and suffered indignities that one hopes never to suffer in a lifetime. They give us great cause for hope.

The policies pursued by the United States, unfortunately with the very active and vocal support of this country, do not give us cause for hope. We received an application a few days ago from the United States

[Jeremy Corbyn]

asking us to join in national missile defence, and we have been requested to join them in a war against Iraq. I will deal with the latter point first.

No one in the House is a supporter of the Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein and all that it has done. Many in this House, myself included, opposed the sale of arms to Iraq in the mid-1980s and supported the right of Kurdish people to live in peace within Iraq's borders. Since that time, what has been the policy towards Iraq? During the war in 1991, it was to bomb the country using depleted uranium weapons among many others, creating the utmost terror and misery and causing many deaths. That was followed by a sanctions regime, which should have been restricted to military and financial sanctions that could have had some effect on the regime but which instead affected the ordinary, poorest people in Iraq, many of whom have suffered grievously. The death rate is very high as a result of the sanctions.

In the wake of 11 September, President George Bush named his axis of evil states and decided that Iraq had to be bombed and there had to be a war against it. He eventually went to the United Nations and Security Council resolution 1441 was passed. I submit that it does not give us the authority to go to war. What it does is to give weapons inspectors the authority to visit Iraq—or, rather, go back to Iraq, because they were withdrawn in 1998—and that is what we are doing. I find it quite extraordinary that when the Iraqi Government complied with the request that their dossier and inventory of weapons be produced within the due time—and it was, all 12,000 pages of it—and when it went to the United States to go to the UN headquarters, it was taken over by the US rather than the UN. Other UN member states were apparently given copies of the dossier, and a partial view of the US assessment of it.

It seems to me that the UN is being told by the United States that it does not really matter what the inspectors say or how successful they are in finding any alleged weapons of mass destruction and destroying them, because the focus is on going to war.

If there was seriousness about avoiding a war and about ensuring the success of the weapons inspection regime, why are so many troops being sent to the Gulf? Why is so much money being spent on preparations for war? Why does the US President constantly undermine any efforts to bring about a peaceful solution to the problem?

It is sad and extremely disappointing that the British Government are touring the world on behalf of the US and its putative war against Iraq and are apparently giving the US carte blanche to go to war. Many of us were not convinced by the statement made yesterday by the Secretary of State for Defence that there is to be a period of reflection on and consideration of Britain's involvement. If that is the case, why are reservists being called up? Why are so many preparations going ahead? Why is there such a high level of political and military preparation for war?

Many of us think that the US approach is deeply cynical. Like the UK, the US has always had a great interest in the middle east. Like this country, it has been involved in many coups over the years to impose regimes on countries in the region. I believe that the real motive behind the actions of the US is not democracy, peace, justice or human rights—it is all about the region's massive resources, especially the huge oil reserves in Iraq and other countries.

Throughout the world, many people believe that, fundamentally, the United States and Britain are going to war for oil, resources and military power, with no thought of the consequences in the region and of the number of people who will be killed—civilians in Iraq and elsewhere, and the soldiers of Iraq, Britain, the United States and other countries. In the end, the beneficiaries will be not the people of Iraq but those who have sold arms and those who are able to sell oil after the war.

We should stop now. We should support the weapons inspection regime, but we should pause and not get involved in a war. The consequences will be very serious indeed. A war will not bring about justice for the Palestinian people. It will not bring about human rights for the people of Saudi Arabia who are denied them. It will unleash other wars in the region and, above all, it will set the whole middle east and the whole Muslim and Arab world firmly against Europe and north America.

We are in the 21st century. We could bring about peace and justice but, instead, the Government produce a document entitled "Missile Defence: A Public Discussion Paper", which describes the protection of the United States from supposed missile attacks from the rest of the world. The US is the very country that is trying to abrogate and remove all the disarmament treaties of the past 30 years. In a world that is so deeply divided between rich and poor and between north and south, is it really sane for the world's richest and most powerful country to embark on this massive and probably unworkable experiment in national missile defence and involve us in it, too? Is it really sensible to go into the 21st century believing that an increased level of nuclear deterrence will bring peace to the world?

On 11 September last year, the United States suffered grievously when 3,000 people died in the attack on the World Trade Centre. The persons who committed those atrocities were unarmed; they took over planes with knives. They had skill and they were prepared to die because they believed that they were doing so for a cause. I have no time whatever for those who want to kill innocent civilians, but if we want to live in a peaceful world I am not convinced that going to war in Iraq, setting up national missile defence and labelling a series of states as an axis of evil—presumably in order to start a war in the future—is a sensible way forward.

The United States would be better advised by this country and others to get involved with the rest of the world, to support the Kyoto protocol and to attend the next earth summit—rather than ignoring it, as at Johannesburg. The US should sign up to a process that shares the wealth of the world rather than stealing it. Nothing angers people more in the poorest parts of the world, especially the middle east, when countries with huge rates of consumption which are ignorant of the reality of life for the poorest people in the world prosecute a war that seems to be intended to grab the resources of a region. At this time of the year—a time of peace and hope—I should have thought that we could

pause for a moment and think of the terrible consequences of a war with Iraq in the new year, with ordinary Iraqi people and soldiers dying.

The past few months have seen massive political changes around the world and the rebirth and rejuvenation of peace movements in this country and elsewhere. On 28 September, 400,000 people marched through the streets of London; a million have marched through Florence; and many thousands have marched in New York, Washington, California, all over Europe and in many parts of the world. A generation is growing up in the wealthy west who simply do not want the policies of widening the gap between rich and poor and of a war between the first world and the third world to continue in their lifetime. They want to see a world based on peace, justice and on legal and moral principles. This war is about none of those things; it is fundamentally about US commercial interests.

The Government are well aware of the views of many people. I hope that the fact that a lot of ordinary British people have been to a political meeting for the first time in their lives in the past year because they do not want a war carried out in their names will give them pause for thought. In that spirit, I hope that we have a peaceful Christmas. Above all, I hope that we have a peaceful new year.

5.56 pm

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam): I, too, wish to address a number of constituency matters. Even if the Minister cannot reply to them today, I hope that he will ensure that they are followed up by the relevant ministries.

First, I wish to pick up on a couple of comments made by others. The hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) talked about the long-running campaign to secure a medal for the Suez veterans of 1951–54. Hon. Members of all parties have campaigned on this issue. Earlier this year I was pleased to take part in a delegation to the then Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, who was conducting a review of the matter on behalf of the Prime Minister, and to urge him and his colleagues to look favourably on the compelling case that recognition should be given to those veterans by means of a medal. It is disappointing that since the review was announced and since that deputation, events have continued to drag and we still do not have a decision by the honours and decorations committee. I hope that the Minister can pass along the line to those conducting the review the fact that time is pressing and that they should honour those veterans while they are still alive.

The hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) commented on the daft repeal of legislation enabling the police to confiscate unopened alcohol containers. He is absolutely right to flag that issue. Alcohol definitely fuels antisocial behaviour. In terms of preventive policing, it beggars belief that the police were unable to confiscate sealed containers and could only take opened containers. When I raised that concern with the Home Secretary and the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety recently, I was told that the Government were now minded to reverse that change in the law to bring it back to the position which would allow the police to exercise the power of confiscation of sealed containers. Just two weeks ago I received in a letter the good news that the Licensing Bill will contain amendments to the law to give effect to that intention. That is welcome news.

The first constituency case that I want to raise concerns the operation of the blue badge disabled persons scheme. A number of my constituents have raised concerns about the regulations governing the scheme. In particular, Mrs. Jenny Herneman and Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, whose sons James and Cameron suffer from autistic spectrum disorder and who provide hours of love, care and support to them and to other children, have real problems with transport. Getting to and from the shops and transporting their sons safely to other places is very difficult and adds yet another obstacle and burden to their caring role. Walking is often not an option—not because of their children's physical impairment, but because of the challenging behaviour that they sometimes exhibit given the unpredictability that those conditions can result in—so they want to be part of the blue badge scheme for safety reasons.

That problem is not isolated: it is growing in my constituency and, I suspect, in those of many other hon. Members. Indeed, it prompted the local consultant community paediatrician, Dr. Benedicta Ogeah, to raise her concerns with Sutton council earlier this year, to clarify whether the regulations are flexible. It led me to write to the Department for Transport and, on 22 August, the Under-Secretary replied:

> "The eligibility criteria for a badge are governed by regulations laid before Parliament. Apart from blind people and those with severe upper limb disabilities, the key criterion to qualify for a badge is 'a permanent and substantial disability which causes inability to walk or very considerable difficulty in walking'. People with Asperger's Syndrome and similar conditions will only be eligible if their walking ability is also very seriously and permanently affected."

That is an unsatisfactory position, and it led me to table early-day motion 295, which attracted support from hon. Members on both sides of the House. That early-day motion calls on the Government to review the regulations to allow safety to be a consideration in circumstances such as those that I describe. I hope that the Minister will pass that serious concern on to the Department for Transport.

The second issue that I wish to raise relates to the television licence concessions that apply to sheltered housing schemes, particularly those in the public sector. I refer to the accommodation for residential care concessionary television licence scheme, following a case raised by my constituents, Mr. Daniel Davies and Mr. Freeman and others in Crown road in Sutton. The problem is that qualifying residents in sheltered schemes can lose their concessions if the level of warden provision, or the age or social mix in the scheme change.

The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has been reviewing that anomalous and unfair situation for some time now, and it has promised to introduce a preserved rights scheme to protect residents from those changes. In November 2001, I was told in a letter from the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting that consultation between the DCMS and officials at the BBC on the formulation of the necessary amendments to the television licence fee regulations were currently

[Mr. Paul Burstow]

under way. That is fair enough, but that was the position in April 2001—some six months before that letter was written—and it is still the case today, 12 months later.

Indeed, the Secretary of State told me in a letter dated 27 September:

"The structure of the proposed amending regulations is still under consideration."

Surely the time for consideration has come to an end. Surely regulations should be introduced so that those who live in sheltered housing are not concerned that the concession could be suddenly swept away by dint of a simple change in the administration of their sheltered housing scheme. I hope that the Minister will pass that on as well.

The final concern that I wish to raise relates to changes in the way in which the basic state pension will be collected from next year. The chief officer of my local branch of Age Concern in Sutton, Marion Harper, recently sent me a copy of her correspondence with Postwatch regarding that change. In effect, the pension book will be withdrawn in April 2003, and older people will be given two options to collect their pensions: opening a bank account with the universal bank, or using the Post Office's keypad facility with a personal identification number.

In her letter to Postwatch, Marion Harper said:

"We are very concerned about the entire concept of changes to pension collection, but we would welcome an explanation as to how the new system will affect older people with mobility problems, particularly arthritis and older people who are visually impaired or blind. Please inform us what measures have been considered for these groups of older people."

Postwatch's reply was very disturbing indeed, as it said:

"On the issue of difficulties that may be faced by older people, it will be possible for those people who have a regular carer to apply for an additional card and PIN number. This arrangement applies only to the Post Office Card Account.

Customers using a current account with a cheque book to collect their benefit can write a cheque for their carer to cash or, alternatively, they can provide a letter of authority to enable the carers to use a building society pass book to withdraw money from the account.

These arrangements apply to permanent carers/helpers. Despite the fact that we have persistently raised this issue with the Department of Work and Pensions, it is still not clear how collection of benefits by another person will be facilitated either where there is no regular carer or helper; or where the claimant has a Card Account and needs another person to collect the benefit suddenly. In these circumstances, the benefits recipient would need to give someone their card and secret PIN number, thus breaching the terms and conditions of the account.

A further point of clarification we are still seeking is the position of those people who are not able to use a PIN pad but who do not have a carer/ helper to collect their pensions for them."

With just three months to go before monumental changes are introduced that will impact on the lives of many thousands of pensioners in this country, it is a real cause for concern that details of that kind are not clear. I hope that the Minister will be able to assure us that the Department for Work and Pensions will work over Christmas and through the night to make sure that pensioners have this information, and that their carers and others can be assured that there will be secure ways in which they can gain access to their pensions.

In conclusion, I was heartened by the comments of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), especially about the opportunity that debates such as this provide to raise cases and concerns, and about how it is important that the Minister who replies, even if he does not have time to deal with all the matters raised, ensures that they are followed through. I look forward to receiving the results of that in relation to the cases that I have raised today. Like other hon. Members, I have many such constituency cases brought to my attention every year, and these few opportunities to raise them in the House are very precious.

I hope that the matters raised will be taken forward. I thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to make my brief remarks, and I pass on my best wishes for this season to you, to officers of the House, to hon. Members and, most importantly, to my constituents.

6.7 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Nobody knows better than you and the other occupants of the Chair, Madam Deputy Speaker, the importance of timing. Timing is critical in this House; it is important when somebody makes a killer intervention and in terms of the order in which Members speak. I am conscious, too, that the time that I take to make my remarks is important to a number of Opposition Back Benchers. I therefore promise that I shall try to ensure that the time that I take is commensurate with the importance of the subject matter with which I must deal.

When the Government produce a Green Paper two days before the winter recess, one can tell that the timing is critical—and not by chance. The Green Paper on pensions is about timing because nothing is more important than the time at which we choose to get involved in preparing a pension for our future and for our future well-being in retirement. The savings gap in this country is £27 billion. It has been estimated that every person in this country—pre-retirement—needs to save an extra £1,400 per year to prepare adequately for retirement. The timing issue that I wish to put to the Minister, however, is one that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions did not answer the other day.

The Secretary of State announced many important things including the review to be conducted by Adair Turner into compulsion. He did not, however, announce the time scale for that review, which is absolutely critical, because we have waited long enough in this House to deal with compulsion once and for all. There cannot be many sensible financial commentators in this country who believe that we can continue with a voluntary system to prepare our population adequately for their old age, and that we can prepare for a decent pension in old age without compulsion. I am not suggesting that work will not be done on the matter or that the report that Adair Turner and the members of his commission will produce will not be valuable. However, the work is urgent and the timing is critical, and I urge the Government to make an announcement as to when it will take place.

The fact that a Green Paper is published two days before the Christmas recess means that it will not be given the full blazon of publicity by the Government, but the fact that the Cabinet Office's "Game Plan:

A Strategy for Delivering Government Sport and Physical Activity Objectives" has been published on the final day before the recess—19 December—is a clear sign of contempt for the document. The document relates to some of the most important and fundamental issues facing all Departments, not just the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. For it to have been published today and for it not to have reached the Table Office until just before 1 o'clock so that hon. Members did not even have the chance to read it properly before this debate is a great pity.

Fortunately, I have spent many hours waiting to contribute to the debate, and I have had the chance to peruse the document with some care. I shall therefore consider some of the issues that it raises. My first point relates to the elements that it has failed to address altogether. We will not have the fundamental change in participation in sport and physical activity that the document argues for until we take seriously the issue of making it a statutory obligation upon local authorities to make provision for sport, physical activity and leisure services in the area under their jurisdiction. The fact that that question has been fudged in the document—it is not even mentioned, as far as I can see—means that the document cannot deliver to the time scales that it has set for what it wishes to achieve.

The document also fails to extend the powers of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to call in the development or sale of private playing fields. I welcome the moves that the Government took at the beginning of their period of office. Before then, playing fields were being sold off at the rate of 40 a month. The figure has now fallen to two a month, and I welcome that. It is a tremendous decrease, and I know that even those two a month are examined extremely carefully, but the Secretary of State should have been given increased powers to call in the development or sale of private playing fields.

From what I can tell in the time that I have had to peruse the document, it also fails to use the tax system to incentivise people to invest in their health. Small and medium-sized businesses should be able to provide their employees with tax-free gym membership. VAT on personal fitness equipment could also be reduced, as a way of incentivising individuals and businesses to get people engaged in physical activity.

Timing is critical. When a Department produces a 223-page document in which the targets it sets for achieving the goals is 2020—in 18 years' time—and it does not specify the individual medium-term targets on the way to that goal, that is another clear sign that it does not expect to be held to account for what it says it wishes to deliver. That is a great pity. What the document wants to deliver is commendable. It sets out a participation target among the population of 70 per cent., but that is by 2020. It is vital that we have key stages along that route to define exactly what medium-level physical activity and extensive physical activity constitute so that we know what the Government are trying to achieve at each stage and how they measure up against delivery.

If timing is important, then so is structure. One of the most important and radical things that the document does is to look seriously at the delivery mechanism of the Government and their capability to deliver what they want to achieve within the current structure. It is not possible within a departmental system of government to deliver many of the policies that we wish to achieve. That is particularly the case in sport. Sport does not just have an impact on the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; many of the most profound impacts of participating in sport come under the mantle of the Department of Health. The National Audit Office has shown that the cost of obesity to the country is approximately £2 billion each year, some £0.5 billion of which is a direct cost to the national health service.

This country spends £1 a head on sport and physical activity per year. We spend more than £800 a head on our national health service per year. The imbalance is blindingly obvious. If we take £10 out of the £800 and add it to the £1, the preventive medical benefits of engaging in sport to combat obesity, coronary heart disease and diabetes are clear. It would save the Government money instead of costing them money. But a departmental system of government cannot deliver that because it has to focus on this year's departmental targets. A Department would have to say, "If we take this £10 and give it to another Department to achieve its objectives, can we actually show that we are going to match up to the short and medium-term targets that our Department has been set?" Of course the answer would often be no. The same thing happens in the Home Office. It realises the benefits of sport and of engaging young people in physical activity, but it cannot deliver through sport because that is not part of its remit. Home Office targets are not seen to be met by putting money into sport.

The document contains an important initiative. It recommends establishing SPAB, a cross-departmental sport and physical activity board, to pull together out of all the Departments—the Department for Education and Skills, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Office, the DCMS and the Department of Health—the resources necessary to invest in our sporting infrastructure. So we have the beginnings of lateral thinking about the straitjacket that the Government have got themselves into for years. Through departmental funding and short and medium-term target-setting, we cannot create across Government a body dedicated to delivering many of our policy initiatives. I hope that the document will not have a lifespan of just four hours of parliamentary debate this afternoon. If it is to achieve its goals by 2020, we must wish it much more discussion and a better wind than that.

I have spoken about time. There is perhaps no more moving or eloquent treatise on time than in the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the prophet teaches that there is a time to be born and a time to die. Earlier this week my good friend and constituency neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley) issued a public statement advising that following recent surgery, doctors had advised him that he had only a short time to live.

Paul has devoted his life to serving the people of Brent. In the council and in Parliament he has constantly battled to improve their lives. Too often in life, we fail to say thank you to people before the time is too late. With characteristic bravery, Paul is publicly facing up to the doctors' diagnosis. We wish them to be wrong. We wish Paul more time, but I could not let this

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

opportunity pass to let him know and to state publicly the depth of love and respect that the people of our borough of Brent bear him for all that he has given to us.

6.21 pm

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): May I tell the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) that that sentiment is shared throughout the House, and particularly on the Conservative Benches?

I should like to raise the case of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' quinquennial review of Horticulture Research International, its effect on the HRI station at Efford in my constituency and the effect that it would have on jobs. Clearly, the team at Efford impressed those conducting the quinquennial review. The review's conclusions relating to Efford state:

"Efford has an inspirational site manager who is taking active steps to remove the deficit and seek new income sources within the capability of the site. Although we consider that closure may be the best option financially, we recommend that Efford should receive the opportunity to consult with the local grower industry and scientific community about new income opportunities as an alternative to closure".

The inspirational site manager mentioned is Mr. Ray Tucker, who has an excellent support staff in his work force. He enjoys support from the local industry, as I know from a number of horticulturists who have written to me. There is, however, a problem. Inspirational management is important, as is the quality of the work force and the support of industry, but resources are also needed. Mr. Tucker cannot be expected to manage existing projects very well, and at the same time to go out and find additional sources of income—to market Efford.

I use the word "cannot" loosely, because clearly Mr. Tucker is doing that, and doing so sufficiently well as to have produced the complimentary reference in the report. However, if Efford is to be given its chance to make itself viable, it needs to develop the business by acquiring an additional manager to manage projects, so that Mr. Tucker can get out there and win the business for Efford. I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to raise with Lord Whitty the possibility of allowing Efford to recruit such a person, notwithstanding the current moratorium that the Department has placed on HRI. I hope that the Minister will be able to meet me, and perhaps Mr. Tucker, to discuss the matter.

6.24 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): I begin by echoing the comments of other hon. Members in wishing you, Madam Deputy Speaker, your staff and all Officers of the House a very happy Christmas. I thank you for your kindness and courtesy over the past 12 months.

This has been a wonderful year for our country. We have celebrated the golden jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. It has been a national celebration and I congratulate everybody in the country who organised street parties and celebrations to commemorate this momentous year in the history of our country. I was privileged to attend 50 golden jubilee events in my constituency of Romford. We should be proud of this wonderful year that we have celebrated. Long may Her Majesty reign over us.

I wish to raise one or two constituency issues—I shall be brief because I am aware of the short amount of time left. Hon. Members may have witnessed my question to the Prime Minister yesterday, when I asked him why his constituency of Sedgefield will receive an increase in local government grant that is nearly three times as much as the increase received by the London borough of Havering—Havering's increase is 3.5 per cent. and Sedgefield's is 8.9 per cent. The Prime Minister failed to answer.

As the hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) and my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) will confirm, Havering has been short-changed for many years under both Governments. That is borne out by a multitude of published figures. We are suffering in many other ways, too. Collier Row police station in my constituency has been closed, and we lost a fire engine from Hornchurch.

We are also suffering through a lack of funding through central Government, which must be addressed. Many pensioners are concerned at the prospect of losing their free bus pass. I support the Freedom pass, which should be extended throughout the United Kingdom to allow all pensioners to travel freely. It would give them something back in their later years for paying their taxes all their lives and fighting for their country. They deserve better than they are getting, and I would argue with anyone who suggested that the free bus pass should be removed.

Finally, in this golden jubilee year, why can we not fly the Union flag all year round from the Houses of Parliament, as her Majesty does from Buckingham palace when she is not in residence? It is a disgrace that Portcullis House's flagpole has not been used since the building was opened. In 2003 can we please see the flag of our country flying throughout the year to show that Members of the United Kingdom Parliament are proud of our heritage, our history and our nation?

6.28 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I shall use my two minutes wisely and join my hon. Friend the Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) in wishing everybody a happy Christmas. I have five issues to raise in my two minutes.

The misuse of fireworks is a big issue in my constituency, and I look forward to the private Member's Bill of the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) making progress in the year ahead.

Post office closure is another major issue. More than 7,000 people in Edinburgh, West signed my petition to fight for the retention of the local post offices. Most of those are in urban areas, but there are also problems in rural communities where, because of the uncertainty of the post offices' future income, it is difficult to know whether postmasters and postmistresses will be able to take over the businesses.

On Iraq, I congratulate the hon. Member for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) on his passionate speech, to which I would only add that there is no hurry to move ahead with military action. Liberal Democrat Members have previously mentioned the need for a debate on this issue in the House, but we must let the weapons inspectors do their job.

The remaining two issues are not so much constituency as global matters. The first is the food crisis in southern Africa. While we are enjoying our Christmas dinners, people in Africa are about to experience another famine. Eritrea is now experiencing pre-famine conditions. On top of that, it faces the scourge of AIDS. These people are the most vulnerable in the world today and the best Christmas present that they could get would be for the international community to respond, feed them, lift them out of poverty and ensure that next Christmas, they will be able to feed themselves.

6.29 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Without hesitation, deviation or repetition, I, too, give my best wishes for the season to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to the Officers of the House. I had hoped to address the House in relation to phoenix traders, but I shall simply mention the issue in the hope that a little bit of Christmas magic might rub off in the Adjournment debate ballots in the new year.

There is one pressing matter that I should like to bring to Floor of the House, which caused me considerable distress when I came across a report about it yesterday in *The Scotsman*, and I hope that the Minister will raise the issue with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry. It appears that somebody going by the name of Professor Eckhard Weidner of a place apparently called Bochum university has developed instant powdered whisky. I have to say that I am shocked and bereft at that development. Such a thing can only be regarded as an abomination.

I shall be spending Christmas in Orkney in my constituency, where we have Highland Park and Scapa, two of the finest single malt whiskies. Thereafter, I shall be on Islay with my parents, where there are no fewer than eight magnificent single malt whiskies. Can we have assurances from the Department of Trade and Industry that that is the proper sort of dram with which to celebrate Hogmanay, and that we will have none of these powdered abominations?

6.31 pm

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): I should like to begin by saying that we were shocked to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) about his colleague, the hon. Member for Brent, East (Mr. Daisley). We were not aware of those details and our thoughts are with him and his family at this difficult time. I am sure that I speak not only for my party, but for the others whose Members sit on the Opposition Benches.

We have had a very wide-ranging, constructive and good-natured debate, which I think has shown the House at its best. Before I refer to what others have said, however, I should like to raise one issue of my own, harking back to a theme that has featured in many of the speeches: the Government's road policy.

Both this week and last, the Secretary of State for Transport announced a number of changes to his policy, which some say smacked of a U-turn. I welcome his announcements. The Opposition feel that they are too little, too late, but I do not want to take up time by making party political points. The Government are now moving in the right direction. Although I thought that it was disgraceful that no road schemes were included for East Yorkshire, I was heartened by what the Transport Secretary had to say towards the end of his statement last week when he told us that further studies would look at corridors in a number of areas, including "through Yorkshire".

I can therefore live in hope. In particular, I hope that the transport team will look at the inadequacies of both the A614 and the A165, which run through my constituency. As the Minister may know, the A614 is the main route from the motorway network to the north-east's premier seaside resort, Bridlington, which I have the honour of representing, and it is badly in need of widening. In addition, on some stretches of that road—including, for example, where it passes through the village of Middleton-on-the-Wolds—a bypass is long overdue. I do not expect the Minister who is winding up the debate to give me a snap answer, but I ask him to pass on to the Transport Secretary my genuine concerns about the need to upgrade those two roads.

Hon. Members in all parts of the House have raised many issues. If I may, I should like to comment on only some of them, as I do not have much time. The hon. Member for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) made an effective attack on the Lib Dem administration running Hull council, but he cannot claim the high ground on that issue, because of his party's murky record in running the same authority. An effective council leadership is in the interests of the future of Kingston-upon-Hull. That is yet to happen.

My hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) made a somewhat intemperate speech by his standards. He was clearly angry, but he made an effective case. I advise any Conservative campaigner to buy today's *Hansard* and read my hon. Friend's contribution before going canvassing. It was a tour de force. I understand why my hon. Friend is not present to hear the winding-up speeches. Anyone who knows him realises that when he is absent from the Chamber, he is in his constituency.

Morecambe and Lunesdale is a long way from Sutton Coldfield and the hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) painted a rather different picture. She initially presented a rose-tinted view of life in the UK under new Labour, but as she developed her case, I was heartened by the criticisms of her party that she introduced into her speech. Conservative Members appreciate her frankness. She said that transport was a disaster, and she is right. She said that farmers were having a terrible time and again she is right. She was also right to say that guesthouse owners were having a bad time. If she never makes it to new Labour's Front Bench, her willingness to tell the unvarnished truth will be the reason.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) broke his vow of silence as a Chief Whip and gave us his views on several issues. I was intrigued by his recollections of early Liberal pension policy under which it appears that the police clubbed over-eager pensioners on the head. He did not say whether that

[Mr. Greg Knight]

remained Liberal Democrat policy, although those of us who have studied his tax policy know that it would clobber us all.

Mr. Stunell: I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that it is not party policy.

Mr. Knight: At least not this week. I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's work on the Modernisation Committee, on which we both serve. I support his comments about a visitor centre, but those who campaign for it should appreciate that the House is, first and foremost, a working building. Space on the parliamentary estate is at such a premium that the more I look into the matter, the more I perceive an overwhelming case for a visitor centre outside it. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees. The House of Commons Commission is considering the matter.

The hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) made a serious, detailed and thorough contribution. His allegations clearly warrant a full investigation. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will respond positively to his speech.

My hon. Friend the Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) told us about the dire predicament of the national health service in his constituency. The problem is not confined to his region. East Yorkshire also has difficulties, which I am trying to resolve. Ministers need to take action, and I hope that the health team will receive a full report of my hon. Friend's remarks.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) mentioned flooding. He may not know it, but he could have prayed in aid the report of the Institution of Civil Engineers, which stated that Government policy was inadequate and piecemeal and that spending on flood defences should be doubled. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary will pass on my hon. Friend's concerns to DEFRA. I also hope that, in view of clearly changing weather patterns, the Government will accept that more needs to be done.

The hon. Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) had the courtesy to tell me that he would not be present for the winding-up speeches because he had to be back in his constituency. He raised some serious concerns about Wandsworth prison. The Home Office needs to examine those matters.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) expressed her congratulations on and enthusiasm for the Government's transport U-turn. I hope that that enthusiasm is not premature, that further road-building programmes will be announced and that the Government will consider a number of new, innovative schemes to tackle congestion that are not necessarily anti-motorist. They could consider the example of the United States, which is taking the lead in that area. On health, we were pleasantly surprised by my hon. Friend's willingness to audition for the Hattie Jacques role in "Carry on Matron". We shall watch her next move in that regard with interest.

The hon. Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) made an interesting contribution. He spoke about vandalism on and around the tube. All Members are with him in being against such behaviour, but he moved on to vandalism of another type—nationalisation without compensation, of which he is in favour. At that point, he lost the support of this side of the House. Although we cannot agree with everything he said, he made a number of points about the need for people to feel safe when they travel on the tube if we are to attract more passengers to it. If he decides to spurn the tube during the Christmas recess, get his Armstrong Siddley car out of the garage and drive north to East Yorkshire, he will be most welcome to call at the Knight residence.

Jeremy Corbyn: How about filling up the car for the journey back?

Mr. Knight: I will not do that, because I know what it does to the gallon.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) made an interesting point about parish councils, which has been brought to my attention as well. The new rules are too heavy-handed. I hope that the Government, in the same spirit in which they are reconsidering road building, may be prepared to look again at the rules covering parish councils. In my constituency, at least two people have resigned because they feel that the new rules are too intrusive. I wholeheartedly agree with my hon. Friend's comments on broadband, which is essential if rural areas are to be able to compete with urban.

The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter), who is a rare but welcome free spirit on the Government Benches, called for effective implementation of deterrent sentencing and a more visible police presence. We can agree with him on that. He certainly struck a chord on the Opposition Benches, not only in those remarks but in what he had to say about over-regulation. He referred to over-regulation in the NHS producing a result that none of us wants, but that is not confined to the NHS. For example, I understand that if a speaker—part of the public address system—fails in one railway carriage, the Health and Safety Executive takes the train off the track and it cannot be run until the speaker is repaired. That is mindless over-regulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) referred to truancy. I can say one thing with certainty: he is never a truant from these Adjournment debates and we look forward to the wide-ranging contributions that he makes on behalf of his constituents. If someone had listened to his opening remarks and then left the Chamber, they would have a different impression from the rest of us of what he was saying. He started talking about the Swedish model and ended up talking about the breeding season. In between, he raised a number of important constituency matters.

I have heard only one speech by the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst), and I was not sure whether I would agree with much of what he had to say today. However, I was pleasantly surprised to agree with him on all four issues that he raised: the need for road improvements, the problems of pig farming, the unfair power that supermarkets have over prices and lax labelling provisions that often do not allow the British housewife to know whether she is buying a product produced in Britain. I have personal knowledge of restaurants not only not disclosing where food is from, but sometimes deliberately mislabelling it as local to encourage customers to order it.

I have only one other matter to raise before the Minister gets to his feet. I remind him and the House of the words said by Benjamin Disraeli to a constituent on 24 December 1869, with which I associate myself: merry Christmas.

6.45 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): Like all pre-recess Adjournment debates, this one has been wide-ranging and highly educational. We have heard of issues ranging from continuing concern about the situation in Burma to the problem of badgers in the constituency of the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess), which has forced a conversion in the hon. Gentleman's opinion.

I am afraid that because of the time limit I shall not be able to respond to all Members. I am grateful, in advance, for the tolerance of those to whom I cannot respond. I had 50 minutes in which to speak before the summer recess and I have only 15 now, so Members will get less at the Dispatch Box and more in writing; but I will try not to make the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) wait six months for a response, which was the treatment meted out to her before. I shall try to ensure that all Members are given timely responses.

As is traditional in these debates, some Members concentrated on constituency matters while others took the opportunity to highlight particular interests that would not usually have an airing, or discussed the broad sweep of politics and the state of the nation—and, indeed, the world. Some ranged over all three subjects. These debates always provide a good indication of the amount of interest in particular issues. I shall try to respond to Members in order of the number of issues raised in relation to their chosen subjects. It will not surprise most to learn that health was raised most often.

The hon. Member for Gosport (Mr. Viggers) described the state of the NHS as dire. He is not usually given to hyperbole, and that is not a description I recognise or, I think, one that my constituents would recognise. Despite the huge challenges facing the NHS, all the research shows, all the opinion polls show and most of our local newspapers show that the vast majority of people feel they are receiving a very good service. It needs to improve, of course, which is why we are investing in it. Some of the other issues raised by Members illustrate the importance of ensuring that reform accompanies that investment.

The hon. Gentleman raised specific issues about his local foot care services, Haslar hospital and the March meeting. I will ensure that he receives a response. I will also ensure that a response is given to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew), who mentioned the problem at Good Hope hospital.

The hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton mentioned hospital-acquired infections. We have suffered one in our local hospital, a three-star hospital which I hope the hon. Lady will agree is excellent. During the debate I have managed to find out that the infection she referred to is not connected with hygiene. I do not want to go into the details, because they are rather gruesome, but it is airborne. Anyway, I agree with the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight) that the hon. Lady will make an excellent matron, when they come back.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hornchurch (John Cryer) spoke of the shortage of young GPs in his constituency. That is a problem in many areas, partly because it takes five years to train a doctor and the last Government cut training numbers. We have set up two medical schools, the first to be set up since the 1960s. Moreover, I think that I am right in saying that funds for my hon. Friend's primary care trust will increase by more than 30 per cent. over the next three years, so I hope he will soon see an improvement.

A number of Members referred to the problem of finding NHS dentists. The Government are aware of the problem. We have committed an extra £100 million to NHS dentistry in the last two years. The number of dentists has risen in the past year, and it has risen significantly since September 1997. I accept, however, that much more needs to be done.

The hon. Member for Southend, West said that his experiences with a Swedish model might help the Government come to the right decision on delayed discharges. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman feed his experiences into the Bill currently going through the House.

What emerged from the speeches about the health service is the fact that there is still a wide and unacceptable variation in care standards from one hospital to another—the two may not be far from each other—and between primary care trusts. That shows that, at the same time as providing extra resources, it is important that we ensure good management and quality of care, so that there is no inequality of treatment.

The next most popular issue that hon. Members raised was transport. That is not surprising, as these debates are a great opportunity for Members to refer to their pet transport schemes. I am afraid that I do not intend to go through all of them, much as I am tempted to do so, because I do not have the time, but I shall ensure that hon. Members receive responses to their points.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (Geraldine Smith) thought that delivery on transport was the area on which the Government have made least progress. I agree with her: she is absolutely right. I do not want to rehearse the reasons for that, as they have been much rehearsed in recent days, not least in the statements that the Secretary of State for Transport has given to the House. We have committed £180 billion over the next 10 years, and we are only 18 months into that 10-year plan. I remind hon. Members that we are the only major economy in the developed world that has increased public spending on the whole gamut of public services. Labour and Liberal Democrat Members who constantly ask for extra spending should sometimes recognise that fact.

I shall get the Department to respond regarding the individual schemes mentioned by the hon. Members for Tiverton and Honiton and for Southend, West, my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) and the right hon. Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight).

Crime was the third most popular issue raised. The remarks of the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) would lead people to believe that crime has not fallen more than 20 per cent. since 1997, which it has. This is the first incoming Government since the

[Mr. Ben Bradshaw]

second world war who have got crime down. Police numbers nationally—not in every part of the country, but certainly in my area—are at record levels.

My hon. Friends the Members for Morecambe and Lunesdale and for Hornchurch, and the hon. Members for Southend, West and for Castle Point (Bob Spink) raised specific concerns about crime and antisocial behaviour in their areas. I am sure that they are aware of the legislation being introduced on antisocial behaviour, the criminal justice system, the courts and sentencing system and licensing, all of which should have a positive impact on those problems. I hope that those hon. Members will feed their views in to the consultation on those Bills as they go through the House.

My hon. Friend the Member for Tooting (Mr. Cox) made an excellent and well-informed speech about the problems facing Wandsworth prison and prison overcrowding in general. I shall ensure that he receives a comprehensive response from the Home Office to the points that he made.

The issue of pensions was raised by the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield, who to my surprise, and probably to the surprise of most Members of the House, said that under the Tories our pension system was the envy of Europe. Tell that to the 3 million or more pensioners who were living in poverty when Labour came to power. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) asked when Adair Turner's review would be completed. I am afraid that I do not know the answer to that, but I shall find out and let him know. He also made a number of points about physical exercise with which I fully concur.

There were the usual complaints about bad councils. We should sometimes stand back and congratulate our councillors, most of whom do a good job and work hard for little material gain. Most councils do a good job, but it is right that poor councils should be named and shamed. That is exactly what the Government are doing. My hon. Friends the Members for Hull, North (Mr. McNamara) and for Islington, North (Jeremy Corbyn) are right to complain about their local Liberal Democrat-run councils, because they have both been officially designated as poor under our recent comprehensive performance assessment. The best remedy for the voters of Hull and Islington is to make their feelings plain at the next local elections.

The hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell), my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North and the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) rightly referred to the international situation. The hon. Member for Hazel Grove repeated the Liberal Democrats' demand, which we recently debated in the House and which was overwhelmingly rejected, that there must be a new vote before any military action is taken. The Government have made their position clear: that is our preference, but it is the safety of the men and women in our armed forces that is of paramount importance. No Government have entered into a commitment such as the Liberal Democrats are demanding, and no Government ever would.

I like my hon. Friend the Member for Islington, North very much, but I fundamentally disagree with him on the Iraq issue. I hope that he can agree with me that it is important that we support the United Nations process, the work of the inspectors, and the integrity of the UN and its resolutions, and that perhaps occasionally we could congratulate the Government on securing resolution 1441, which makes solving this problem peacefully far more likely.

A number of hon. Members raised individual constituency issues to which I shall get the relevant Departments to respond. The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Atkinson) mentioned a local flooding problem that affects mobile homes. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) discussed the proposed closure of a post office in his constituency; my hon. Friend the hon. Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) talked about problems with trading schemes; the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) discussed the closure of an airport in his constituency; the hon. Member for New Forest, West (Mr. Swayne) spoke about the problems facing Horticulture Research International at Efford, in his constituency; the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) spoke about a number of problems affecting his constituency; my hon. Friend the Member for Walthamstow (Mr. Gerrard) mentioned the loophole, as he sees it, in the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, and spoke about changes to the asylum rules; and in drawing on his great length and breadth of experience, my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) made some very interesting points about corporate governance. I will ensure that all those issues are drawn to the attention of the Departments concerned, and I hope that Members will forgive me if I have not managed to answer them in detail. *[Interruption.]* I apologise for not managing to respond to all the specific points that were raised.

The hon. Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) made what sounded to me like a series of demands for more money; well, he should talk to the shadow Chancellor about that. I should remind the hon. Gentleman that local government spending has risen by 25 per cent. under this Government, and that it was cut by 6 per cent. under the Major Government. Perhaps he needs to let his constituents know about that.

At this time of year, and particularly during the Christmas adjournment, it is right that we stand back and contemplate the state of the nation and, indeed, of the world. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield described himself as a Victor Meldrew figure, but that was not fair. He is not nearly as old as Victor Meldrew; however, his litany of complaints did somewhat remind me of Victor. I should point out to the Opposition that simply repeating that everything in Britain is a disaster does not get us very far in our political discourse. It is simply not true; indeed, the latest opinion polls show that, were there a general election today, the hon. Gentleman's party would return even fewer Members than it returned only 18 months ago, when it was brutally rejected by the electorate.

A much fairer and more accurate assessment was given by my hon. Friend the Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale, who talked about the improvements that her constituents have experienced. In doing so, she admitted that there is a lot still to do, and that is absolutely true. My hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) said that we should ask

whether the lives of our constituents have improved, and with one or two exceptions, he answered with a resounding yes.

I have discovered that part of the job of a politician, and particularly of a Minister, is being a permanent optimist. As politicians, we should all believe in the possibility of improving our country and the way in which it is run. I used to wonder whether I was the only person who woke up in the morning to give thanks for the fact that we live now, and not in a previous age—until I read the bumper Christmas and new year edition of *The Spectator*, which is no supporter of, or sympathiser with, this Government. I was delighted to read an article by Mr. Harry Mount entitled "The Blessings of Britain". He urges us to stop moaning, and lists the 26 things that we should be grateful for. I should say that some of them are rather idiosyncratic, and that I myself am not grateful for them; however, he is, so I am happy.

At Christmas, it is indeed sometimes worth standing back and thinking of some things that we can be grateful for. For example, we can be grateful for the fact that we live in a freer and more tolerant society than anyone else on these wonderful islands has ever lived in; and for the fact that, to quote a former Conservative Prime Minister,

"most of our people have never had it so good."

In wishing you and everyone else a merry Christmas, Madam Deputy Speaker, I should say that I hope that, when we go back to our constituencies, we will raise a toast to celebrate some of those things with genuine Orkney and Shetland Isles whisky, and certainly not with the outrageous white powder, instant imitation that is being produced in Bochum.

Education Funding

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Joan Ryan.]*

6.59 pm

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): I am enormously grateful for the opportunity to raise this important matter again in the House. In this season of good will it is right that I should follow the example set by hon. Members in the previous debate and wish a happy Christmas to all those present in the Chamber, and to all those beyond who have served hon. Members so well in the past year.

Not everything is bad in Worcestershire. Our police, fire, and social services, as well as our schools, may all be underfunded, and our hospitals may be at breaking point, but tomorrow morning will find me at the opening of the Wyre Piddle bypass. That road is a great Christmas present to my constituents from this Government and, specifically, from the hon. Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), whom I am delighted to see in his place. I thank him publicly once again for that road, and I thank his ministerial successor for the money to begin the other crucial link in the strategic route from junction 6 of the M5 to Evesham, known as the Squires link. For that, the Government have my sincere thanks. After all, this is the season good will.

But—and there is a but—the education spending settlement announced two weeks ago was nowhere near as welcome as those two roads. This debate is about giving Worcestershire's children an equal opportunity to succeed, and that is what they are being denied.

I am grateful for the presence in the Chamber of my hon. Friends the Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) and for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer), and of the Minister of State, Department of Health, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith). It is good to see them here. I know that the hon. Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) wanted to be here, but he chose today to move home. Anyone foolish enough to move six days before Christmas deserves our sympathy, not our condemnation. In any case, he is a Parliamentary Private Secretary in the Minister's Department, so he could not have spoken in the debate. That is a shame, as I should have liked to hear what he had to say—but that will happen another day.

The hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) had hoped to be here, but now finds that he cannot. In a letter of apology to me yesterday, he wrote:

"All I want is the truth stated using comparable figures. If you can get this you really will have achieved something."

I am indeed in search of the truth, and my colleagues and I will listen carefully to what the Minister says in his speech later.

Of course, we acknowledge that there have been real-terms increases in funding for education across the country. The golden economic inheritance of this Government from their Conservative predecessor made that possible. However, this debate is not about how much more Worcestershire may or may not have got in absolute terms. It is about the county's position in the funding table relative to other similar and neighbouring education authorities.

[Mr. Peter Luff]

I welcome today's announcement on capital for access measures, but I am concerned about revenue—the year-on-year funding for the education that our children need.

This debate must also be set in the wider context of the extraordinary demands placed on teachers, across the country and in Worcestershire. Local teachers feel under great pressure. As Heather Staite, who works at St. Egwins middle school in Evesham, said to me:

"Schools are not given enough time or resources or money to 'implement' all the strategies that they are bombarded with."

That is the subject of another debate on another day. Critically—and it is the central reason for this debate—Worcestershire has continued and looks set to continue, to get less than its fair share of national increases in education funding. For schools in Worcestershire, a 4.2 per cent. increase per pupil is basically a standstill budget. With the employers' national insurance contribution increase coming into effect from April next year, the upper pay scale 2 payments and a likely teachers' pay settlement in excess of 2.5 per cent.—some say it will be as high as 3.5 per cent.—Worcestershire will end up with something very close to zero in real terms.

All that is in complete contradiction to the assurances given by the former Secretary of State, then the Schools Standards Minister, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris). Replying to a debate initiated by my hon. Friend the Member for West Worcestershire, she said:

"I cannot in all honesty explain why children in Worcestershire get less money than children in Wiltshire . . . the system is irrational . . . It is a historic system, which does not serve us well."

Later, she added:

"I am not seeking to defend a formula that ill serves the children of Worcestershire—that would be dishonourable and dishonest. I am saying that we are trying our best, with all reasonable speed, to change that. We are the Government who have given a pledge that that will change."—[*Official Report*, 1 February 2001; Vol. 362, c. 562–564.]

In a debate that I initiated on 24 October 2001 in Westminster Hall, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis) said that

"the Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions has . . . now clearly committed itself to introducing a fairer formula on 1 April 2003. That is not a possibility or an aspiration but an unequivocal commitment that there will be a new, fairer and more even SSA formula not only for education, but for local government generally. It will make a significant difference to the hon. Gentleman's constituents and to mine."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 24 October 2001; Vol. 373, c. 128WH.]

In fact, the gap between Worcestershire and Wiltshire—and between Worcestershire and all the counties and metropolitan authorities bordering it—has grown.

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): My hon. Friend makes a vital point about the growing gap between expenditure in Worcester and in comparable counties. Does he accept that the effect is beginning to be felt, certainly in my constituency? School sports and drama facilities are now worse in many cases than those of comparable counties nearby. That is a direct result of the gap that my hon. Friend has so brilliantly described.

Mr. Luff: My hon. Friend is entirely right and, if time permits, I will cite some examples of what that has meant for individual schools later in my remarks.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I do not want to interrupt my hon. Friend's flow, but I want the Minister to understand that it is not just a question of comparing us with the shire counties. My constituency abuts Birmingham and many head teachers in my constituency who have worked there tell me that they had so much money in Birmingham that they did not know where to spend it. We have 4.2 per cent. and Birmingham is getting 7 per cent. on top of an already much bigger budget, which gives high schools in excess of £500 per pupil per year extra. I should be grateful if my hon. Friend would take that into account in his excellent speech on which I congratulate him.

Mr. Luff: I will be dealing specifically with the Birmingham question later. However, my hon. Friend is right—the comparison with Birmingham is becoming very difficult to sustain or justify.

The pledges that the Government made in debates in the Chamber and in Westminster Hall have been broken. Worcestershire has been awarded a 4.2 per cent. increase in funding per pupil. The average for the shire counties was 4.4 per cent. For England as a whole it was 5.2 per cent., for Gloucestershire—our neighbour—5 per cent., for Warwickshire 7 per cent. and for Birmingham and Dudley also 7 per cent. As Worcestershire was not getting much to begin with, that means that the cash gap between us and the English average will have increased, not reduced as Ministers promised. Worcestershire is now 33rd out of 34 counties on education funding per pupil.

Today's debate has been made more complicated by the introduction of the new formula, which makes comparisons with past settlements more difficult to draw. So let us remind ourselves what the new formula was supposed to achieve—stability, simplicity, robustness and, most importantly, fairness.

The new system will prove to be unstable. It is amazing that a new formula has had to have such floors and ceilings in it to slow the amount of change that it is generating. This will lead to a clamour from the winners to remove the ceilings. Bradford should have had an increase of £21 million, but it got £14 million. It feels short-changed to the tune of £7 million. Similar considerations apply to Birmingham. Because of the way that it is made up, the winners will continue to have their position reinforced year on year. No one knows what the long-term effects of the system will be.

As for simplicity, I challenge the Minister, even with his considerable intellectual skills, to stand up in front of a group of parents, governors and teachers and explain in, say, 15 minutes, exactly how the new formula works. He would have to explain, for example, how income support interacts with the working families tax credit, and its successor in the spring, as a deprivation indicator; what met and unmet educational needs are; why, in meeting these needs, the Government have gone

for the medium threshold when the F40 group sent 53,000 letters asking for the high threshold; why Worcestershire does not receive the area cost adjustment when Warwickshire and Gloucestershire do, and so on. Worcestershire county council has asked these questions of the Government and has had no answers.

As one head teacher said to me:

"For a formula that is supposed to be transparent the data produced by the ODPM and the DfES is at best opaque and one might suspect has been made so detailed as to obstruct understanding."

As for robustness, there are already many rumours circulating in local government that Ministers are planning to engage in tweaking the formula in future years, hardly a sign of strength or belief that what they are doing is correct.

As for fairness, the most important element, how can a system be fair that values my constituents' children as needing £333 less than the top county of East Sussex, £176 less than the average county of Lincolnshire and £98 and £90 less than our neighbours in Warwickshire and Gloucestershire? All children in similar circumstances should be equally valued. That is the point.

Mrs. Mulryne, head teacher of Pebworth first school—a school with a Warwickshire postcode—told me:

"The mismatch between Worcestershire and Warwickshire funding is striking and very disappointing."

Mike Appleby, head teacher of Broadway first school, shares this view. Broadway is a limb of Worcestershire that juts into Gloucestershire, surrounded on three sides by its neighbouring county. He wrote to me to say:

"All schools are judged by their results—such as Ofsted inspections—but all schools are not being given an equal chance of providing the necessary equipment or staffing because of the disparity in the funding arrangements. Schools that are only two miles apart should receive the same funding per pupil, however this is not the case. Surely Worcestershire children are worth the same level of investment as a child in Gloucestershire or Warwickshire. If this government believes in giving everyone a fair and equal chance to better themselves then this system of funding must be changed."

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove has already pointed out, the comparison with Birmingham and Dudley is even worse. Another local head teacher wrote to me:

"Staggeringly the gap between ourselves and the Birmingham schools actually increases. The gap between my school and a similar size school in Birmingham looks to be even larger under this funding system than the previous one. Indeed, it now looks to be in excess of £750,000."

That is for one school, each year.

We all acknowledge that Birmingham has deprivation that must be addressed with extra resources: it is how much extra that is at issue. After all, there is plenty of poverty, drug abuse and social exclusion in Worcestershire, too, so what that head teacher went on to say is important. I have heard other head teachers say it, too—it reflects exactly the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bromsgrove. The head teacher said:

"It is galling in the extreme to hear from colleague headteachers in Birmingham that they have so much money they don't know what to spend it on next, when we in Worcestershire are having to increase class sizes, make do and mend with outdated computer equipment and most galling of all, lose our best staff to Birmingham schools."

Basic pupil funding has now been introduced and should be welcomed; it is a step in the right direction, but it could have made things much fairer. For example, top-ups, especially the area cost adjustment, still irrationally disadvantage Worcestershire. Actual teaching costs in areas that receive the adjustment are less than 3 per cent. higher than ours—indeed, sometimes they are lower—yet they receive between 12 per cent. and 16 per cent. higher funding. The cost of employing teachers, which is about three quarters of all educational costs, is higher in Worcestershire than in 61 other council areas, including Oxfordshire, East Sussex, West Sussex, Hampshire and Surrey—all counties that receive extra funding because their costs are supposed to be higher.

In July, I analysed a document deposited in the Library that shows that Worcestershire teachers are, on average, paid more than their counterparts in England. Excluding the very high salaries paid in London, but adding in all the city areas such as Birmingham and all the counties of south-east England, the average salary paid to teachers last year was £25,103. In Worcestershire, the figure was £25,110—£7 more than the English average, excluding London.

Ministers argue that those other areas face higher recruitment costs, but, apart from London itself, the argument is not sustainable; it just does not hold water. Salaries paid are in accordance with scale rates and I do not believe that schools are finding other ways of spending so much extra cash on boosting teachers' salaries that do not feature in measures of actual teaching costs. I am sure that the Inland Revenue would be interested if they were!

The only fair formula should reflect three things: the real cost of employing teachers; the relative poverty of the area, as measured by average incomes in the area; and any necessary adjustment for special needs, for example, of ethnic communities. That is the only basis for a fair formula.

Locally, some of the county's MPs have been describing the settlement as a victory. If this is victory, I would hate to taste defeat. Even more monstrously, some of them said that, as some local schools had not done well at key stage 2, it might be wrong to give them extra resources. I hope that the Minister does not concur with that argument.

In the recent comprehensive performance assessment, Worcestershire county council scored four out of four for the use of resources. There is precious little waste in Worcestershire. Although I am sure that there is always room for improvement, the taxpayer's pound goes about as far as it can in my constituency, thanks to the county council.

My grievance is not a new one. I challenged the last Conservative Government on the same point. However, things have got worse, both relatively and absolutely, since 1997. What we have been asking for during the past five years—and appear to have been promised by Ministers in successive debates—has not been delivered; expectations have been raised and cruelly dashed.

I accept that there are welcome technical features in the new formula. As I said earlier, a basic entitlement is a good idea, although it should have been given greater

[Mr. Luff]

weighting. However, there are serious technical objections, too; above all, the application of the area cost adjustment.

In concluding, I make the following points. We have a national pay scale, a national curriculum and a national inspection system. In other words, teachers are paid the same amount to teach the same things and are inspected in the same way, yet all schools receive vastly different amounts of money.

I could quote from many letters that I have received on the subject from teachers during the past few weeks and months: Charlie Lupton of St. Barnabas Church of England first and middle school; Jenny Batelen of Hartlebury Church of England first school; Gerry Hughes of Chawson community first school; David Coll of Witton middle school; Gerry Burgess of Simon de Montfort middle school; David Kelly of Evesham high school; Bernard Roberts of Prince Henry's high school; David Braham of Bengeworth first school and the chair of Governors of Harvington Church of England first school, Brian Tarling. They have all written broadly to say the same thing.

I want to end by putting on record my deep appreciation of a tireless campaigner for the schools in our county, Mr. Cledwyn-Davies, headteacher of Droitwich Spa high school, who moves to a new position in Swindon in January. His last words to me on school funding in Worcestershire will also serve as my last words in this debate. He says:

"I regret to say I feel disillusioned, disappointed and frustrated by this new formula. It perpetuates iniquities of the past and apart from setting a baseline funding for students across the country it does nothing for the children of Worcestershire. I do feel badly let down by politicians in the Government who promised much and asked us to trust them and be patient. We were certainly patient and had no other option other than to take their word but that has now been found sadly wanting."

7.15 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): In the spirit of Christmas cheer, I offer my congratulations to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) on securing this debate at a much more reasonable hour than the Summer Adjournment debate I answered at 1.50 am in July when you, Madam Deputy-Speaker, were in the Chair and looking much more sprightly than I was. Perhaps I may take this opportunity to offer good Christmas and new year cheer to you.

It was generous of the hon. Gentleman to acknowledge the outstanding work done by the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) and by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) and their campaigning zeal, which has helped to deliver a big change in Worcestershire over the past few years.

I want to address the hon. Gentleman's challenge that I explain why the current system is fairer, simpler and more transparent. That is precisely what I will do in the time available. I am sure he will not mind if I take the opportunity to put on record my thanks to and gratitude for the work of teachers in Worcestershire who have been responsible for significant improvements in the quality of education in the county. For example, since 1998 the percentage of young people leaving primary school reading, writing and counting well has risen from 66 per cent. to 75 per cent. in English, from 56 per cent. to 71 per cent. in maths and from 69 per cent. to 86 per cent. in science. At a time when many people are ready to disparage the teaching profession, I am sure the hon. Gentleman will agree with me that that represents outstanding work in primary schools. In the early years of secondary education there is impressive evidence of what is happening in Worcestershire in terms of pupils reaching level 5 at aged 14: results are up from 63 to 69 per cent. in maths, and from 61 to 70 per cent. in science. We all hope that that can be translated through into continuing rises in achievement at GCSE, A-level and in vocational qualifications.

The hon. Gentleman robbed me of the chance to rib him by acknowledging that there had been increases in funding in Worcestershire over the past five years. We may disagree about exactly why that has happened and what choices have led to it, but it is worth putting on the record that since the 1998 local government reorganisation Worcestershire's education SSA has increased by over £42 million. That is up 22 per cent. in the space of four years. That formula funding is only part of the picture. The amount that Worcestershire gets through standards fund grants has also increased from £4 million in 1998 to over £20 million this year. The allocation so far for 2003–04 is over £12 million. That can be allied to the increase in school standards grant. I recognise the hon. Gentleman's point about the importance of revenue as well as capital funding. That money, going directly to schools in the same proportion around the country, has more than doubled from £3.7 million in 2000–01 to over £7.7 million this year. It is also worth remarking on the improvements in capital expenditure; in 1998–99 capital expenditure in Worcestershire was about £9.6 million, last year it was £17.7 million and this year it is over £24 million.

The hon. Gentleman was unwise enough to trespass into his own record during the last Conservative Government by claiming that he had pressed hard for improvements in education funding. What did I discover in my detailed researches of 1995, when central Government were cutting by 0.36 per cent in real terms the amount of money going to Worcestershire? Was the hon. Gentleman challenging the Government? I am sorry to disappoint the House, but I am afraid that he was not. He was attacking the county council. He said:

"Last year the county received one of the largest increases in the country for education"—

that was the minus 0.36 per cent—

"and this year has done better than the average . . . if the county council has cash problems they stem from the mismanagement of that cash."

Mr. Luff: I should like to quote from an article that appeared in the Worcester *Evening News* on 21 September 1995:

"Worcester MP Peter Luff is pressing Whitehall to give Hereford-Worcester a fairer share of crucial Government grant aid next year. He claims the county has been getting a raw deal compared with other shires"—

and so on. So, in 1995, I was pressing the then Conservative Government.

Mr. Miliband: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that, but I think that he has just read out his own

press release, even if the local newspaper faithfully repeated it. I am sure that the fact that the council was controlled by the Liberal Democrats at the time had absolutely nothing to do with the attitude that he took.

Let me move on to the aspects of the new system that the hon. Gentleman raises. It is important to restate why we changed the formula. The previous system was out of date and based on even more complicated criteria than those that he criticised in the current system. It did not reflect the division of responsibilities between schools and LEAs, and it was unfair because it was based on a regression of spending patterns from 1991.

The aim in the new system is to ensure that similar pupils in different parts of the country attract the same amount of funding. The system is designed to match the separate responsibilities of schools and LEAs and to be more fairly distributed according to three simple criteria: first, the basic need, to which the hon. Gentleman referred; secondly, the additional educational needs that may relate to poverty or having English as a second language; and, thirdly, the area cost adjustment. It is incumbent on me to address those points.

Of course it is important to say that representatives from Worcestershire and, indeed, parents and governors engaged, with some gusto, in the consultation exercise that we held on the reform of the system. Their representatives played a significant role in the education funding strategy group, which has met many times during the past 18 months. Four of the six local authority members of the group were from the F40 authorities. Of course they were working, as were the Government, on key data that were produced not by us, but independently by PricewaterhouseCoopers.

The hon. Gentleman perfectly reasonably refers to the area cost adjustment, from which Worcestershire, along with 51 other local authorities, does not benefit. The area cost adjustment is designed to recognise that many schools, especially those in London and the south-east, face particular pressures from the extra costs of recruiting and retaining staff. Under the new system, we have recognised that other authorities outside that area face similar problems. That is why the system has been refined to take proper account of local circumstances.

The system recognises that there can be high-cost areas outside the south-east, which is why 99 local authorities now benefit from area adjustment, not 59, as under the previous system. We have been driven by data. I cannot help the fact that the data reveal that Worcestershire is not one of the top 99 high-cost authorities; it is one of the 51 with the lowest costs, based on wage rates, which, we believe, form the right basis on which to calculate local costs.

The allowance is not based on teachers' pay scales—the hon. Gentleman referred to that fact—because they do not reflect differences in the cost of recruiting and retaining staff in different areas of the country. Our system is based on wage differentials in general, which represent a better proxy.

The hon. Gentleman talked about additional educational need. In introducing the new system, we also took account of the additional costs that different pupils face all over the country. The current system, which we are reforming, is based on evidence that is completely out of date and on criteria that are not relevant to different educational circumstances.

I thought that the hon. Gentleman would mention the fact that we have a wider definition of poverty under the new system. The number of children of parents on income support, which has been the basis for the definition of poverty, is now supplemented by the number of children with parents in receipt of the working families tax credit. So we recognise that the children of those in low-paid employment have extra needs. We do not recognise them in the same proportion as those on income support who have extra needs, but there is significant recognition of the working families tax credit in the new system. That is an important step forward in how we understand the nature of deprivation and need.

Sir Michael Spicer: If regression analysis is no longer used, why is the gap between comparable counties and Worcestershire growing at almost exactly the same pace as it was before the Minister's new ideas were introduced?

Mr. Miliband: I am happy to go through each of the counties that the hon. Gentleman believes is comparable, but the reason is that the data show them not to be comparable. He may have his own impression about what constitutes a comparable authority, but the two reasons for differences between the new funding arrangements for LEAs are the number of pupils or their circumstances. The system has been driven by data throughout.

Sir Michael Spicer: It is an extraordinary coincidence that the gap should be growing at exactly the same rate in those counties.

Mr. Miliband: I am happy to respond to the hon. Gentleman about any specific counties that he has in mind, and I shall write to him with full details of the data that have underlined that. The changes have been driven purely by the data that we have received about the different circumstances of children and the number of pupils, which is relevant in the Wiltshire case to which the hon. Gentleman for Mid-Worcestershire referred. I understand that the number of pupils in Wiltshire is growing fast, which is part of the explanation for the different system. I am happy to write to him about that.

I was saying that the new data on working families tax credit are of benefit to Worcester. That is an in-principle change at the foundation of our system, for which many people campaigned hard—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for Bromsgrove (Miss Kirkbride) is complaining from a sedentary position without being entirely clear what she is complaining about. This is good news for Worcestershire because it recognises that, even in areas of high employment, there can still be need. The fact that the system has recognised that should be applauded across the House.

Miss Kirkbride: I shall be sending the Minister's comments to the 1,000 parents, teachers and governors who have written to me on this matter. They say simply that it costs pretty much the same amount of money to buy books and computers and to supply teachers. A basic need therefore exists. Despite what he said

[Miss Kirkbride]

today, they will not understand why the gap has got wider under Labour when it promised something different.

Mr. Miliband: We promised at every stage that similar pupils in different parts of the country would be treated in a similar way. The letter that I have sent to head teachers explains that.

It is also important to recognise the importance of the LEA's role in terms of the situation between different schools. When the money goes to schools, it is distributed on the basis of the formula adopted by the LEA. The LEA has responsibilities to ensure that need is recognised in its formula, as well as in the formula that we send out.

The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire did not mention sparsity in his remarks—I understand that he was short of time and that he has been concerned about the issue. Perhaps I can use the time remaining to put on record that there is now a significant recognition in the funding formula of the problems faced by sparse authorities. Sparse authorities wanted us to introduce a sparsity factor for secondary schools, which we were not able to do. We have recognised in the primary sector, however, the significant extra costs associated with that factor.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned floors and ceilings. I have been impressed that the authorities on the ceiling have not been bombarding me with requests to get rid of that ceiling and to give them faster increases in funding, as they recognise that there is an inherent fairness in ensuring stability as we introduce the new system. The introduction of floors and ceilings has been an important part of ensuring a degree of consensus about the new system.

The Green Paper, which we published in the summer to kick off the process, promised that we would level up to a fair amount of funding per pupil. A fair distribution has to be arrived at, however, by considering the relative needs of children, not by arbitrary comparison with a particular authority or level of funding, or by levelling an authority with low levels of deprivation up to the same level as one with high levels of deprivation. I understand, however, that the effect of the changes to the education funding formula has not been as dramatic as Worcestershire had hoped.

I hope that my remarks at the beginning made it clear that significant funding increases are going into Worcestershire. I believe that we have a funding formula that is far clearer, far simpler and far more transparent. On that basis, it will command the respect of the education world and beyond, and will deliver the sort of stability that we both want.

Miss Kirkbride: As the Minister cut his remarks short, I am grateful to have some time to put our response to those remarks on the record.

While we have great respect for the Minister's intellect, what we heard was simply a load of waffle about the new formula. That simply does not satisfy our constituents, who genuinely feel that the gap has unfairly become wider, when it was wide enough ready, and that it costs pretty much the same to have books and computers and to employ teachers. The Government have not recognised basic cost per pupil in the school funding formula. I understand and support the idea that poorer authorities should have more money to give extra tuition to their pupils who may need it, but I very much resent the idea that just because a child comes from a poorer background, they must, by definition, be less clever and therefore need extra support in schools. That simply is not the case. It certainly was not the case when I was at school, and it is not what I see when I visit schools nowadays. Of course, the formula should represent in some ways deprivation, need, different languages and different ethnicity, but, ultimately, it is not right and proper.

The motion having been made after Seven o'clock, and the debate having continued for half an hour, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER *adjourned the House without Question put, pursuant to the Standing Order.*

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Seven o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 10 December 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Textiles, Clothing and Footwear Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy.]*

9.30 am

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): I am glad to have the opportunity to discuss such an important issue and I am grateful that so many hon. Members have turned out on such a cold and frosty morning to take part in the debate. Now is the right time to consider the new structure that was recently announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, as well as the changes that we anticipate will be made to grant support. The case for grant support is crucial to textiles and it is one to which I shall return.

We are in a post-Doha world and the matters arising from that are also crucial to the textile industry. What makes now a good time to review progress are the recommendations of the textile clothing strategy group. That group was formed in 1998 by the Department of Trade and Industry and it issued a draft consultation report in March 2000. Since then, it has produced other reports and its latest report that was issued earlier this year entitled "Making it Happen" is what we would like to see happen in the textile industry.

The Transport and General Workers Union plays a vital role in the development of textile strategy. I thank Peter Booth, a union representative, for his work and for the information that he has given me about the current state of the industry in preparation for today's debate. He told me that, at a recent TGWU conference, more than 90 per cent. of the textile delegates reported mill closures and job losses in the industry. Even at a time of rising employment, I am sure that we all agree that all job losses and mill closures are sad. We must examine closely the reasons why any industry starts to fail.

There have been job losses and mill closures in my constituency of Colne Valley. Within a week of one factory closing, however, a new purchaser was found for the factory and new jobs were introduced. Thanks to the help and support of the employment agencies, Kirklees council and Jobcentre Plus, each of those who worked in the mill were found jobs elsewhere. We could ask, "What is the problem?" For me, it is that the industry is still in decline. Last year's Red Book showed only two industries in decline—recession decline, not a slow down in growth—textiles and steel. That is important.

Textile production is still a major business in this country. It contributes 0.7 per cent. of gross domestic product, a fact that must not be ignored. People in the industry say, "If only we had the same voice as other manufacturers, we would be listened to." As it is, our textile producers are struggling, as are German and French textile producers. However, the Italian market is a completely different model. One of the TCSG's recommendations was that we should learn from the Italians' success, and I hope that the Minister will tell us today what progress has been made in that.

Huddersfield's Textile Centre of Excellence is convinced that we can learn a lot from the Italians. It found the Italian manufacturers to be especially helpful and forthcoming. They say that the key to success is co-operation and collaboration within the industry. I despair of some mill owners in my constituency. I do not believe that they have the right frame of mind to be able to collaborate with others. A sense of isolationism and a bunker mentality persist in some sectors.

In Colne Valley, there is a wide range of textile producers, making knitted garments, frilly lacy things, haberdashery, heavy woollens and carpets. We have all the flavours of textile production. We also have the patriarchal background of the industry, which results in producers not talking to one another for fear of people finding out what their company is doing and how it is performing.

Happily, not all producers are wedded to the past and there are good stories to tell. However, some producers still resist trade union membership, and an attempt to get trade unions into some factories failed abysmally. There are those who do not want to fill in DTI forms because they find them too difficult; those who do not want anyone else to know the background to their business; those who still have looms and machines that were built in 1947 rather than 2002; and those who have not invested in new design or produced anything different in the past 50 years. For those producers, the future will be very grim indeed. The industry must adapt and change and the Government must be aware of how they can help the industry to do so.

Money can always help, but how it is spent is crucial. I cannot argue with the Government's investment of £80 million in the industry since 1997, or with the £8 million that was spent between 2001 and 2002 on market development, employment training, the supply chain, design skills, e-commerce and export support. All of that is good; but I question whether we have gone far enough.

The problem for many producers in Colne Valley is that many schemes apply only to certain areas—in particular, to objective 1 and 2 areas. At present, Huddersfield's Textile Centre of Excellence is developing a local action plan. The centre needs to extend its premises, for which it has received £500,000 from Yorkshire Forward, the regional development agency, but it cannot go ahead because of state aid rules. Development in Colne Valley is being stymied. Many businesses in Colne Valley are in exactly the same position as businesses that are inside objective 1 and 2 areas. Their market conditions are the same; the conditions inside the companies are the same; the sort of help that they need is the same; and the population of workers is the same. However, they are outside the boundary and therefore not eligible for some of the support and help that is available to other companies. Producers feel that the system contains inequities—inequities that have arisen because of the rules, so those rules will determine which businesses will survive and flourish and which will fail.

The DTI is reviewing the 183 different kinds of funding. It is sometimes difficult for people in the Department to remember and understand 183 different

[Kali Mountford]

kinds of funding, let alone the poor producer who is trying to decide which particular funding the business should apply for. It is no wonder that people sometimes do not receive the help that they might have received or do not know exactly where to go to get help, or that they apply for the wrong help or in the wrong way, and therefore fail. I hope that, during the Department's review, a sensible and simplified way can be found of allowing all producers to receive the help that they so desperately need—especially in investment. The system is a minefield that results in companies putting in a great deal of time and effort filling in forms, only to fail at the end.

I wish to thank the Textile Centre of Excellence in Huddersfield, because it provides an excellent service to local companies by visiting them and helping to fill in the forms, but firms have ask for such help, and often there is a divorce between the help available and the mentality of producers who will not always seek it. Frankly, the system should not be so difficult in the first place.

I hope that the Minister will understand how textile businesses work and how difficult it has been for them during the current grant aid review. The industry seeks not only a level playing field in Europe, but throughout the world. Doha rightly points out that western industries cannot succeed by ensuring third-world failure, and I hope that we all accept that developing nations must be on an equal economic footing to be able to work their way out of poverty. It must therefore be right for British and other western industries to compete not on the lowest common denominator, but on quality.

If the industry is to be supported, however, artificial barriers must not be constructed against British textile exports. For example, in evidence from the International Monetary Fund to the Treasury Committee recently, we discovered that the United States applies for export barriers as if it were a third-world nation. One throws up one's arms in horror to think that the US considers itself to be a third-world country when it comes to export barriers. It cannot be right.

Huddersfield's Textile Centre of Excellence can provide a good model for the rest of the industry. It can show how we can move it forward into a new millennium, leave some traditional, backward-looking thinking behind and build a new and innovative industry. Yorkshire Forward has contributed a budget of £963, 000 over a two-year period. Not all of that will be spent in Huddersfield, but a large amount will be spent in west Yorkshire, as that is the base of the Yorkshire textile industry.

The Textile Centre of Excellence has a seven-point plan that builds on the proposals in "Making it Happen", a report produced by the TCSG, for which I am grateful. But there is a plethora—I have brought only a small number of them as an example—of different reports and plans from different parts of the industry. Different organisations represent different bits of the industry that have grown over the years.

The first—and, from looking at the wide range of reports, the most essential—part of the plan is to bring all of the strands together. The industry needs a single voice. Disparate and separate voices can cry lonely into the wilderness, but by speaking with a single voice, representatives could create the same volume as other industries, such as the car manufacturing and energy industries. According to the December 2002 labour market count, the industry supports 430,000 jobs overall in the UK and should be considered a major employer, especially if the industry speaks with a single voice.

The second strand to the plan is to develop a Yorkshire label. We should be proud of the products that we sell, but I recently visited a factory with excellent quality woollen products that were being sold as Scottish. I am told that the wool came from Scottish sheep, so it can be argued that it was ethical, although there were some pretty good Yorkshire sheep grazing nearby. Nevertheless, the company preferred to sell its product as Scottish. That must be wrong. There is nothing wrong with the Scots being proud of their product, but why are Yorkshire producers not proud that their products are made in Huddersfield or Yorkshire? It is something that we must change. If we are not prepared to go out in the rest of the world and to be proud of the product that we are selling, why should the rest of world be proud to buy it?

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): I agree with the hon. Lady, who makes the point eloquently. That is true within various parts of the United Kingdom, but it is also true of international intellectual property rights. Perhaps the Department could spend a little time ensuring that those rights, which exist throughout various parts of the United Kingdom industry, are protected globally.

Kali Mountford: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point that I could illustrate by describing a movement from woollens to technical textiles in my constituency. A manufacturer succeeded in registering a product but because of market conditions and because it required investment in new machinery and meant applying for grants, the owner decided to close the business. I was particularly concerned when his son took it to Africa. I do not object to the growth of businesses in Africa, but the new product could have been developed and made in Britain. The product—it is called Leospring; look out for it because it is excellent—could one day change how we address ecological problems, such as oil spills, and it does not produce smoke, so imagine the difference that it could make if it were woven into the seat coverings of planes. It is an outstanding technical advance for textiles, and we have lost out because it will not be made in Britain. I hope that the product will be made one day because it will give advantages to us all, but it is a real pity that it could not be made in Britain.

That leads to the third strand of the plan, which is skills development, because we could not invent or produce such fantastic products as Leospring without skills. However, there are several gaps in the development of skills in the textiles industry. The Government have invested £2 million in strategic training for the apparel and textiles project. That project was widely welcomed but it ended in June this year. Many organisations, including the TGWU, are calling for an extension of the STAT project. However, in Huddersfield at least, there has been a response to fill the

gap. I am delighted that we have excellent facilities in the Textile Centre of Excellence, which the Secretary of State visited when she was the Minister with responsibility for textiles and e-commerce. The centre is now developing a craft entry training course and we hope that that will be validated soon. It has used an investment of just £120,000 to start to teach students several of the craft-based skills that they need to enter the industry.

We cannot continue to be backward looking. If any hon. Members present were to visit a local textile business, they would find that many people working there would be over 40 or, in many cases, over 50. It is very difficult to find any 20 to 30-year-olds working in mills. However, I am pleased that young people are now coming straight from school to train in the field and that there are new links with universities. There was a time when universities withdrew their training courses in textiles. There is now a development of links between the local university and the centre of excellence to provide degree-level courses, which must be right.

That brings me to the futures programme, which is the fourth part of the plan. The Department of Trade and Industry has agreed in principle—so I hope that it is not improper to say this now—to give £309,000 to a scheme that will cover west Yorkshire, the north-west, the north-east, the east midlands and Scotland. The scheme will allow companies to be selected for a one-year programme during which they will receive the expert advice that they need but cannot usually afford. People from the companies will attend seminars with experts at least once a quarter in order to receive the advice and mentoring that they need to keep their businesses on track and up to date. Additionally, grants of between £15,000 and £20,000 are available as cash for participating companies to help them to develop and grow. The object of the plan is to take companies out of the past, and to encourage a movement away from old-fashioned practices and toward the use of modern production techniques. That will secure the future of the industry.

The fifth and most exciting part of the plan is the incubator unit. A thousand fashion and design students graduate each year in our area—20 per cent. of the United Kingdom total. Hardly any of those graduates stay in Yorkshire; most of them go to London, or go abroad. The centre is now working with the universities and is helping graduates to create their own start-up businesses.

Too many of the catwalk shows have featured quite mad designs that no normal person would want to wear, with models walking down the catwalk wrapped up like Christmas turkeys. We want to buy well-tailored, well-designed, wearable clothing, in which we can go to work and in which we feel comfortable when we go out in the evening. We do not want clothes in which we would feel uncomfortable even when sitting down. We need designers who stay close to producers and work with them to produce a synergy between good quality cloth and good quality design. Accordingly, the centre provides work space, help with portfolios and the technology with which to produce computer-aided designs. The centre intends, through the use of local market intelligence, to set up 12 companies each year. Those could grow design and fashion knowledge that is useful to the industry and create a local outlet for the industry's product. No more should we have to go to the south, or abroad. Let us keep our good designers at home.

The centre is also part of the manufacturing leadership programme, which is developing qualifications in manufacturing to degree level. That is not specifically an innovation of the textile industry. It is important for the textiles industry that students understand that manufacturing is a business and that they develop the leadership skills that are needed by all manufacturers. I would recommend that programme to anyone from Yorkshire who is listening. My copy of that programme shows that each faculty should work with the universities and with companies to develop the leadership skills that are obviously needed and to break out of the bunker mentality that we have been used to. The industry is also a significant consumer of energy and it has found it difficult to respond to demands for reduced energy consumption. The industry does not want to be anti-ecology, but it finds the climate change levy particularly onerous.

I have in my hand a note from the Textile Services Association, which is a vital part of the industry. The industry uses a lot of energy and water, from the beginning of the production process, in all its component parts, including laundering, right up to the end. The industry also uses many chemicals in its production processes and it is right to try to control the effects of production on the local ecology. It can, however, be costly for a producer if it has worked hard to reduce its energy consumption but cannot recoup any of the costs through national insurance contributions. The Textile Services Association will attest to that. The centre of excellence, however, tells me that it has been able to help in many cases and has shown some factories how to reduce both consumption and production costs. Much has been learned, but there is still a lot more to do.

The Textile Centre of Excellence has £160,000 to spend in the region to show companies how to respond to the climate change levy. Companies tell me that they are finding it difficult to save money, but the centre says that it can help. The levy needs closer consideration and it should look at it in more detail, so that we can help companies through a period in which we expect them to adjust.

Yorkshire Forward has made available just £150,000 for innovation, and £80,000 has already been allocated to one company, but at least that money is being made available. I have already mentioned the product called Leospring, which, sadly, Huddersfield lost. Such products must be given some support if we are to develop them. If there is to be innovation, there must be support, otherwise there will be a sad lack of innovative products in our country.

I discussed the future of textiles with Bill Macbeth, the outstanding managing director of the Huddersfield Textile Centre of Excellence. Hon. Members can tell from my speech how much I admire the work of that body. Bill Macbeth says that we must change our attitude to textiles. He has certainly inspired me. He says that textiles is a sexy industry. I was not sure whether I would be allowed to say that, but I have done so now. That sexy industry—I think that I would prefer to call it exciting—should be forward looking. If the industry drags its heels, and comes kicking and screaming into this millennium, its future will be bleak. However, if the

[Kali Mountford]

industry is backed by the Government, as is recommended in "Making it Happen", and if the industry co-operates and meets the challenges of a modern world, its future could be secure and exciting. I, for one, hope that it will be.

9.55 am

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) on securing the debate and on speaking so eloquently in defence of a beleaguered industry. She must have read *Hansard* before she became a Member of Parliament, because her predecessor, Graham Riddick, was a great champion of the industry, too.

I am interested to hear that the hon. Lady regards the industry as sexy. When I first went to Hinckley in my constituency in 1987, I was invited to attend the "Hinckley Makes It" show, and I was somewhat surprised to see some of the ladies from the factory modelling the local products. I expressed my surprise to the organiser of the show, a lovely man who played a great part in the local industry, Mr. Bill Randells, and he said, "David, you must understand; Hinckley makes progressive underwear." I am not sure what should be read into that.

The Government's approach to hosiery, knitwear and textiles closely mirrors the No. 10 press office—both are totally out of control. I shall not indulge in a lot of corny puns on spin and spinning, but if ever there was an industry to which the maxim of all spin and no delivery should be applied, it is this one. I see the Minister smiling and moving around in his seat; perhaps he is feeling uneasy. He must know, in his heart of hearts, that the Government promised so much for the industry when they came to power, and they have done so little.

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: I am pleased that, within 10 seconds, I have provoked the Minister.

Mr. Wilson: I wanted to clarify that that was not why I was smiling; I had just been given a definition of progressive underwear by someone behind me.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am fearful of being called to order, but I could perhaps say a little more to the Minister on that subject later.

I am entertained to know that I am speaking before the cashmere kids. I had never heard that term before, and I did not realise that the cashmere industry had an informal group dedicated to its support that goes by that name.

I represent a famous hosiery and knitwear town in the east midlands, Hinckley, which at one time had 150 factories. It used to have perhaps the highest income per family in Europe, because all the ladies of the town worked in the factories, and many of the men crossed the Watling street boundary into the west midlands to work in the car industry. The textile industry is still thought of as a key industry in Hinckley and the east midlands, but it has suffered grievously. The hon. Member for Colne Valley correctly reported that 90 per cent. of the delegates at a recent conference talked about the closure of mills. The terrifying fact is that, whatever the Government say and whatever great schemes they introduce, when one says "Where's the beef?" there is not any. The industry is all closures, it is all downhill, and that is the Government's fault. This Government are entirely responsible for the decline of this industry, regardless of how many reports they publish.

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley) *rose—*

Mr. Tredinnick: I shall give way to the hon. Lady, whose constituency was represented by an eminent Conservative, Phillip Oppenheim, before she took it over.

Judy Mallaber: Would the hon. Gentleman care to tell us how many jobs were lost in this industry under the previous Conservative Government?

Mr. Tredinnick: It is an old technique of parties in Government to try to blame previous Governments for their own misfortune, but one would have thought that a Government who have been in power since 1997 could do better than merely blame the previous Tory Government, because the fact is that they have done next to nothing for this industry.

There have been many reports; there is another one this year. Fludes is a factory in my constituency. The Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Leicester, West (Ms Hewitt), paid a surprise visit to Fludes, a factory in my constituency, to help to promote the innovative socks that it is making for travellers who might suffer from deep-vein thrombosis. [*Interruption.*] I am not so uncharitable that I will not also mention the hon. Member for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), even though he does not represent my party. During the visit to Fludes, the managing director of the factory said that the Government put all the emphasis on the relocation of employees after they have lost their jobs. They are backing other industries, and nothing is being done to keep the jobs that exist in this industry, which is why we are seeing this catastrophic decline. The industry is in a very serious situation.

The hon. Member for Colne Valley mentioned the export of jobs. When Pex in my constituency shut down, the idea was that all the equipment would go to Romania. We are suffering from an export of jobs. One of the reasons for that is that it is almost impossible for companies to reinvest—to bring in the new machinery that the hon. Lady so eloquently said that they need—because they are not receiving any help from the Treasury. It also provided absolutely no help to the Textile Services Association when it made representations about the climate change levy. The association said:

"The submission by the industry to the Treasury was summarily dismissed despite having held face to face meetings with the Minister."

That reveals that this is all about saying one thing and doing another. That is disgraceful. We need a coherent, determined and meaningful effort to reverse the trend of decline in this industry. I have no doubt that the textile clothing strategy group's efforts were well intended and

that they have alerted the Government to some of the problems that exist, but no meaningful action has been taken.

The industry must get added value for products: that is the way forward for it, but to achieve that it will need more equipment. Some companies in Hinckley, such as Davenports, have made great efforts to bring in new equipment at great expense—without any help from the Treasury—so that they can compete with the Italians, who are very effective. That is how the industry can move forward—by adding value.

Some companies in Hinckley are now having to outwork in China. They make some products there, and then bring them back and re-label them. It is regrettable that that has been the way forward for some companies, but at least they are still in business.

Courses at North Warwickshire and Hinckley college have been shut down: the ones that used to train the mechanics who maintain the equipment have gone during the tenure of this Government. The overriding problem is that too much emphasis is put on helping those who are leaving the industry, and not enough is put on helping those who are in the industry and who want to stay in it, and on creating new jobs.

Mr. Paul Stinchcombe (Wellingborough): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Tredinnick: I will finish now.

10.3 am

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I am very disappointed by the contribution of the hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick). I had no intention of getting into a party political debate; the situation is too serious for that.

When the Conservatives were in government, half a million jobs were lost in the industry and no action was taken to bring the parts of the industry together to try to develop a strategy for the future. We are going through a period of incredible globalisation and industrial change—a new industrial revolution. I will come back to that point.

Yesterday, I spoke with Julian Ellis, who chairs the group under the east Midlands regional organisation that looks after the technical textile sector for the industry. He said that the Government could not be doing more, and that it is now up to the firms in that sector to take action. We are going through great difficulties, and now is not the time to talk about party political issues. The textile and clothing strategy group was set up precisely because, after 1997, Ministers talked to different sides of the industry and said, "We cannot tell you what to do. Please come together and tell us what you need and your recommendations for where the industry should go." I hoped that the hon. Gentleman would at least recognise that, because I wanted to start by paying tribute to the group's work. It is a model partnership between trade unions, employers, trade associations and academics working with, and supported by, the Government.

Despite the many problems, the group has produced 55 recommendations on how to take the industry forward, and the Government seek to support those. Things are difficult, but we all know that. In our east midlands region, structures have been set up to assist development of the industry. However, after the national strategy was produced, some hon. Members in the region had to talk to the key players and argue with the development agency to take the strategy on board and to do the work that is now taking place. I thank the officials in the unit at the Department of Trade and Industry, who are very helpful and doing a great deal of work to advance the recommendations.

As I said, we have many difficulties. We face a global problem and a change in the operation of the industry. It is the job of those participating in this debate and those of us in the all-party group to stress that the industry has a future. That was one of our main purposes, in addition to ensuring that we had a national strategy and that action would be taken on its recommendations. That is why we are here today.

The industry is still important. As my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) said, it still accounts for 0.78 per cent. of gross domestic product, £15 billion in sales and £6.5 billion in exports, and it employs 250,000 people, so it is still a key player in this country. However, the industry does not have the profile that it should have, and part of our job is to ensure that it has that profile.

The industry is having an incredibly difficult time. Some 75,000 people work in the industry in the east midlands, and there are 2,500 companies, but we have lost 20,000 jobs in the past 10 years and we lost many more before then. We recognise those problems: I believe that the constituency of every hon. Member present has experienced pain as a result of those difficulties. We are going through a relentless globalisation process, and it is very difficult to compete internationally. We must consider those areas where we can still compete and find new ways of competing, new products and new sections of the industry. We face competition and the removal of tariffs, which is a very hard process.

This Thursday, I hope to attend a farewell function for many of the people who are to lose their jobs at a Richard Roberts factory, which is just up the road from where I live. It is a former Charnos factory, and the factory manager lives just a few doors down from me. The hon. Member for Bosworth spoke about the help that is given to people who lose their jobs. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley, I pay tribute to the work that Jobcentre Plus has done, because most people from the factory have managed to find new jobs.

Interestingly, the only factory that Richard Roberts maintains in the region is the one with a niche market—the firm in Kirkby in Ashfield that makes cashmere products that are sold to Saks Fifth Avenue. That is the only factory where the company can maintain a high-value product in this country and still compete. This is a serious problem: how can we transfer to new areas, where competition can still exist?

Many of the traumas in my constituency came with the job losses at Coats Viyella. In September 2000, we lost 5,000 jobs across the region, which caused us serious trauma. A major economic driver in my area over the next few years will be the development of the world heritage site in the Derwent valley. Ironically, that was the heart of where the Arkwright and Strutt mills were

[Judy Mallaber]

and the real start of the industrial revolution. We are losing jobs in this sector while praising, applauding and developing tourism and economic growth based on the area's world heritage status granted in recognition of the industry's past. It should make us think about where the industry is going. Attempts are being made to protect and assist companies presently in production, but we also need to move into new sectors: we are on the brink of a new revolution within the industry.

Technical textiles are a particularly important sector and we should recognise that we are world leaders in it. I have recently had the sad job of talking to people who are losing their jobs in one traditional part of the industry that has been unable to compete. By contrast, last weekend I went to see the latest James Bond movie: Nottingham university was consulted about the Aston Martin car's amazing trick of turning over a million times on the ice. A technical process within the textiles industry—a 3-d braiding process—was used to create and strengthen parts in the chassis of Bond's high-performance car. That lies behind the thrills and spills of the James Bond movie and highlights the important work of our local university. One hopes that the process will be used in other cars to make them safer.

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): Will the hon. Lady acknowledge the great promotional tool of the latest Bond movie for the entire textile sector, recalling that the cashmere sweater worn by Bond comes from Ballantyne of Innerleithen?

Judy Mallaber: I will certainly acknowledge that. Yet another aspect of that enjoyable movie is that it features a female spy who is as good as James Bond—and the baddie came from the east midlands, too. The movie is good for demonstrating many things.

Staying with cars, when I first visited Advanced Composites in my constituency, I was amazed to hear that all its material for Formula 1 cars was textile-based. I found it hard to believe, but that is indeed the case, and it shows another important application of the textiles industry.

I mentioned earlier the chairman of the group of technical textiles companies in the east midlands. Those companies are involved in the production of surgical implants, which utilises historic embroidery techniques. His company is also taking part in a £1 million Government-funded project examining urinary incontinence: it is producing a collapsible tract to be inserted into people's bladders to facilitate the use of catheters—yet another example of extraordinary and amazing developments from technical textiles. As I said earlier, the company felt that the Government were providing help through the TCSG. Will the Minister give an assurance that continued funding will be available to that important sector, which should not be allowed to fall short because of lack of investment?

Many positive developments are taking place within the industry, but I have some questions about how best to implement the recommendations in the report. People in the industry have asked me to put some questions to Ministers. First, the relaxation of the three-times rule is welcome, but what action is being taken to clarify the rules for 2003-04 to ensure that people can take advantage of international trade fairs, which are so important for export sales? Although the rule has been relaxed for this industry, the amounts that can be used for export fairs are still capped.

Secondly, on public procurement, the Government have been seeking to make the rules more beneficial to British companies. However, all too often there is a feeling that price rather than quality is being considered—I have been given the example of blankets provided for our troops by the MOD. There is also a question of transparency in the tender process in this industry and elsewhere. People do not know, for example, how to get on to the approved list for tenders.

The subject of my third question—the STAT programme—was referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley. I am delighted that the industry has done so well in achieving trailblazer status for the sector skills council. That is a great tribute to the work done by partners in the industry, but we still want the STAT programme to be continued. It could be a model for other industries; it is employer-based and has enabled companies to work with business advisers to establish their training needs rather than having to adapt their training to the courses available. Some 91 companies have benefited; 1,800 jobs have been secured, 2,500 employees have new skills, and new jobs were created in 41 per cent. of the companies involved.

I would be pleased if the Minister could clarify the follow-up scheme. I tabled questions to the three relevant Departments, and was disappointed that one of them—not the Minister's—told me that we did not need the STAT programme now that we had the sector skills council. The reality is quite the reverse: the council needs to be able to promote and develop this flexible programme. I would also like the Minister to give a commitment on its funding

I have also been asked what happened to the designer study. Earlier this year at London fashion week, which I attended, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry launched a study of the fashion design sector and its impact on the wider textiles and clothing industry. Is that being taken forward, and what help is available for it?

The Minister responsible for the textiles and clothing industry recently re-launched the second phase of the designer forum in Nottingham in the east midlands, which provides facilities and information for designers on fashion trends, start-up units, incubator units and so on. It would be helpful to know how that ties in with the study that Ministers are conducting.

On my next point, I understand that the joint industry fashion team was a Treasury initiative to encourage and help companies to move from the informal economy into the formal economy, and to let them know that they would not be closed down because of previous problems of taxation or the minimum wage. The *Evening Standard* has reported recently on how Arcadia—a company that has been very involved in Government projects in the industry—was found to have been taking goods produced in sweatshops by workers receiving less than the minimum wage. The initiative is therefore very important.

I reiterate some of the frustrations that my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley expressed at the start of the debate about business support and the

difficulty in accessing funds in areas not obviously eligible for objective 1 or 2 funding. Stevensons Dyeworks, a company that has been involved with some of the Government programmes and is now part of the Quantum group, is concerned about the rigidity of the rules for applying for financial assistance. It is frustrating for that company, which is in a ward in my constituency that was expected to move to tier 3 status. Had it done so, it would have been eligible for some grants, but that has disappeared from the agenda while the review of business support is conducted.

Stevensons raised with me the difficulty of ensuring coherence in the programmes that we are developing in our regions and hoped that the strategy developed by the clothing and textiles group would be taken forward. A considerable amount of work is now being done in my region and in that of my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley to set up structures to co-ordinate the work that is being done in the industry. However, it can still be confusing for companies in the region to work out exactly how they access that help, and it is important that we provide that information.

I shall end with an example that illustrates the need to take the industry forward. The person who chairs the east midlands cluster within the region runs a company called Swiss Tour, which manufactures specialised netting, from mosquito nets to parachute lining. It even produces netting that can block mobile phone calls and other wonderful things. Interestingly, that technology has been developed from Nottingham's old lace-making machines, which were invented two centuries ago to replace hand lace making. The problem is how to move on from traditional manufacturing while keeping as much of it as we can. I agree with the hon. Member for Bosworth that that means not just giving assistance to those who lose their jobs, however important that is, but also seeing what can be done to make companies move into new niche markets and areas where they can compete. We can assist them in that, but we also need to keep our eye on the current industrial revolution, which can take us into a new sector in the future. It will probably not be called "textiles". The technical textiles people are setting up their own trade association. It is doubtful that people will realise that many of the products are based on textiles technology, but that is how the industry is developing. There is a huge amount of work to do and a painful process to go through. I hope that the Minister can deal with some of the points that I have raised.

10.21 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been an important debate and I congratulate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), my colleague on the all-party group on clothing, textiles and footwear, on securing it. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the work that she does on the Committee and to the hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), whose chairmanship of the group makes it highly effective. The hon. Lady has kept us focused on the activities of the textile sector for the past few years.

I am glad that the Minister is in his place. He dubbed my hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire (Mr. Kirkwood) and I the cashmere kids, I presume on the basis of the work that we did during the banana war that threatened to wipe out the cashmere industry in our part of the world. If we are the cashmere kids, perhaps the Minister is the class monitor, because he put in a great deal of effort at the time addressing a huge public meeting in Hawick, where people were very anxious about the future of the knitwear industry. On a separate occasion, without any publicity or attention—and, dare I say to the hon. Gentleman's civil servants, without any support whatever—he met manufacturers in Hawick to talk about the threats to the industry. I pay tribute to his work and I look forward to his response to the debate.

For all the pessimism that exists in the textile sector, it remains one of Britain's strongest manufacturing sectors, especially in my constituency. It is a vibrant sector that needs to succeed and I believe that it will do so, through innovation and by enhancing its competitiveness. There is no doubt that the textile industry has a future. I worry that in the House and in other forums we are tempted to talk the industry down and look for problems, which are self-evident and present in most manufacturing sectors. The textiles industry still has a huge impact on the economy and without it south-east Scotland and the borders would be in great difficulty.

The main aspects of the textile sector, be they knitwear apparel, weaving or technical textiles, are represented within south-east Scotland. Each of them has seen huge changes in recent years. Over decades, the nature of the competition faced by individual companies in the United Kingdom, especially from overseas, has changed out of all recognition. Inevitably, that means that regardless of the state of the world economy or particular parts of it, the sector will always be subject to the buffetings of the world economy with the extreme competitiveness that that introduces. Globalisation may be a reasonably recent concern for people across the world, but the textile sector has coped with it for a hundred years or more. We must not shy away from the challenges that it faces, nor should we worry that the only route is downwards.

The marketplace has changed. That has been noticeable in many of the products that are produced in my constituency. There has been a shift in recent years towards the different niches of the market. For example, the cashmere sector has moved to the high fashion end of the market. As a recent local trade publication put it, borders manufacturers no longer sell just gold button cardigans and twin sets. I take slight issue with the hon. Member for Colne Valley, who talked about the catwalk and asked whether it was relevant to everyday people. It is relevant in that it shows how design and innovation is increasingly important for British companies, particularly those that I represent. It may not be the stuff that anyone here might want to or could wear, but it shows what the industry can do and it spills out into the more mainstream markets that we see as important commercially and otherwise.

Kali Mountford: Does the hon. Gentleman recall the sort of catwalk shows that there were in the past? One of my favourite designers was Paul Costelloe, whose fine tailoring was very innovative. It may have been a little extreme for the average person, but it was wearable

[Kali Mountford]

clothing rather than the tinfoil effect of some of the current designers. Would not that inspire people to wear new fabrics?

Mr. Moore: I am getting a little out of my depth as a fashion consultant or guru. I defer to the hon. Lady's greater expertise. It is important that the industry shows off the best of its potential in whatever sector. I hope that it will continue to do so. My constituency does not just produce high fashion cashmere. We also produce goods in a diverse range of fields. One small manufacturer, Robert Noble and Replin Fabrics, makes aircraft seat and carpet fabrics that go into Boeing jets throughout the world. Too few people in the borders understand that, let alone elsewhere. It is a good example of a small company that has diversified and is reaping the rewards as a result.

My hon. Friend the Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire and I recently carried out a survey of local manufacturers, and the textile sector obviously featured heavily. The techniques that manufacturers have to adopt nowadays range widely across the spectrum. Some seem still to be living in a 19th century museum but others are state of the art and software driven and are unrecognisable from earlier days. Each company has its niche and each has its expertise, and the importance of investment for all of them needs to be stressed.

One of the key issues facing all of these local businesses, regardless of their sector or their manufacturing base, is the need to encourage young people into the industry. The skills shortage in the textile sector is massive. A recent report in the borders entitled "Where are the young people?" put its finger on the dangers facing the local industry. It will not run out of customers or struggle with cash flows: it will have no one to employ. That goes back to the point with which I started. Part of the difficulty is not that there are no young people, although that is an increasing problem in the borders, but that they do not like the image of the industry. They are not happy with the one that is portrayed in public. All of us here and elsewhere have a responsibility not to talk the industry down, but to promote it so that young people and others can see a viable future in it for themselves.

Further applications for research and development will ensure success in the future. Heriot-Watt university in my constituency successfully took part in the Faraday partnerships. It has undertaken much research that, it must be hoped, will be recognised for its academic excellence and will spin out into industry. It is clear from the university's recent briefings that the work that it is doing is highly respected. My anxiety, however, is that it does not generate the spin-offs of new jobs and new markets for businesses in the borders and elsewhere in Scotland. So far, that is the missing link in the partnership, and I hope that the Government will encourage Heriot-Watt university and others to work more proactively to ensure that there are local spin-offs from the excellent work that they are doing.

Time is running short, but I return to the point to which I referred obliquely. I draw the Minister's attention to the importance of world trade to the industry, and to the need for fair rules of competition. We all acknowledge that the multi-fibre arrangement is coming to a close. Every business has had the past 10 years to prepare for that. The Doha round is extremely important for setting out the new rules for the future. However, I ask the Minister to ensure that when the rules are drawn up we do not suffer from dumping, especially from China with its access to cashmere supplies, into the United Kingdom, and that the monitoring and checking of the provisions that succeed the multi-fibre arrangement are vigorous and secure.

This is a very important debate on a very important sector. The strong have survived, and the strong who adapt to change will continue to survive for a while yet.

10.31 am

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford), who made an effective case for her constituents. It was also heart-warmingly positive, forward looking and outward looking—not the face of the textile industry that I have experienced. In the 1970s and early 1980s, I worked with developing-country negotiators to try to help them to receive better quota treatment under the multi-fibre arrangement. In those days, the face of the British textile industry was very different; it was defensive, inward looking, and obsessed by external competition and by building barriers to it. Courtaulds and Carrington Viyella were investing heavily in upstream weaving and spinning and in trying to secure quotas to protect their industry. The face that the hon. Lady presented today was altogether more positive and forward looking, which I appreciate.

The hon. Lady and other speakers helpfully highlighted the extent to which we are dealing with a diverse industry. We can argue that the textile industry is, in a sense, merely a lobbying group. It is very diverse with very different sets of problems. There is an enormous difference between, for example, upstream spinning and weaving, which is capital intensive, and the garment makers.

The knitwear industry is a different story; Members representing the east midlands and the Scottish borders spoke about its importance. Even in that industry, the knitwear producers are very protective of their sub-industries. The people who make socks and stockings have little to do with the people who knit garments and who use different technologies and materials. In view of such diversity, it is useful for us to remind ourselves, as several hon. Members have done, that it is not all doom and gloom.

There are some very positive stories in "the industry". The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) reminded us of the success of industrial textiles, especially household furnishings. Many people in niche markets in the garment sector, which 20 years ago seemed a hopeless case, are doing very well. My hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) rightly reminded us how innovative and successful Scottish producers in the cashmere sector are proving to be. They are using new designs, new technologies and better materials, which is how we should view the industry.

The same applies to the communities. As a teenager, I went round the West Riding playing and watching football and rugby league. It was often depressing going to towns such as Batley and Halifax, but they are now

totally transformed. The area around Leeds is now a prosperous, successful and vibrant economic area. The area, and not just the textile industry, has adapted extremely well to relative decline. The story is not all doom and gloom by any means.

The figures clearly show that the textile industry is in relative decline. That is nothing new; it has been in relative decline for 150 years. However, that is not surprising because it was the industry that led the industrial revolution. It has been declining relative to the economy as a whole and relative to manufacturing, while other industries have gradually replaced it.

Over the past few years the contraction of output has speeded up. This is not to apportion blame, but that contraction is probably because of the exchange rate as much as anything else. When the exchange rate has appreciated by roughly 25 per cent. in real terms since the mid 1990s, and when many parts of the industry are concerned with competition in exports and imports, and are very price-sensitive, prices and the exchange rate will clearly be important. I suspect that the exchange rate is the factor that most explains the increase in the pressures of competition on the industry. However, even if that exchange rate factor did not exist, globalisation would still be a factor bringing its own pressures, as the hon. Member for Amber Valley reminded us.

I wish to discuss two policy issues. The first concerns trade policy. There is now consensus that the MFA has to be phased out. However, it is worth while reminding ourselves what a pervasive influence trade protection has had in the textile industry. That goes back a long way. Those who know their economic history will know that the first big industrial riots in London took place at the end of the 17th century just before the reign of Queen Anne. The riots were over textile imports. The whole of Whitehall was burned to the ground by rioting workers demanding controls on calico imports from India. People protested about the unfairness of so-called coolie labour—cheap labour. They demanded, and got, quotas. That remained the nature of British industry for many decades, only dying out for technological reasons.

We have had quota protection in British industry since the early 1960s. The long-term agreement became the multi-fibre arrangement in 1974. We were told that that was temporary and that only a few years were needed to get the house in order. Then, in 1979, it was multi-fibre arrangement 2, and things were extended and extended. It is worth while remembering how unbelievably complex the system is. Apart from the common agricultural policy, it is the most complex system of managing trade in the world. There are hundreds of clauses for hundreds of countries and categories of products. Indeed, apart from Gosplan, it is the most managed system of international trade that has ever existed, and it is right that it should go. The lesson has been that, when trade is protected, as in the MFA, it is very difficult to get rid of it. Moreover, in the long run it does not work. All the efforts that have gone into protecting the textile industry in rich countries ultimately turn out to be futile. There have been many successful companies but they are not in the sectors that were protected against import competition. The exercise was largely futile and immensely costly. I hope that the Minister will confirm that the Government are committed to working towards the phasing out of the arrangement. I understand that the commitment is to phase out the quotas but that that commitment is, in the jargon, back-end loaded—it will not take place until the end of the process.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale pointed out, elements of genuine unfairness remain. There are problems with dumping and a lack of reciprocity, especially with the United States. It is right that the Government should be vigilant on those issues.

The second policy issue that I wish to discuss concerns industrial assistance. What is the most sensible and helpful way in which the Government can help an industry that is trying to adapt in difficult circumstances? There are basically two ways. The first is through subsidies and industrial assistance. A lot of money has gone into the textile industry. I think that about £100 million has gone in during the past 10 years, and an awful lot more went into Lancashire and Yorkshire textiles in the 1970s. I am sceptical about the value of that assistance and I should be interested to hear any evaluation that has been made of the outcome. However, I welcome the more useful, subtle and forward-looking approach adopted in the 12-point programme. Those measures are extremely well thought through, sensible and business oriented. They bring the industry together in a sensible way and I commend the people who put the programme together. It is the way in which a forward-looking and outward-looking industry can prosper.

10.39 am

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) on initiating the debate and on her well thought out and extremely impressive contribution. She described the decline that the industry has faced, which has been relentless. In the past 10 years, whereas the growth rate in all industries has been plus 2.1 per cent., the growth rate in the textile industry has been minus 3.2 per cent. That has obviously been reflected in the number of jobs and the balance of trade. We have seen substantial decline.

The hon. Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) mentioned globalisation, but I was pleased with the amount of positive talk about the future in the debate and how we can move forward with hope. One of the biggest problems has been companies and manufacturers sourcing products abroad. More such sourcing abroad of the lower value, high volume goods—such as trainers and jeans—is inevitable. Companies have moved production to China, Africa and the sub-continent. Dr. Martens recently announced the loss of 2,000 jobs, which is devastating for the communities that supplied the labour for its factories.

The ladies' cardigan manufacturer, Dewhirst corporate clothing, announced the loss of 350 jobs last summer when it closed its plant and relocated to Morocco. An especially poignant and brutal truth was brought home to the workers in that factory because they were sent out to Morocco to help set up the factory and train the staff there. They then saw their own jobs exported.

The debate has rightly focused, however, on higher added value, lower volume quality goods. There is every prospect of many manufacturers of those goods

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remaining in the United Kingdom. The Government and the industry must work together to ensure that those things within the remit of the Government are moved forward constructively.

We should examine what the Government have done. My hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) was critical and talked about the lack of any determined, meaningful or clear strategy by the Government, but we should look at what they have done. The Opposition welcomed the textile and clothing strategy group report and the Government's response to it. We also welcomed the updated response that was published a year ago.

What are the Minister's comments on recommendations 1 and 2 of the report? Recommendation 1 states that the Department of Trade and Industry

"should press the European Commission to undertake a detailed study into the reasons for the relative success of the Italian clothing industry".

Recommendation 2 states that the Department

"should fund a study looking at best practice in the Italian textile and clothing industry and how it might be adapted to the UK."

Recommendation 6 states:

"The DTI should ensure that the availability of funding streams to support technological innovation in the textile industry is properly communicated to the industry."

Has any progress been made on that front?

The hon. Member for Amber Valley mentioned recommendation 19 and the suspension of the three-times rule for support to companies attending trade fairs, which is vital. I hope that the Minister will tell us what the Government will do to make matters easier on that front.

Recommendation 37 relates to the progress of the new centre of excellence and the need for it to be monitored closely and for its success to be built on. Will the Minister tell us what is happening about that? Recommendation 40 was that the Department of Trade and Industry should establish a flexible fund to support individual companies that undertake small-scale innovation and development work. That is very important, so will the Minister give us an idea of what the Government have done about that recommendation?

I am worried that although we have had a period of buoyant economic conditions and economic growth, manufacturing is undoubtedly in severe recession. It will become even more important for the Government to examine the recommendations and to ensure that they put in place anything that they can within their remit and resources.

There are other areas in which even if the industry is asking for too much positive help, the Government must not hinder it. The hon. Member for Amber Valley mentioned procurement, and I believe that the Government have positively hindered the industry through their procurement policies. I know that this is outside the Minister's remit, but there was mention of the procurement of Army blankets from abroad. Six months ago, an order for boots and uniforms was sent to a German manufacturer. I am aware of the EU directive that insists on fair and competitive tendering within the EU, but no other major EU country is sourcing clothing and kit for its armed forces from outside its own manufacturers.

Several hon. Members mentioned the climate change levy. I entirely agree with a point made about the Textile Services Association because the key question relating to the climate change levy is whether manufacturers can recoup the money through national insurance contribution reductions. If the answer is no, the Government should take action. Perhaps we should consider moving forward for such cases with an emissions trading scheme, which has been popular and successful on the continent.

Some burdens and pieces of red tape, such as EU directives and regulations, are outside the Government's control. However, the Government have been driving forward several pieces of social legislation. I do not claim for a moment that each burden and extra pressure will be a show stopper, but we hear from every single trade association in every single industry that the combined weight of the burdens on business is making life much more difficult.

During last week and the week before that, we considered two statutory instruments arising from the Employment Act 2002. One related to maternity and paternity pay after adoption, which Conservatives Members support, but last week we considered a statutory instrument on flexible contracts, which gives all employees the right to demand a flexible contract if they have a child under six or a disabled child under 18. That might not worry a larger firm but many small firms in the textiles sector will find it difficult to cope with demands from perhaps five out of 10 employees for a flexible contract. The employees might deserve a flexible contract but if firms are trying to meet an order in the run up to Christmas or another especially busy time, the smaller firms will suffer every time.

Smaller firms, especially, will also suffer from the agency workers directive. To be fair to the Government, they have done their best to resist and water down the directive. However, the directive will almost certainly go through. It has been passed by the European Parliament and it is now before the Council of Ministers. It will give agency workers—or temps—the right to demand a full contract. In fact, the European Parliament insisted that that right should exist after day one, but I know that the Council of Ministers is confident that it can extend the period to six weeks. However, even a six-week period will affect many agency workers. They will have the right to demand parity. It is sometimes easy to justify paying a temp as much as an employee on a full contract. However, there will be plenty of situations in which a temporary member of staff does not have the same experience or skills and who does not qualify in any circumstances for the same level of pay. Many people who work as temps are highly skilled and qualified. They do not want such contractual rights, nor do the employers. I urge the Minister to resist the directive. I know that his socialist colleagues in the European Parliament have voted it through, but I hope that hon. Members who know Labour Members of the European Parliament will talk to them about the damage that the directive will do to business.

The Government must look carefully at those areas within their responsibility that they can control and relieve some of the burdens and red tape. We can then look forward to a bright future. The key to such a framework is that the Government deliver upon it. I hope that the Minister will give us some hope in that direction this morning.

10.50 am

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): I add my congratulations, Mr. Cook, to those that have already been expressed to my hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Kali Mountford) for initiating a debate on such an important industry. The subject certainly deserves an airing in Parliament. It is particularly welcome that she looked on the positive side of the industry. In fact, the whole tone of the debate has been positive, whereas so often in the past it has been a procession of doom and gloom. I come to the debate as a late substitute, but I have a long-standing interest in the industry and it is good to renew my acquaintance with such issues. When innocently fumbling with my tie earlier, I was relieved to find that it was made in Nottingham. I was surprised about that; it is my fig leaf for today.

It is worth bearing in mind that the textile industry is not a piece of industrial archaeology. It contributes 0.8 per cent. of GDP; it accounts for £15 billion in sales and it employs about 250,000 people. It is interesting that exports last year were to the tune of more than £7 billion. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) made good points about the history of protectionism in the industry, but the other side of the coin—even in current circumstances—is that we sell £7 billion worth of goods from that sector overseas. It is the old story that protectionism cuts both ways and we need such markets just as other economies need our market. That is why my Department is committed to working with such an important and dynamic sector and helping it to remain competitive, both domestically and globally.

For the first time in a generation, there is an industry-led national strategy for the future of the sector, which has been drawn up by the textile clothing strategy group. It was established in 1999 to examine the major issues affecting the textile and clothing industry, and to identify actions that would improve its viability and competitiveness. The report was launched in June 2000. It contained several recommendations aimed at the industry and the Government to help the sector meet the global challenges that it faces. Since then, we have expanded our effort to address all the recommendations in the TCSG's strategy that called for action by the Government alone or the Government in partnership with the industry.

The group's follow-up report "Making it Happen", which was launched in July this year, records the actions taken by the Government and the industry to help United Kingdom textile and clothing manufacturers compete more successfully. They include £1.5 million towards a £3.8 million textiles and clothing industry forum programme, developing projects to promote world-class best practice to improve the performance of the industry throughout the entire supply chain; £2 million support to target retraining for the industry through the strategic training for an apparel textiles programme, with a follow-on programme now in the pipeline, and so on. I do not want to go through all 12 steps that the Government have taken because my 10 minutes would be up. I want instead to deal with some specific issues, Mr. Cook.

Mr. Deputy Speaker [Mr. Frank Cook]: Order. I have allowed two such references to me; I cannot allow a third. When establishing this parallel Chamber, the House decided that the four senior Chairmen of the Chairmen's Panel should, while occupying the Chair, be addressed as Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Wilson: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley and the spokesman for the official Opposition asked about what had happened to the study of the comparison with the Italian industry. That is an interesting and important line of inquiry because Italy is not a third-world country that pays knock-down wages, and yet it has extremely successful textile, clothing and footwear industries. The TCSG identified that important lessons could be learned from studying that industry, and the Department of Trade and Industry has undertaken a comparative study of the UK and Italian textile and clothing industries. The initial findings of that will be made available in the new year. The principal focus of the research has been on wool and worsted fabrics and men's suits, which are important for the UK industry and with regard to which Italian manufacturers have been particularly successful. When it is completed, the study and its conclusions will be widely disseminated to the industry.

I was interested by the comments on public procurement. The Government cannot pursue a buy British policy. They must observe European Union rules and Treasury value-for-money guidelines. However, I emphasise that value for money is not the same as cheapest is best, and although we recognise that there is a legal framework and that there are inhibitions on a buy British policy, there is also scope to work within that framework—particularly on the basis of value-for-money criteria—to help the UK textile and clothing companies to compete better in tendering for public service contracts. Value for money must be the key criterion, but that does not necessarily mean that one looks for the lowest price all the time.

Technical textiles are one part of the industry that is booming. As my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) said, a significant factor in its growth is the increasing use of textiles in industrial applications that were originally the province of metals and plastics and of the automotive, aviation, construction, defence, health care, information technology and other industries. I will not list the various amounts of money that are going into this, but it adds up to a very significant contribution, and it is forging links with sectors such as higher education and research and training organisations. The Faraday partnerships are one of the routes through which that money can be channelled.

The hon. Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) said that the Government were entirely responsible for the decline of this industry. That is one of the most absurd statements that we will hear this week—or any week. Classically, the textile industry has been subject to the forces of globalisation. The historical analysis of the

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hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) was more accurate than the statement of the hon. Member for Bosworth: decline has being going on for a long while, and what is important is how one manages it and seizes opportunities.

Mr. Tredinnick: In that case, will the Minister tell us why the industry is still declining despite the many years of his Government's stewardship?

Mr. Wilson: The hon. Gentleman has made his point, and I will make mine: what is important is what one does to try to counter decline and seize opportunities.

That leads on to the point that was made by the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore). He generously referred to my role with regard to the cashmere industry. I enjoyed that: I found it interesting, and it was ultimately rewarding because of the outcomes that were achieved. Anyone who was to look at what has happened in that industry as a micro-example of what can be done in the industry in general would learn many lessons.

The cashmere industry employs hundreds of people—maybe thousands. It is not a cottage industry; it is a very substantial economic contributor. It is also sexy, attractive and international, and it has all the status and economic benefits that flow from those attributes. If that can be done in the borders with cashmere, scores of other niches can be established throughout the United Kingdom. That will allow the industry to continue to be important and valuable. The industry will not, as it did before, succeed through the mass production of items that can clearly be produced more cheaply elsewhere, but that does not mean that there cannot be a healthy textile, clothing and footwear industry. I believe that the industry will be design and quality-led, rather than mass-production-led. There is much to be done, but with the industry and the Government working together, we will achieve it.

Middle East Peace Process

11 am

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Mr. Deputy Chairman—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Frank Cook): Order. I would be remiss in my duties if I did not remind the House for the second time this morning that, when the decision to establish a second Chamber was taken, it was determined that the four senior Chairmen of the Chairmen's Panel would be addressed as Deputy Speaker in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Maples: I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I came to the debate ready to address you as Mr. Chairman, and I checked with my neighbour, who said, "No, you should call him Mr. Deputy Speaker." I am afraid that somehow the words "Deputy Chairman" slipped out.

I shall start by making a couple of fairly uncontroversial statements. The first is that the Israeli-Palestinian dispute complicates a range of other issues. A great many ethnic and border conflicts are raging in the world, but none has external consequences on quite the same scale as those arising from the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The conflict complicates the war on terror enormously, because the terrorists and Islamic fundamentalists use it as an excuse—although I think that it is a pretty pathetic one—and keep pointing to what is happening on the west bank. The conflict also complicates American and British efforts to stabilise the Gulf and deal with Iraq and, more generally, complicates our dealings with the Arab and Islamic world. The consequences of the dispute are out of all proportion to the consequences on the ground for the parties to that dispute.

Secondly, Mr. Arafat and Mr. Sharon are unlikely ever to make a deal. Arafat was not prepared to accept what he was offered by Barak at Taba, and it is highly unlikely that Sharon will make that offer again. As he will make a lesser offer, it is unlikely that the Palestinians will accept it.

The resolution of the dispute is too important to the rest of the world to be left to the Israeli Government and the Palestinian Authority to resolve. The United States has realised that. President Bush came to power thinking that he would not have to bother too much about the middle east, but he has discovered pretty rudely that foreign policy has a way of insinuating itself into a political leader's life, no matter how much he might not want it to. I think that he was warned by President Clinton not to pay too much attention to the middle east because of what had happened at Camp David and at Taba. However, President Bush has found that the matter is top of his agenda as a result of the war on terror and his desire to do something about Iraq.

In January last year at Taba, the parties to the dispute very nearly resolved it. They spent a couple of days talking, having had extensive negotiations the previous September at Camp David. President Clinton had then put forward some new proposals, and those were discussed at length in Taba. I quote from the joint statement issued after those talks:

"The two sides have never been closer to reaching an agreement and it is thus our shared belief that the remaining gaps could be bridged".

Unfortunately, time ran out. Barak lost the election and Clinton left the White House. Arafat did not at the time seem prepared to make the deal, although my understanding from those who were there is that his negotiators would have had a positive—let us put it that way—attitude to the deal that was offered by the Israelis. We know quite a lot about what happened at that meeting, both from reports in the press and from Ambassador Moratinos and the European Union's report on what happened.

The Palestinians should have accepted what was on offer at Taba. I think that it was another Palestinian leader who said that the deal gave them 98 per cent. of what they wanted. If anyone gets 98 per cent. of what they want in negotiations, they are doing pretty well. I do not know which it is, but either Arafat could not or would not make that deal. He is not likely to be offered a better one.

Prime Minister Sharon looks set to win the Israeli elections, although in the Likud parliamentary list elections yesterday, the more extreme and right-wing candidates who back Netanyahu seemed to do rather better than Sharon's. It is unlikely that such an offer will be made to Arafat again. All of us who think about the issue, and who are not completely partisan, know that the Taba deal is the one that is going to be done. The Taba deal was very nearly done and it will, one day, be the one that resolves the dispute.

Let us go through the elements that have constantly been at the heart of the negotiations and what was on offer at Taba. The first issue is territory. At Taba, all of Gaza, 95 per cent. of the west bank and, as I understand it, a 3 to 5 per cent. land swap was offered. Whether the amount was 3 or 5 per cent. may become a big issue, but I cannot believe that a deal would stand or fall on that. Secondly, there is the solution of the refugee problem. The choices offered at Taba were that refugees could stay in the new Palestinian state, move to the area that would be given to the Palestinian state in the land swap, and some could return to Israel on a limited annual basis or go to a third country. Various countries had offered to take people and that seemed to be acceptable.

The third big issue was Jerusalem. At Taba, the offer was that Jerusalem should remain an open city that would be the capital of both the Israeli and Palestinian states. East Jerusalem would be the capital of the Palestinian state and the rest of Jerusalem would stay as the capital of Israel. Also on offer was a regime for the administration of religious sites. The Palestinian state would have jurisdiction over the top of Temple Mount, which is the location of the two mosques that are important to it, and the Israelis would have jurisdiction over the Wailing wall below. I am sure that some complicated legal fine print enabled that deal to be put to bed. Nevertheless, the principles, and more than just the principles, were put in place.

It was agreed that an international commission should handle the question of compensation. There are complications regarding that matter, but, once again, I cannot believe that, if a deal was on the table for everything except compensation, some way could not be found to resolve the matter. Of course, the compensation issue is not just a one-way street. The Israelis would say, "What about the Jews who were expelled from Arab states?" The fundamental issue is security, to which I shall return.

Most Palestinians want a deal; they want a state and they want to be able to get on with their lives. They feel frustrated that the Oslo process has not led them to that. My information is that the Palestinian negotiators at Taba were prepared to accept the deal. I hear from my Israeli friends, and from my friends in London who keep closely in touch with what is happening in Israel, that most Israelis would do anything for peace. Most Israelis would make almost any deal if the suicide bombings stopped and if they could get on with their lives and have some kind of normal relationship with their neighbours. Such people may vote for Sharon in the forthcoming elections, but really they support the Israeli Labour party's position on the negotiations. Barak had a lot going for him in the negotiations, but it was felt that he delivered nothing in the way of peace and security. People feel that Sharon has a better chance of delivering security.

We are in a cycle of violence. I will not take sides in the dispute, but shall propose a new way of approaching a solution. The cycle of violence is unlikely to be halted. In fact, it seems that the more that one side escalates the situation, the further the other side escalates it.

Two other pieces of the jigsaw fell into place at the beginning of the year. First, Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia suggested to Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times* that, in return for peace, an Israeli withdrawal and the creation of a Palestinian state, the Arab world should recognise the state of Israel and normalise relations with it. The Arab League summit, held in March in Beirut, declared that in exchange for the refugees being dealt with and the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from what would become the Palestinian state, Israel would get a peace agreement and normal relations with the Arab world. That is something worth going the extra mile for.

I return to the point that this dispute is too important to be left to the parties to resolve: the rest of us have too much of a stake to leave it to Mr. Sharon and Mr. Arafat, when no one believes that they are likely to reach a deal. The United Nations Security Council should pass a chapter VII mandatory resolution. Having determined a threat to peace in the region, which is undeniable, the Security Council can take decisions, which then effectively become international law. It should set out what was nearly agreed at Taba, plus or minus a few adjustments, in a resolution stating that that is the settlement. It would then be international law that the Palestinian state exists, that its capital is based in such a place, that Jerusalem is based on that regime, and that the choices available to refugees and the compensation arrangements are as defined.

All that would need widespread support, which might well be forthcoming. First, the permanent five members of the Security Council—certainly we, the French, the Americans and the Russians, comprising the Quartet group would support it; and although China has never shown a huge interest, it would be unlikely to frustrate it—would support the resolution. In those circumstances, sufficient numbers of the other members of the Security Council could probably be carried. The two key non-Security Council members are Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Prince Abdullah declared his support and signed up to the Beirut declaration, as did Egypt, which has had diplomatic—or, at least, working—relationships with Israel. It would be good if we could

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bring the rest of the Arab and Islamic world on side, but irrespective of whether that proves possible, the resolution would create the Palestinian state. A buffer might be necessary in the form of a referendum in each territory—in Israel and in what would become the Palestinian state—to test the democratic legitimacy of the proposal. The resolution would set out the detailed terms of the creation of the Palestinian state.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's argument, particularly his reference to China's lack of interest in the region. Purely on a point of information, I heard recently from China's permanent representative in the United Nations that the country has sent to the region an envoy, who is now actively engaged in examining how China could support an eventual settlement. Perhaps China has a greater interest than the hon. Gentleman suspects.

Mr. Maples: That is an interesting point, which I did not know. Whatever China does, it would be unlikely to frustrate a settlement that everyone else was in favour of. Where its direct interests are not at stake, a country tends not to frustrate the actions of the Security Council. Framing the resolution and putting it in place will require considerable arm twisting. However, if the United States can twist the Israelis' arms and the Saudis and Egyptians can twist the Palestinians', we might well get a settlement.

That leaves the security issues, which are at the heart of the Israelis' concerns. Some of the discussions at Taba were about an international stabilisation force. Although it can patrol a border, such a force cannot stop suicide bombers. The Israelis need some assurance on suicide bombings, but it will be difficult to stop every extremist group that wants to frustrate the process. In these circumstances, the groups associated with Fatah might well stop; whether Hamas and Hezbollah would follow suit might depend on the attitude of their sponsors. The United Nations might need to invoke sanctions, which it can under chapter VII and articles 40 and 41, against states that continued to sponsor terrorism in Israel.

My suggested plan would not stop terrorism immediately, but it would put the settlement in place so that the details of negotiations—about the boundaries of the Palestinian state, the options available to refugees, the status of Jerusalem and so forth—would be settled and could no longer be used as alibis by the Israeli or Palestinian authorities to justify why they could not reach a settlement. The choice would simply be whether to implement or fight the settlement.

A UN Security Council resolution, supported by the permanent five members and the most influential people in the Arab world, and with all the diplomatic force that can be mustered from Britain, the US, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Egypt behind it, could offer a chance. I see no other route to a peaceful settlement in the middle east.

At the end of last week—before the debate—I informed the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of exactly what I intended to propose, in the hope that they would respond specifically to that, rather than dwelling on the multitude of aspects to the problem. I look forward to hearing a response from the Minister and from my own side.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I remind hon. Members that it is customary in these 90-minute debates to commence the first of the three winding-up speeches 30 minutes before the conclusion. That leaves us only 45 minutes, and five hon. Members seek to catch my eye, so I exhort hon. Members to make their contributions concise and pertinent, and to resist interventions if possible.

11.16 am

Mr. Ernie Ross (Dundee, West): When I arrived here this morning, I was not quite sure what we would discuss, and I am quite amazed at what I have heard. It is not often that I am amazed on this issue, but I am not sure where the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) has been hiding his bushel. I listened to him when he was on the Opposition Front Bench in the main Chamber. I am also aware of what he has said in the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, of which he is a member. This is one of those times when I wish that the Minister would speak next, so that we could hear what the Government think and then have a debate.

The idea that the Taba proposal should be the basis for a chapter VII UN Security Council resolution is imaginative, to say the least. However, there are major drawbacks with the proposal; it was not quite as simple as the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon suggested. He quoted from the final declaration, but I believe that the officials at Taba felt that a number of mistakes were made there by all concerned, not just by one side or the other. However, in the interests of not creating a division, I shall not attack what the hon. Gentleman said or disagree with it in any way, because I want to hear what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say about the proposal.

I think that most hon. Members arrived here this morning hoping to use these 90 minutes, with your permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to ask the Government questions that we will not be able to ask this afternoon, although there will be Foreign Affairs questions then and we have not really had a debate on the middle east for a long time. I accept that we are all concerned and determined to try to see peace between the Palestinians and the Israelis. We all know that the only way to achieve that is to get both parties round the table, and that the people who can achieve that are the Americans. Most of us have some idea of what the Americans should do.

We also need to send a simple message from this Chamber to the Israeli people: if they re-elect Prime Minister Sharon when the Israeli elections are held and on the platform on which he is likely to stand, most of us taking part in this debate will see no future in the short term for peace in the middle east. The real issue for someone like me, who has been involved with the issue for more than 30 years, is Sharon.

A recent series outlined the way in which the state of Israel came into being and showed the fight put up by various factions in the emerging state. Sharon comes

through all the time as having a clear sense of what is required as far as Israel is concerned, but it is virtually a case of to hell with everyone else. It does not matter who he stands on or who he is prepared to push out of the road. To Sharon, the one important thing was Israel. It did not matter who he was pushing out or knocking out or whom he was prepared to move—Israel had to be established. One can well understand that, given the experiences in various parts of the world—including, it has to be said, the middle east—of those who came together to form Israel.

When it created the state of Israel, the General Assembly said that there should be two states, one mainly Jewish which became Israel, and another an Arab state. We can rake over the coals about whom is to blame following that General Assembly resolution, but the fact is that the Arab state has never been allowed to come into existence, mainly because of people like Sharon.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): With great respect, the reason why the two states did not come into existence after the original UN resolution surely was that the Arab armies invaded that section that was allocated to Israel. Although one can accept the hon. Gentleman's strictures against Sharon as being clumsy and often brutal, is not it also a fact that the al-Aqsa martyrs' brigade, which is responsible for suicide bombings, is directly linked to Yasser Arafat's PLO? It is a little more two-sided than the hon. Gentleman suggests.

Mr. Ross: That is the problem. I am trying to stick to the way in which the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon started the debate. Already, the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) seeks to divide the Chamber and have us squabbling in the middle. I am trying not to do that. We will certainly squabble if the hon. Gentleman continues along those lines.

Sharon is a specific individual; when General Sharon was commander of the Israeli defence forces, the US Secretary of State, George Shultz, negotiated a peace agreement with Yasser Arafat, head of the Palestinians, who were then in the Lebanon. For six months not one Katushya rocket went across into the northern part of Israel, yet in June 1982 under General Sharon, the Israeli defence forces invaded Lebanon. That individual's history is of a man with a single vision; he has not shown, either as Prime Minister or as a general, that he has the facility to understand that if he is to live in peace in the area he has to live with a neighbour who, whether he likes it or not, is a Palestinian Arab. Therefore, rather than knock them about and defeat them on the battlefield, he needs to sit round a table, recognise them as an equal partner in negotiations and start negotiating. If he did so, there is the possibility that the Palestinians would respond.

I remind hon. Members of Sharon's history: when he was not Prime Minister but the leader of Likud, he walked on to Temple Mount, deliberately and provocatively, and brought into being a series of events that made it impossible for what was proposed at Taba to be agreed. From there, the situation has escalated into further violence. No one in the Chamber would go along with anyone losing their life; I am just as concerned about those people who are being killed now, whether it is a 95-year-old woman in a car or taxi waiting at a crossing point, or Iain Hook, who it now appears was deliberately targeted and killed by a member of the Israeli defence forces. I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will tell us how the investigation is going and what representations he has made.

One message that we need to send to the Israeli people is that Prime Minister Rabin gave his life; he understood that he had to sit with the Palestinians. He said that if the Israelis were to live in peace with their neighbours they needed to recognise that their neighbours needed space too. Prime Minister Rabin's land-for-peace proposals were the most imaginative of any Israeli leader for many years. I hope that in the forthcoming elections someone of similar stature will arise among the Israeli politicians to ensure that it is not simply a case of security, security, security. There will be no security if there is no peace. Peace can come about only when the Israelis and the Palestinians sit down together.

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): The hon. Gentleman has told us what the message would be to the Israelis. What would the message be to the Palestine Liberation Organisation?

Mr. Ross: The message would be exactly the same, although not to the PLO but to the Palestinians. The PLO is much bigger than those who assemble on the West Bank and Gaza at the moment. It includes all the refugees throughout the world. The Palestinians need to sit down with their Israeli brothers to negotiate peace. It needs to be based on land for peace. There needs to be a recognition of the two states, which has been the case for some time. It must be recognised that there is no military resolution to the conflict. The conflict must be resolved across the table between two parties and on the basis that both Israelis and Palestinians, including the Palestinian diaspora, have rights. If those rights are recognised and put on the table, there is a chance that peace will result. I am sorry that my speech has seemed rather rambling, but I am still trying to react to the proposal of the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon. I look forward to hearing what the Minister has to say.

11.26 am

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): I shall start by declaring an interest, as I am chairman of Labour Friends of Israel. I have just returned from Israel, and it was clear from that visit that both the Palestinians and the Israelis need peace. Palestinian income has dropped to less than $1,000 a year. Malnutrition is appearing. Palestinian civilians have been caught up in the crossfire of a dirty war. On the other side, 700 Israelis have been killed in less than two years. It is important to put that number into context. That is in a country of 6.5 million people. It is the equivalent of 7,000 people in this country being killed in acts of terrorism. How would we react to that death toll? What would be the pressures on the Government? The Israelis know perhaps more than any other nation what it is like to be on the front line of the war against terrorism; they know that there are no limits to the atrocities that the terrorists will commit to try to spread fear among the democratic people.

Many people feel uncomfortable with the reaction of the Israelis, particularly the Israel defence forces, to those terrorist attacks. I can understand why people feel

[James Purnell]

that way, but we must recognise that Israel as a democratic nation has a right to defend itself. The only reality in today's politics in Israel is a contest over who can get the death toll down. Even getting the death toll down to 20 people per month from 60, as it was a few months ago, is seen as a victory. That dominates Israel's politics and it dominated my conversations with pretty much everyone I met, including Shimon Peres, Barak and people from Sharon's office and the military.

I am glad that both the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) phrased their remarks in the context of peace and what can bring us together. I agree with my hon. Friend that we should emphasise what unites the two sides in this conflict, rather than try to find ways to divide them. That is the key message that should go out from today's debate. These debates are scrutinised carefully outside the House: they are scrutinised as closely as any that we have. We need to put out the message that there is no monopoly on suffering in this fight. Both sides are suffering a terrible burden, and there can be no military solution to the conflict.

That is certainly what the members of the kibbutz that we visited believe. Kibbutz Metzer is very left wing, and when one sits in its canteen, one can see the minaret of the local Arab village, which is barely a few hundred yards away. The kibbutz has a shared kindergarten with its Arab neighbours, a shared football team and it shares its land and farming resources with the village. However, last month a young Arab terrorist, who was not from the village although he was fairly local, walked into the kibbutz and killed five people, including two children who were shot through the back of their mother as she was trying to shield them. We asked our hosts about the reaction, and we were told that a meeting had been held and that nothing had changed in their heads. They still believed in giving up some of their precious land for peace and in sharing their resources with the local Arab village. Indeed, a flood of people came from the village to express their condolences. However, our hosts said that something in their hearts had cracked and that their faith in the peace process had been shaken.

That is true throughout Israel. People are very clear that there must be a change to what the Palestinians are doing—they must try to reduce terror. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, the condition is not that terrorism must cease, because that would provide the most extreme people in the conflict with a veto that would derail the peace process at any stage. However, there must be a belief that there is a genuine attempt by the Palestinian Authority to control and reduce terrorism. Until that happens, I do not believe that any progress will be made.

That was the very depressing conclusion that I took from my trip. The silver lining is that there is broad agreement on the outcome. If we can get people walking down the road that is set out in the "Roadmap", the destination is relatively clear, apart from 5 or 10 per cent. around the edges. The deal can be done, but it will be difficult with the current leadership. I cannot imagine a situation in which the Israelis will do a deal with Arafat, because they do not believe that he genuinely wants peace. We must face that difficult reality. Ehud Barak did as much as anyone to try to take on the legacy of Rabin and to come up with a proper peace deal. He was prepared to try hard to find a way to offer a deal on Jerusalem, settlements and refugees. As Bill Clinton said, he perhaps gave more than the Palestinians had expected. However, if one talks to Barak about Yasser Arafat, it becomes quite clear that if Barak would never do a deal with Arafat again, no one to the right of him in Israeli politics would. We must face that.

In that context, it is worth saying that there is hope. During the past few months, prominent Palestinians have publicly stated the futility of suicide bombings and have said that the armed struggle has reduced the amount of land under Palestinian control and has led to an appalling loss of lives on the Palestinian side as much as on the Israeli side.

Mr. Steen: We are all very interested in the hon. Gentleman's comments, but I wonder whether he could help us on one point—perhaps his memory is better than mine. I recall from the not-too-distant past that President Arafat agreed to a democratic process through which there would be elections, a recognised hierarchy and a democracy. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that that was the case and that it is the way that the Palestinians should go? That would give a broader base from which negotiations could continue.

James Purnell: I quite agree. Reform of the Palestinian Authority will be necessary in order to improve conditions for Palestinians on the ground and to give faith to others that it is worth genuinely engaging in the peace process.

The proposal made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon was very interesting. There will have to be a huge amount of international pressure if we are to get people walking down the road to peace. It may be that the hon. Gentleman's approach can get the parties out of their current logjam.

Two preconditions are necessary. First, there will have to be faith on the Israeli side that their security will be guaranteed. They will not agree to the Taba deal without a real belief that it will bring security. Without that security, the current terrorism could continue and the Israelis could be left with no cards to play to try to reduce it.

The second precondition would be recognition by the Arab states of the legitimacy of the state of Israel. The problem is not only Fatah; it is Hezbollah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In many ways, at the root of the campaigns of those organisations is not so much the Palestinian issue but the issue of the recognition of the state of Israel. That recognition is required from Iran and Syria in particular.

What more can we do? We in the west must keep pressure on the Israeli Government to go down the path of peace. We must continue to provide aid to the Palestinians to try to relieve the conditions on the ground. The Chief Rabbi has suggested that, in return, there should be conditions that require a much broader education for people in the Palestinian Authority, to ensure that hate is not spread through schools and that children grow up with a recognition of Israel and of their Jewish neighbours. We have to keep working with the Arab nations.

In that context, I want to make one quick final remark. I understand why we are engaging with Assad and why he is visiting. It is important that we bring Arab nations into the family of nations. In return, however, we have to make it clear that that cannot happen without a significant shift on the sponsoring of terrorism. The headquarters of all of the organisations that I mentioned are in Damascus. I am sure that the Prime Minister will raise such issues with Assad next week. Without an end to terror—terror from within not only the Palestinian Authority but the generality of Israel's neighbours—there can be no peace in that troubled area.

11.37 am

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) on securing this debate and on the way in which he has approached it. I also congratulate all speakers on the way in which they have spoken.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon made some interesting points. The story of what happened at Taba depends on whom one speaks to—a number of different accounts exist of what happened—but from the accounts that I have heard, I recognise some of what the hon. Gentleman said. I want to pick him up on one point—although I am sure that it was no more than a slip of the tongue. He wondered what might have influenced some of President Arafat's attitudes at that time. He said that he thought President Arafat might not have wanted to be the one who recognised Israel. However, President Arafat and the Palestinian Authority recognised Israel not only recently but several years ago. There is no doubt about the PA's recognition of Israel within the pre-1967 borders.

The Taba negotiations were clearly not completed. Neither side walked away from them; as the hon. Gentleman said, they simply ran out of time. We should acknowledge that. All too often in debates on what has happened during the peace process, Taba is almost jumped over. It is suggested that everything has flowed from the impression that a wonderful deal had been on offer at Camp David a few months previously, but the Palestinians had rejected it. I do not want to go into everything that happened at Camp David; suffice it to say that it was not as simple as has been suggested. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to highlight what happened at Taba.

I chair the Britain-Palestine all-party parliamentary group. On behalf of that group, I condemn violence against civilians from whichever side it comes—whether that be the case of the 70-year-old who died last week in Gaza when his house was demolished by soldiers when he was still inside it; or the appalling incident when children and their mother were gunned down in a kibbutz; or the suicide bomb in Jerusalem a few weeks ago that killed 11 and injured 40; or the 383 Palestinian children who have died since September 2000. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) was right to say that 700 Israelis had died in the past two years and to ask how we would feel if the equivalent number of British people—about 7,000—had died since September 2000. It is important that we bear that in mind. In the same way, however, we should ask how we would feel if, like the Palestinians, the equivalent of more than 20,000 Britons had died in the same period.

It does not weaken in any way our condemnation or horror of the violence to recognise the need to move beyond it and look for its causes and solutions. We should remind ourselves that, although Israel has an absolute right to exist and to demand recognition without preconditions, Palestinian concerns are also important. We must avoid any suggestion that Israel has non-negotiable, absolute rights, whereas the Palestinians' rights are somehow discretionary. Uri Avnery, a well-known Israeli who has been active on the issue for many years and has a great deal of respect, put it well recently when he said:

"The first and worst violence is the occupation...Human rights are not a special favour granted to Palestinians if they behave like good children."

I am sure that Israelis, rightly, would not accept their rights being dependent on special behaviour, but that should apply equally to the Palestinians. We must recognise that when we see the reality of the occupation.

Hon. Members may have read the powerful article in *The Observer* last Sunday, which examined the situation in the Itamar settlement overlooking Nablus. Settlers there have been firing down on Palestinians whose only crime is to try to harvest the crop from the olive groves. I was chilled to read the words of an 85-year-old farmer quoted in the article, who said that the

"settlers approached me when I was ploughing my olive groves. They said, 'If we see you here again, we will shoot you.'"

That was no idle threat: two people from that olive grove have died in recent weeks.

Such incidents are as morally unacceptable as suicide bombings. They are also illegal under the Fourth Geneva Convention, which relates to the treatment of civilians. The occupation and the settlements are illegal. When we look for ways in which the United Nations can adopt a more pro-active and assertive role, we must establish that international law is not negotiable or discretionary in the middle east. It is as sacrosanct there as anywhere else. I say that not only because it is right, but because we must try to understand the causes of the conflict and win the support and confidence of both sides.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde is right to say that we need to understand the fear that grips so many Israelis. However, we must also understand the feeling of double standards that pervades in so many parts of the Arab world when we seem to treat their citizens' rights as different from the rights of Israelis.

Many hon. Members have questioned the way in which Sharon approaches issues, especially my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross). He is right to do that. It is sometimes projected that Israeli violence is a response to terrorism. If one examines the sequence of events, however, that is not borne out. In December last year, there was a Palestinian Authority ceasefire that lasted for 28 days. Not a single Israeli was killed during that time. All Palestinian factions agreed to it. However, during that time, Israel demolished the homes of 614 Palestinians in Rafah in Gaza, 19 Palestinian civilians were killed and Raed Al-Karmi, a Palestinian activist, was assassinated. I am not trying to

[Richard Burden]

suggest a tit-for-tat argument, but unless we understand the sequences, winning the confidence of the Palestinians will be much more difficult.

We need to ask what Sharon's agenda is, because his argument seems to involve a catch-22 situation. If, as a result of his constant military incursions, Palestinian violence stops, it is said that that shows that his policy works and why there must be an iron fist to put the people down. If Palestinian violence does not stop, the response comes, "Well, that shows why we've got to do these things." That is an absolute catch-22.

Last week, Sharon said:

"Israel can no longer be expected to make political concessions until there is proven calm and Palestinian governmental reforms".

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde said rightly that the first part of that gives the men of violence a veto on peace, so it makes no sense in that case. However, there is also a question of Palestinian political reform, which the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) rightly mentioned. The Palestinians want elections. I visited the area in May and there was a constant demand for elections from members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Palestinians in the street and the Palestinian Authority. Chairman Arafat wants elections. However, it is a bit difficult to organise and hold elections while closures stop people getting from one town to another and curfews stop people leaving their homes for most of the day. The international community could say that if there is a consensus that such elections should be held, not only Israel should have elections in the next couple of months because Palestinians should also have free and fair elections that are held in the presence of international observers. The weight of the occupation should be lifted to allow such elections to be held.

On present form, Sharon and the Sharon Government have not shown any interest in allowing such things to happen. Sharon said in a recent speech that a Palestinian state could perhaps make up about 40 per cent. of the west bank and Gaza. He said that the way to get from one Palestinian area to another could be by using bridges or tunnels. If we honestly expect to win the confidence of Palestinians, we must accept that they are people. They are not moles or rabbits. They cannot go from one place to another by using a series of tunnels. They must have a viable state.

There are alternatives. I am encouraged by the new leader of the Israeli Labour party and by what he has said. He seems seriously to want peace talks, which is great. He seems to recognise the Palestinians' right to choose their representatives. We should encourage that and encourage similar voices in Israel, just as we must encourage the voices of peace among the Palestinians.

We should also pay tribute to the small number of Israelis who, often in difficult circumstances, say that they are no longer prepared to go along with the occupation. A growing number of conscripts and reservists, who often have distinguished military records, are refusing to serve in the occupied territories. They are not pacifists, by and large. They say that they are prepared to serve in an Israeli defence force but they are not prepared to serve in an Israeli occupation force. That shows great bravery and courage and it focuses attention where it should be. Ending the occupation is not an add-on or luxury in addition to finding a settlement but it is absolutely central to that. We should pay tribute to the refuseniks and, as parliamentarians, encourage them as much as possible.

The conflict in the middle east has bedevilled not only that part of the world, but the whole world for so many years. It has already claimed the lives of far too many innocent people. It is right that all of us who participate in these debates condemn violence from whatever source it comes. If we are to move from condemnation to change, which is ultimately the important thing, the international community needs to be more assertive. I agree with the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon that that requires a new initiative from the United Nations and I welcome the fact that our Government are taking more of a leading role. If the initiatives are to work, they must be not only meant as even-handed, but seen as even-handed, which requires addressing the issue of double standards that is felt so keenly among Palestinians and throughout the Arab world as a whole.

11.49 am

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I was very pleased that during our conference in September and October, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, in connection with his statements on Iraq, promised that the middle east peace process would move toward final status negotiations before the end of this year. More recently, on 25 November, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary made some positive suggestions, which indicated that that would happen. I wish my hon. Friend the Minister to bring us up to date on that; this is an ideal opportunity for us to be told how far we have got in putting the middle east peace negotiations back on track.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) on securing the debate. It is timely, as the end of the year is approaching fast. I also welcome his suggestion. I have always been told that the Americans must help if we are to get peace in the middle east. There is some truth in that, but I have never believed that the Americans alone, with all their vested interests in that region, would proceed to final status negotiations.

The hon. Gentleman obviously believes that the key to unlocking this serious problem lies with the United Nations. I have always believed that; in the past, I have called for UN peacekeepers to try to keep the two sides in the middle east apart. Therefore, I strongly welcome the proposal, and I look forward to hearing my hon. Friend the Minister's response to it.

Dr. Julian Lewis: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman referred to the possible future role of UN peacekeepers. I was minded to inquire about that when my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) made his opening remarks. We have been in that position before: permanent peacekeepers were in place in the run-up to the 1967 war. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that in any settlement imposed by the UN, those peacekeepers should be there permanently, and that they should be removable only by the UN, rather than at the behest of one or other side of the dispute, as has so disastrously happened in the past?

Dr. Iddon: I would certainly welcome them being there, although I would hope that they would not have

to stay there permanently. It is obvious that it will take several decades to achieve peace in the region; that will be a long-term process.

My constituency has a large Muslim population, and my Muslim constituents are pressing me on this issue more than on any other. I attend many meetings with them, and they keep asking me about the chances of success with peace negotiations in the region. Recently, I have had to tell them that I think that at present we are further away than ever before from achieving peace in the middle east; that is my opinion, but I hope that I am wrong.

Ariel Sharon does not appear to want to make peace in the region. An article in *The Guardian* a few days ago stated that Sharon has openly admitted that he does not want a two-state settlement. I am unsure whether there is any truth in that; perhaps my hon. Friend the Minister will tell us whether it is true. There cannot be peace in the region unless there is a two-state settlement. My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) referred to Ariel Sharon's history. With Sharon in place, there can be no peace in the region. We will have to see what happens in future elections in Israel.

I am a scientist, so I examine the evidence. I have no axe to grind on either side of this argument. I used to be very supportive of the Israelis—I certainly was during the six-day war, when they were under attack from the Arabs. Now, my sympathies are the complete opposite: I strongly support the Palestinians because they are among the most oppressed people in the world.

As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, the repercussions of the conflict in the middle east ripple out to wherever there are Muslim populations in the world. Matters such as the war on terrorism also go back to the central debate on the middle east.

When the Berlin wall was built, people throughout the world vigorously protested. I am old enough to remember it being built, and I remember the huge protests that came from almost every country. What amazes me is that a Berlin wall is being built from the north to the south of the region. Much of it has already been built, and I am told that it is higher than the Berlin wall, although I have not yet seen it. The wall is being built illegally 10 km beyond the green line, within Palestinian territory, and it is pinching 10 per cent. of that territory. It completely divides the west bank from the state of Israel. Have the Government made any protest about the building of that wall?

When I visit my constituency, it is apparent that hardly any of my constituents know anything about the building of the wall. It is one of the most devastating things that any country has ever done, but where are the protests? Where is the media coverage? I have not seen it. The wall has been mentioned in the quality press, but certainly not in the tabloids. Our country, and indeed every other country, should protest about the building of the wall by the Israelis just as much as they did when the Berlin wall was built.

James Purnell: I agree with my hon. Friend that it is tragic that the wall is being built. I saw it last week. I understand completely how the matter might seem from our perspective in Britain. However, does my hon. Friend understand that, from the perspective of the Israelis, the building of the wall is a dovish move, and one that recognises the two states? The building is being done to allow people to withdraw from the territories and to reduce what my hon. Friend would think of as the occupation. He may not like the details of the scheme—there are important arguments about its details—but does he understand that the matter is thought of very differently in Israel?

Dr. Iddon: Of course I recognise that the matter is seen differently in Israel, but if the wall is being built in recognition of the two states, why is it being built 10 km—6 miles—beyond the green line? Why, at the very least, did the Israelis not build it on the green line?

I am a scientist, as I have said, and I consider the evidence. The evidence shows that the Israelis want totally to control the Palestinians. The Israelis have never had—and will never have, particularly not under leaders such as Ariel Sharon—a thought of a two-state settlement, except when great pressure is applied on them. One has only to consider the bypasses and how Israel has built settlements around Palestinian towns and villages. The wall is the most recent evidence of the intentions of the Israelis. Such behaviour has been going on under successive Governments, whether on the left or the right of the political spectrum in Israel.

The evidence shows that the Israelis have given no sign that they want a two-state settlement. They prevaricated throughout the peace negotiations. As I said, the Americans will not sort out the matter because they have too many vested interests. For that reason, I strongly welcome the proposal involving the United Nations; that is the only way out of the sticky mess that we are in. If we do not act on the proposal, thousands more people will die.

A few weeks ago, I received a booklet called "Who Will Save the Children?", which is produced by a variety of American organisations, and the information that it gives is horrific. It states:

> "From September 29, 2000 through March 31, 2002, the violence in occupied Palestine and Israel claimed the lives of at least 232 Palestinian and 54 Israeli children under the age of 18."

Who will save the children? Perhaps the UN will; I hope so.

Palestinian towns and villages are rapidly becoming settlements within an expanded Israeli state. I hope that we can get the peace negotiations back on track, but we—not just America but the UN—will have to be strong on Israel. If we do not put pressure on Israel to come back to the table to talk seriously, the devastating ripple effect will continue for decades and affect the rest of us throughout the world.

11.59 am

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) not only on initiating the debate, but on the quality of his extremely interesting contribution. I regret that my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell) cannot be here today. He contributes regularly to such debates and has important points to make. I hope that he will be back in his place soon.

Fundamental truths are repeated constantly in such debates. They need repeating because they are correct. Israel is entitled to live in peace within secure borders

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and free from attack or threat. Palestinians are entitled to justice and to a viable homeland, both administratively and economically. We have set out such a position in UN resolutions that have survived the debates on the subject over many years. They are as true today as they have ever been. If that is the potential light at the end of the tunnel, I can only repeat what was said to me recently at the United Nations. An Israeli said, "We can see the light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot see the tunnel." The fact that we seem so distant from achieving such clear objectives is depressing.

Let us be clear in this Chamber that terrorism and the loss of innocent life is something that we must deprecate. It is not justifiable. The hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) was right to say that Israelis need to be confident that effective measures are in place actively to discourage those who would attack them from within Palestine. Let us understand that the reaction of those who undertake suicide bombings or the like is born of the desperation and the circumstances in which they find themselves, which is based on occupation, a regime of coercion and economic strangulation, and the illegal settlements to which reference has been made.

We must remember that the second intifada started with the determined trip of Sharon to Temple Mount. He knew what the consequences of that would be and he used it for political purposes. He adopted such a position, and I believe that he can end it, too. It is an historical perversity that right-wing leaders are often in a better position to achieve settlement than those who take a more centralist position because such people can take their population with them. Let us hope that Sharon takes that view.

The outside world is aware of the critical importance of the position in the middle east and, as has already been said, the ripple effect covers a much wider area. During my recent trip to the United Nations, it was interesting to talk to members of the Security Council, ambassadors and permanent representatives from wider circles. Other than those representing Arab states, they were not willing to countenance an express linkage between the arguments on Iraq and those on the middle east. Nevertheless, we all understood that that linkage was made on the streets throughout the Islamic world and that it was necessary to be seen not to have double standards.

There is an implicit requirement to meet the impatience of many who do not see the international community acting with the same resolution in the middle east that it is now willing to show in respect of Iraq. Some blame the way in which the Palestinians have played their hand in the United Nations. There is some substance to that belief; the way in which they have used international organisations has not been clever. However, we need to understand that the middle east colours the responses of those whose help we need in the war against terrorism and to ensure that appropriate pressure is applied to Iraq. We must also understand that any conflict in Iraq would have devastating consequences on the position in the middle east, and could take us to a point of no return.

Where does the international community stand in all this? I reject the view that we should not deal with President Arafat. He is the elected head of the Palestinians and must be party to whatever emerges. We should put pressure on the Palestinians to bring every pressure to bear in their communities to persuade the factions that want to pursue the conflict through terrorist action that there are better ways of doing so. I appreciate that that is difficult when there is a complete breakdown of civil or peacekeeping administration in areas under Palestinian Authority control. None the less, that pressure needs to be maintained.

Our principal course of action must be a renewed firmness in dealing with the Government of Israel. Several factors must be considered. The settlements are a running sore and are illegal, as is the continuing demolition of Palestinian homes. Even today, a court is examining the proposed further demolition of Palestinian homes in order to widen the road to an illegal Israeli settlement. The Israeli Government must understand that that is unacceptable. We must make it clear that aspects of the suppression in Palestine are incompatible with Israel's status as a democratic nation that subscribes to the same human rights to which we in the western world subscribe.

There is curfew, collective punishment and the reported refusal to allow Arafat into Bethlehem on the ground that he has damaged the position of the Christians in Palestine. I must say that he has not damaged their position nearly as much as the Israeli tanks have done. There is the shooting of innocent individuals, including members of the international community: I refer to the shooting of Iain Hook on 22 November. Only yesterday in Gaza, Israeli security forces attacked a bus belonging to the United Nations Works and Relief Agency. All these factors create the circumstances in which terrorism thrives. That must be brought home to the Israeli Government, as must the fact that the western world cannot launch a consequential attack on those whom the Israelis identify as their enemies. Mr. Sharon must be disabused of the notion of a crusade. There will be no such crusade against Iraq, Iran or whoever is next on the list.

We must take into account our economic and military links with the nations in the area and reconsider the matter. Israel and the European Union are prime trading partners, and we are still supplying arms, directly or indirectly, to the area. I understand that the Israeli elections are coming up, so these are difficult issues. I understand that the rightward drift poses a difficulty, even in the Likud party, despite the rejection of Netanyahu. The quartet—the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia—must act effectively. We are told that they are doing so, and the Minister may tell us whether the Foreign Secretary was right when, on 25 November, he talked about positive developments and determined moves. However, the process must break cover so that the whole world can see that progress is being made.

I commend the suggestion made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon that the United Nations Security Council should take a lead. I am a great believer in the primacy of the Security Council and the crucial role that it has to play. I also believe that the United States must be on board for the Security Council to be effective. We also need to persuade the Syrians and the other Arab

league nations of the good sense of what is proposed. I look forward the Minister's reply, but whatever happens needs demonstrably to happen now if the Arab world is to have any confidence that the international community is even handed.

12.10 pm

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): This has been one of the most refreshing debates that I have attended on this topic. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) for initiating the debate and for the enlightened way in which he launched it this morning. Any student who wants to learn about the subject should be sent a copy of my hon. Friend's speech, which contained a masterly synopsis of the facts. It is all there in a nutshell. At a time of stand-off in the region, his is a thoughtful, balanced and well-intentioned initiative that deserves to be taken seriously. We have had Camp David, Taba, Tenet, Mitchell, Crown Prince Abdullah and now Maples. What my hon. Friend proposes must be taken as a serious possible course of action. He said that most Israelis will vote for Sharon, but for one peace. The phrase that best describes that apparent contradiction is that they are short-term hawks but long-term doves. A lot of hope rests on a dissection of the psychology behind that opinion.

The security situation is deteriorating. It is something that we have all studied and I witnessed it for myself in May on the day that I walked through the rubble of Jenin. When I returned to Tel Aviv, I heard an explosion in a snooker hall just down the coast—the result of a suicide bomber. It is that juxtaposition of violence that bedevils the issue from day to day.

This is a crucial time because while the world community is looking at Iraq and our gaze is averted, things may go even more wrong. We do not want that to happen. What drives us all demented with exasperation is exactly as my hon. Friend explained: so many of the crucial ingredients for peace are largely in place; they are scattered like a jigsaw on a table, waiting to be put together.

I shall be brief, to allow the Minister to give what I know will be a considered response to my hon. Friend's speech. As he said, the ingredients are there: borders, the right of return, settlements and Jerusalem, the four main components of a potential peace. However, there are no willing interlocutors and therefore there seems to be no progress. As hon. Members have said this morning, there is no military solution.

A solution has been proposed by my hon. Friend. Central to his plan is the concept of imposition by the United Nations under chapter VII. It genuinely reflects our frustration that if only someone could bang heads together something could be done, because the ingredients are there. However, it throws up the issue of whether people can be led into an agreement willingly or whether they need to be pushed. That is at the heart of the concept behind my hon. Friend's proposal.

A parallel can perhaps be drawn with Northern Ireland, where there was similar, seemingly hopeless, sectarian violence. That is often mentioned by the shadow Foreign Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), who was a Minister with responsibility for security in Northern Ireland. He saw that the best step forward was to establish confidence-building measures, which were part of the Mitchell proposals, from a lower level, by grandmother's footsteps, to the point where the main participants in the political process could act on the foundation of mutual trust. The question mark over my hon. Friend's proposal is whether that ingredient can emerge from his process, whether his proposal can work without it and whether some kind of compulsion can lead to the solution that he proposes. But trust cannot be imposed; it has to emerge by degrees over time.

I could say so much but there is no point in rehearsing the attitudes that the two sides face. Suffice it to say that we on the Opposition Front Bench fervently defend Israel's right to exist, to be recognised by all and to live in complete security from terror and destabilising pressure. We also defend the Palestinian people's right to live in a climate of hope in a state of their own.

We must all put ourselves into the mind of each side in this continuing conflict. The Israelis feel insecure and vulnerable: suicide bombers afflict them every day, and they have neighbours who they think want to do away with them altogether. They feel that the Arabs want to push them westwards into the sea. Palestinians, however, feel humiliated, dispossessed, stateless and subjugated. They feel that the Israelis want to push them eastwards across the river into Jordan.

Anyone can take up the cudgels for one side against the other, but it is no good adopting a polarised stance. One does not have to be anti-Arab to be pro-Israeli, or anti-Israeli to be pro-Arab. Arab-hating attitudes are potentially as iniquitous as anti-Semitic ones. To be pro-peace, one must be pro-both sides. Any reasonable assessment of this complicated issue realises that there is cause and fault on both sides. We must totally condemn suicide bombings on any target against the Israelis. We must also condemn the building of illegal settlements by the Israelis on land that is outside the legitimate borders of their own country. Beyond that, however, playing the blame game does not get us very far. Any of us can construct a tit-for-tat catalogue of claims and counter-claims, and accusations and counter-accusations, but such an antiphony of name-calling gets us nowhere.

We need a de-escalation of violence and the gradual, steady growth of trust, perhaps starting, as I suggested, at the lower level and rising to the point at which two leaders with a genuine desire for peace can converse, negotiate and take their people willingly to a conclusive agreement.

I think that all hon. Members present agree that a two-state solution is the only answer for peace. However, the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) and others asked a question relating to the crucial role of the Americans. I think that both parties can walk the path to peace only if the Americans persistently and consistently take an interest in, and pay attention to, the middle east peace process. If they are in it for a few months and out for a few months, the whole process will falter, as we have seen.

Whatever the merits of the President's speech in June, things have stagnated ever since—the process has gone quiet. However much one might wish the United Nations to get involved, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon suggests, without consistent attention from the Americans, that will not happen, if

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only because they will not necessarily do what is needed in the UN for the UN to do what it needs to do. Essentially, this is the dilemma that my hon. Friend puts so well: to tread the path to peace, should it be the UN, the US, or both? I harbour some doubts about imposition by the UN. I do not think that that would work without the United States, but it is a serious proposal that needs to be seriously entertained.

For any settlement to last, there will be no substitute for genuine confidence-building measures and the building of trust. If the participants feel that they have been forced and they are not, within themselves and their people, willing in the agreement that they are asked to meet, it is unlikely to last. In the absence of US attention, and willingness within the two parties that have to sign up to peace, the UN solution will get us only so far. That said, at last and at least there is an initiative in the climate of misery that we otherwise face. I congratulate my hon. Friend on his thoughtful and reasonable contribution.

12.19 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate my colleague from Warwickshire, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples), on initiating the debate. It is on an important issue, about which many hon. Members feel very strongly. They are deeply concerned about the death and destruction that has occurred among the Israelis, Palestinians and others as a result of the conflict in the middle east. Let me take this opportunity to agree with the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who mentioned the right hon. and learned Member for North-East Fife (Mr. Campbell). The right hon. and learned Gentleman has made a valuable contribution to these debates in the past. We hope to see him here again soon. Indeed, I saw him the other day on television looking robust. I know that he is still active and we wish him well in his struggle to regain his health.

The debate has been serious, and a number of important points have been raised. Before I deal with the proposal made by the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon, I should like to say something about the cycle of violence that has been faced by the Israelis and the Palestinians. The consequences have been tragic. Since the intifada started just two years ago, more than 2,000 Palestinians and nearly 700 Israelis have lost their lives. Everyone in the region suffers from the continuing violence and the absence of a final settlement. UK nationals have suffered too. Most recently, Iain Hook, the UN Relief and Works Agency employee, was killed during an Israeli incursion into Jenin on 22 November. I offer my deepest condolences to Iain Hook's family at this difficult time. We will hold the Israelis to their commitment to carry out a full investigation into what happened.

My hon. Friend the Member for Dundee, West (Mr. Ross) asked whether we had raised our concerns. We have done so at the highest level. I spoke to the Israeli ambassador last week, and I am going to meet him again this afternoon to talk about this and other matters. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has spoken to the Israeli Foreign Secretary and we are awaiting a written report of the Israel Defence Forces inquiry, which we will study in due course.

A negotiated settlement of the dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is long overdue. The same goes for Israel and her other neighbours. We have consistently sought to reach a just settlement based on UN Security Council resolutions 242, 338, 1397 and now 1435. As the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon said, the outlines of such a settlement are clear: a viable state for the Palestinians and security for Israel within recognised borders. Israelis and Palestinians alike deserve to enjoy security from attack and the freedom to run their own lives.

The hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon proposes that the UN Security Council pass a resolution under chapter VII imposing a solution along the lines discussed by the Israelis and Palestinians at Taba in January 2001. There has been much speculation about the detail of those negotiations and about earlier talks at Camp David. The negotiators themselves said that they got closer to a settlement at Taba than ever before. Unfortunately, their efforts fell short of a permanent status settlement, which all the parties said they sought. The hon. Gentleman's proposal is very interesting. It deserves to be taken seriously. My view is that it is not a flier now. In the longer term, it is possibly a serious issue that we will have to consider in a wider context. It is not something that we can go forward with at this time. There are a number of reasons for that.

Although it is possible for all of us to sketch the outlines of a settlement in the middle east, it is in the detail of a settlement that the difficulties arise. I agree with the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Mr. Duncan), who was cautious about top-down solutions. He referred to the need for confidence-building measures between the parties. He also said that the impetus for agreement had to come from within the parties involved in the dispute. All that is true. I am also a little bit wary given the history of chapter VII, which we are currently dealing with in relation to Iraq, Liberia and Libya. Should we place Israel in the same category? If my memory serves me correctly, it would be the first democracy to have a chapter VII resolution imposed on it. Such a resolution is enforceable by sanctions or military action, so we should be cautious before we take resolutions down that route. Chapter VI resolutions have been the chosen vehicles for the UN's resolutions on the middle east, and I believe that that remains the right approach at present. It remains to be seen whether chapter VII resolutions will be appropriate in future.

Mr. Maples: The problem with chapter VI is that, if we want to impose a solution, we must have chapter VII. If the international community decided to go down my chosen route, it would have to invoke chapter VII.

Mr. O'Brien: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but thus far we have seen no clear agreement on crucial points at Taba, and we cannot impose a settlement on which the parties are not agreed. Extrapolating something from Taba that really is not there would be counter-productive. For a start, the Israelis and Palestinians are not even agreed on what was discussed at Taba, let alone what was finally agreed. Similarly,

disagreement remains between the parties about Mr. Moratinos's role in the process. Taba saw no agreement on land, with no map defining the boundaries, no agreement on the Temple Mount or Haram al-Sharif, and no resolution on the right of return—a red line for both Israelis and Palestinians. At this point, no easy way of finding a resolution to the red line issues underlined by both sides is apparent. Israel wanted a demilitarised Palestinian state, but the Palestinians were unprepared to accept it. A series of difficult issues were not resolved at Taba, so using Taba as a template for the UN to impose a solution would not be the best way of making progress.

It remains right to view Taba and Camp David as starting points on which further negotiations can be built. As the Foreign Secretary said, they provide a broad framework for handling some of the issues that still divide the parties—settlements in Jerusalem, for example, must figure in final status negotiations. A solution cannot be imposed on the parties through a UN resolution under chapter VII and the parties themselves cannot reach a settlement: it requires vigorous intervention by neighbours and the wider international community, including the UN.

The goal of our current efforts is the urgent resumption of negotiations and the Quartet, the EU, the UN and Russia will play the key roles in achieving it. We shall support them whenever we can. The Quartet is currently drawing up a road map aimed at achieving a final settlement within three years. It will be comprehensive and will include the Syrian and Lebanese tracks. It will address the political, economic, humanitarian, institutional and security dimensions, while spelling out reciprocal steps by the parties in each phase.

Progress will be based on the parties' performance in key areas, including Palestinian security reform and Israeli withdrawal to pre-intifada positions by mid-2003 as the security position improves. Performance will be monitored and assessed by the Quartet. The parties must do everything in their power to reduce violence, build confidence and resume negotiations. They must implement the steps set out in the road map. That is the basis on which we hope to take these issues to a conclusion. We must ensure an end to the suicide bombing, which is stopping the achievement of a Palestinian state, and the Israelis must withdraw from Palestinian land as part of an overall peace settlement. The objective is to move negotiations forward and to ensure that we achieve peace and a final resolution of these disputes. The Palestinian people and the Israeli people deserve peace and the international community should work with them to achieve that.

Council Housing

12.30 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): It is a privilege to begin this brief debate on council housing. Labour councils all over the country have been proud of their contribution to building council houses and maintaining council house stock. We should be proud of the social housing sector because it belongs to the people and is administered by their elected representatives.

Council housing is now more necessary than ever. Prices in the private sector are rocketing, especially in the south-east, because the laws of supply and demand have gone mad. Although demand for housing has increased, we are building fewer houses than at any time since the great depression of the 1920s and 1930s. People are being priced out of the private housing market; they cannot afford it. We now have a lot of subdivision of families. Single parents, in particular, cannot afford to buy, so they need social housing.

The amount of social housing is shrinking. Housing associations have more money, but they are building fewer houses because costs are rising. A Labour Government—I will repeat that phrase with emphasis in the way that Neil Kinnock would have done at a Labour party conference—a Labour Government are selling council housing at a faster rate than the Tories ever did. The target is the transfer of 200,000 council houses in large-scale voluntary transfers each year.

To pressure councils into selling, the Government have deliberately underfunded council housing. Councils cannot keep up with the volume of repairs. The backlog is huge. In 2000, the Government estimated that the repairs backlog amounted to £10 billion, and the improvements backlog was estimated at £9 billion. In other words, a total of £19 billion is needed for repairs and improvements.

In tackling the problems of social housing, housing associations have many advantages that councils do not have. Housing associations can borrow on the stock market, which gives them a lot of power to build houses and carry out repairs. Their tenants do not have to pay the daylight robbery system—a system whereby the housing benefit of council tenants is paid by other council tenants out of the housing account, which is money provided for housing. Thus the poor are being asked to subsidise the housing benefit of the poorest, instead of that money being paid from the social security system. Tenants of housing associations do not have to pay that. The result is that councils, which are underfunded, have real problems in keeping up with repairs.

My council—North East Lincolnshire council—can do only the most urgent repairs because it does not have the money to tackle other repair problems. We did some calculations for a presentation for the National Audit Office's review of large-scale voluntary transfers. There are about 2.8 million council houses and we calculated that the average rent is some £2,500 a year. Of that, £1,500 goes on management, maintenance and major repairs, leaving £1,000 that is, in effect, siphoned off by Government. Most of the money goes to pay for the daylight robbery system in which housing benefit is paid by councils rather than by the social security system. When it comes to a large-scale voluntary transfer, that

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£1,000 is available to the housing associations to play with, but not to the councils. It gives the housing associations an advantage. They can do repairs, provide better services to tenants, and build new houses.

Last month, I attended a housing conference with the north-east branch of the Chartered Institute of Housing. I heard an exciting presentation by Tom Mannion, the chief executive of the Irwell Valley housing association in Manchester. His association has few problems with arrears, which can usually be quite a problem for councils. It has few problems involving crime, drug-addiction and expulsions, and is able to provide a more effective service, good behaviour contracts with tenants and gold service guarantees so that, when repairs become necessary, tenants can choose which repairs are to be done and the bill is not paid until they are satisfied with the work. Repairs are to be done as soon as a tenant with a gold service contract requests them.

I asked at the conference why councils did not offer the service as a means of improving their housing. My suggestion was received with a laugh of pity. Housing managers gently explained to me that councils do not have the same numbers of staff to go out and cosset and counsel the tenants as housing associations. Nor do the councils have the money or the flexibility to provide such a service. That is why councils face a repair backlog and the problems of sink estates where nobody wants to go. The housing there is going steadily downhill and the council can do nothing about it because it does not have enough money for repairs and renovations to make the estate attractive.

Then, along comes the Audit Commission and kicks councils when they are down. We have just had an Audit Commission report on North East Lincolnshire council that comments on the low morale of staff in the housing department. It says that repairs are done more on a fire brigade basis than planned, and that it would like that to be the other way round. It comments on the number of voids. All those problems are the direct consequence of the council having no money. The lack of money for repairs for the deteriorating estates means that repairs have to be done on a fire brigade basis rather than being planned and orderly.

We should all ask a basic question of the office of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister: why are such things being done to social housing when this country needs more social housing and more council housing, as a major contributor on the social housing scene? I hope that the Minister will enlighten us today, but I believe that such things are being done deliberately to make the life and the lot of council tenants so miserable that they vote for large-scale voluntary transfers. Such things are done to force transfers on councils and ensure that tenants vote for them.

Large-scale voluntary transfers are expensive. We are giving away a massive public asset. We are paying the cost of the councils' campaigning, to bamboozle the tenants into giving the asset away. We are giving away the housing benefit of those tenants who transfer, because the benefit comes from the social security budget, not from the other tenants. We are writing off debt to persuade councils to agree to large-scale voluntary transfers. In estimates for 2003-04, £800 million will be allocated for the purpose, which is nearly as much as the £843 million allocated in the same period for the total budget for council housing credits to fund all council housing. We are giving away that much to encourage large-scale voluntary transfers.

Birmingham City council was offered £650 million in written-off debts if it transferred its council housing. It was taken back when the tenants voted no to a transfer. Ministers should be thoroughly ashamed of supporting, countenancing and continuing such a policy.

Despite all the bribery and bullying, the 200,000 homes target for transfers is not being met, even though everything is predicated on it. The decent homes target is predicated on a transfer of 200,000 homes a year. That target will not be met, and is being quietly dropped. Despite the pressures, tenants are voting no. There have been no votes in Dudley, Birmingham, Southwark, Merton and Ealing, and councils in Nottingham and Sheffield have decided not to go ahead with the transfers. Although everything is predicated on it, it ain't working. That must produce a new decision and a policy change, because policy is running into the buffers in this area. Tenants want to stay with the council. No wonder the Government are beginning, slowly—far too slowly—and painfully to pull back from the implications of their policy. The Local Government Bill, which was announced in the Queen's Speech, contains a provision for councils to be able to borrow. I do not know whether borrowing would be on rents, stock, or service charges, but that is an advance, provided that it is prudential. Of course, everything the Government do is prudent anyway, so I am not worried about that.

The Government are allocating more money slowly and grudgingly, and they are making it somewhat easier for many arm's length management organisations. However, if we are to have an arm's length management run by councils, I do not see why housing cannot stay in a council's possession, with the same advantages given to the council as are given to arm's length management organisations, in which there is potential for corruption. Policy is being modified and it should be modified, because it is stalling and running into the buffers.

I hope that the blue skies review, which my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will announce in January, will continue the process of change. I have great confidence in, and enthusiasm for, the Deputy Prime Minister, who could be a driving force behind the big social housing programme that this country needs. That programme has, however, been held in check because my right hon. Friend's Department has not had enough money. With the money and the flexibility that allows councils to borrow, he could initiate the drive that we need. So much else depends on decent housing, particularly social housing, for those people in our society who are less well off. How can people benefit from the provisions for education that we are making unless they have good housing? How can people benefit from the improvements in health that we are making unless the causes of bad health in housing are removed? How can we have a settled society with lower crime rates and less drug addiction unless people have good, affordable social housing? How can we reassert neighbourhood ties unless neighbourhoods are well housed in social housing? None of those things can be done without good housing.

I simply ask for a level playing field between councils and housing associations. We are proud of councils, which are still mainly Labour and which built the housing stock and created the housing associations. Let us end the daylight robbery whereby housing benefit for council tenants is paid out of housing funds. We must allow councils to borrow, so that they can build, renovate, repair, use the leverage of credit to increase the power of tenants and begin a programme of building. If housing associations and councils are on a level playing field, so that there are not the bribes and benefits to vote for large-scale voluntary transfers, they will be able to compete or co-operate.

What is wrong with competition in social housing? It will serve the consumers' needs. What is wrong with competition to serve particular areas' needs? In some parts of the country, there are too many council houses and numbers need to be reduced. Let us allow councils and housing associations to co-operate so that those can be pulled down and so that they may replenish and review where necessary. Let us allow them to co-operate to build anew where it is needed. With a level playing field we can do that. I ask for a new deal for council housing, so that we can build, improve, repair, renovate and pull down as necessary.

It is almost indecent that Ministers and hon. Members, including myself, are sitting here in London benefiting from the giddy escalation in the price of houses that they own, which are financed out of a parliamentary grant, and, at the same time, are treating indecently those who cannot afford to buy houses and who live in social housing. Although such people might like living in social housing—it should be provided for them—we should not treat people who do not have the money to put down on a house and benefit from the appreciation in value as badly as they are being treated.

Why are we persecuting council tenants? Why are we making life so difficult for Labour councils, which are the front line of the Labour party and which need support, help and encouragement to fulfil their aspirations for their people? Why are we devoting so much time and effort to shuffling round the ownership of social housing when we should be making a massive effort to build, repair, renovate and improve? Why are we throwing away public money on large-scale voluntary transfers when the need is for a massive programme of new building not only to regenerate the economy and provide jobs, but to regenerate the local scene and local society and to improve the lives of the people whom we represent?

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I welcome the opportunity to join my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) in reflecting on the importance of high-quality social housing and effective housing management services. I am afraid that he will have to wait for at least a couple of weeks for the answer to several of his questions until my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's statement in early January on blue skies—not least—and other things.

I shall set out why the Government believe that retaining housing stock in local authority ownership is only one option for delivering our objectives. It is an option. Despite the doom and gloom that has been painted, there is significant investment in our council housing stock and the option remains for all local authorities.

The delivery of thriving, inclusive and sustainable communities in all regions is at the heart of the Government's agenda. As my hon. Friend said, the issue is all about communities, and we must help people who live in some of our most deprived areas to live successfully, to fulfil productive lives and to realise their potential. That was reflected by what my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister said on 18 July when he announced his decision to examine whether his Department's programmes and policies were delivered in the best way in which to achieve those ends and to secure value for money while achieving the collective aim of the decent home.

I tell my hon. Friend that the decent homes standard has not been dropped in any way, shape or form. We are bang on target to achieve our interim target for 2005. As the Minister for Housing and Planning, Lord Rooker, said recently, we are about 10 per cent. shy of the target for 2010. However, there is not the doom and gloom that my hon. Friend suggested. The fact that we are 10 per cent. off a target that is not due to be met for eight or nine years does not mean that we should tear everything up and start again. I repeat that the decent homes target remains and we shall not be changed from that. The root of everything that we are talking about is the decent standards target and, as my hon. Friend said, the right of everyone to live in a decent home.

The 2002 spending review settlement also provided significant additional resources for housing. By 2005-06, we will be spending almost £6 billion annually on housing compared with the planned spend of £1.5 billion in 1997-98. Alongside that massive increase in resources, the capital receipts initiative that we brought forward in 1997 freed up about £12 billion of receipts up to 1999-2000. That demonstrates our commitment to a step change in delivering our objective of giving everyone the opportunity of a decent home.

When considering how the delivery of decent social housing contributes to the sustainable communities agenda, we are clear that several routes are available to tenants and their landlords. The housing policy statement that was published in December 2002 by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions—a previous incarnation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—set out four housing management investment options for local authorities, and my hon. Friend alluded to them. One such option is the use of arm's length management organisations. It does my hon. Friend no credit to suggest that there is potential for corruption in ALMOs, and he cannot make such a simplistic statement without a degree of justification.

Other options are the private finance initiative, housing transfers and stock retention within existing resources. Three of the four options mean that the housing remains in local authority ownership, and only housing transfers cause the ownership to move outside the local authority. We believe that it is wrong to see that change of ownership as an obstacle while our goal is decent social homes and decent social housing.

[Mr. Tony McNulty]

Many authorities and their stakeholders have already determined the option that will best suit them, but almost 100 authorities have yet to decide how they will deliver the decent social housing objective. Time is running out for those authorities and it is wrong that tenants might suffer as a result of inaction by their landlords. Therefore, we recognise that without action by all local authorities, we will not deliver our target by the agreed 2010 deadline. All social housing providers must up their game. We intend that the Government's current review of decent home delivery vehicles will help to ensure that there are no obstacles to local authorities delivering as both providers and enablers and, therefore, no excuses for not doing that. As I have told my hon. Friend, that will be duly reported by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister in January.

I recognise that my hon. Friend believes that local authority retention of social housing should be a guiding principle, and that he campaigns for that. However, I believe that our focus has to be on the interests of the tenants—on the conditions of their homes and the services provided to them—rather than simply on who owns the housing. Several of the actions that the Government have already taken demonstrate that: the moves to a consistent rent-setting formula for local authorities and registered social landlords that ensure that rents for similar properties in the same location in different sectors will be similar; the introduction of a single housing inspectorate service to ensure consistent and high standards of provision; and the steps that are being taken to achieve a single social tenure.

There is also an increasing focus on the separation of the landlord function and fulfilment of the role as a strategic housing authority, regardless of whether the local authority retains ownership of the housing. That allows the landlord to focus on improvements in the physical condition of the stock, management arrangements and tenant involvement, and it frees the local authority to ensure that its statutory housing duties are carried out and that housing policy decisions contribute to securing wider community regeneration, as my hon. Friend said. That is possible in private finance initiatives, arm's length management organisations and housing transfers. However, in addressing my hon. Friend's concerns, I will focus on housing transfer.

We know that where tenants play an integral part in choosing the housing transfer option and developing the proposal, they also support it at the ballot. That has not changed recently, despite the cases that my hon. Friend mentioned. During the life of the recent round of housing transfers, when all the votes for and against stock transfer are added up, there are currently four votes in favour to every one against.

There have been notable exceptions to that, such as in Birmingham. That is why tenants are consulted. However, it is wrong to suggest that there has been a sudden and massive sea change, and that over the past year or so every ballot has gone the no way rather than the yes way. The votes are still overwhelmingly in favour of transfer, and I do not accept there is a deliberate conspiracy to make council tenants' lives so miserable that they will do everything but vote against transfer.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: Where surveys are conducted in isolation from the campaign for or against large-scale voluntary transfers, council tenants state that their preference is to stay with the council because they can influence it democratically and it is a known and understood system that they quite like. It is true that where there is a campaign where all sorts of glittering blandishments are held out to them of repayments and renovations and a new happy future they might feel the other way, but in the abstract—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order.

Mr. McNulty: My hon. Friend should not belittle the intelligence or sophistication of council house tenants. He has claimed that they are bamboozled now that there are glittering prizes. They make clear decisions on their futures and those of their homes on the back of the information that both sides put in front of them. To talk about them being bamboozled, as though they do not fully understand the process or are easily led, undermines the integrity of my hon. Friend's case and does not say much for his impression of what council tenants are like.

The transfer of housing to a registered social landlord provides an important one-off chance for local authorities, residents and other stakeholders to improve community well-being. It is a vehicle to deliver the decent homes standard and major repairs and improvements to the housing and physical environment, but it can also deliver a range of other things: better housing management services that are strongly linked to a broader neighbourhood management approach; greater tenant participation in the decision relating to their homes and estates, far more often than is the case under the council; accountable and transparent governance arrangements; and partnerships with other service providers and stakeholders to deliver joined-up regeneration and new facilities in the housing transfer area that draw on external funding streams. As my hon. Friend suggested, stock transfer works best in the context of the regeneration of the entire community, rather than when it is simply a function of transfer or management. Together, these things add up to a way to secure a sustainable future for the community.

Confident, empowered tenants create stronger, safer communities. The best way to ensure that people get the best housing possible is to talk to them—to give them accurate and honest information, to ask them what they need, and to give them a chance to influence what happens to their homes and neighbourhoods. For their parts, landlords should not be afraid to get tenants heavily involved in considering how to deliver a sustainable housing service. That would help to challenge rumour and misinformation, and would allow reality to see the light of day.

The involvement of tenants secures their role in a shared vision for the future and therefore helps to create stronger, safer and better-run communities. When we put tenants first, they become active consumers, pushing for better standards and keeping landlords on their toes. They play a part in how increased investment can revive

and renew our communities. From councils to the private finance initiative or arm's length management organisations, agencies are increasingly understanding that housing is not just about bricks and mortar, or the decent homes standard; it is about revitalising and regenerating our communities. My hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby tells a tale of woe but, under the housing transfer, more than 700,000 council dwellings have moved to the housing association sector. More than £11 billion of private finance has been secured for investment in the repair and improvement of the transferred stock and, through the receipt paid to the local authority, for funding much-needed new homes.

As I have made clear, we are looking not only for better homes but for better communities. I am therefore saddened when debates on improving housing conditions and services focus on ownership, and when discussions on housing transfer are hijacked and made into a wider debate, often centred on political allegiances. That is not fair to tenants and it destroys the opportunity to make a real difference.

Our policy of providing additional resources to councils that set up high-performing ALMOs to manage and improve their housing stock is also starting to deliver results. So far, we have accepted 21 councils on to the programme and have made conditional allocations of more than £660 million for the three years to 2004-05. To qualify for that funding, arm's length companies must achieve at least a two-star rating from the housing inspectorate. The first results are encouraging; we heard only yesterday that all eight ALMOs in the first tranche have qualified.

I make no apologies for the National Audit Commission inspecting housing departments. I do not accept what my hon. Friend says about inspection being a bogey word for adding to the sad lot of housing departments. There are flourishing housing departments throughout the country that are run by councils, that do a good, professional and committed job for their tenants. There are others that do not, and if the commission finds them out and sets up a rescue package, and that package is ignored, we are responsible to local tenants to ensure that they get the housing service that they deserve. I was a councillor for 11 years, and can say that there is no magic wand. Housing departments are not all good, and registered social landlords or private providers are not all bad. It is incumbent on us to use the inspection process to ensure that council housing departments do what they can to improve the condition of stock and the lot of the tenants.

I congratulate those councils with ALMO status on achieving high standards. Tenants can expect investment to bring nearly 80,000 council homes up to the decent homes standard. Inspection results from the second tranche will come through next year. The private finance initiative is also progressing. In 1999, eight local authorities were chosen to pioneer the housing revenue account PFI scheme as pathfinders. There are now 18 HRA PFI schemes and five non-HRA PFI schemes in procurement.

HRA pathfinders and round 2 schemes were allocated £760 million in PFI credits, and are expected to refurbish about 30,000 homes. Some of the schemes are expected to sign contracts early in 2003. Two non-HRA schemes have signed contracts, and a further four are at different stages of the process.

To conclude, I urge my hon. Friend to focus not on the ownership of social housing, but on helping to ensure that there is minimum delay in giving all tenants the opportunity of a decent home. That is best achieved through securing maximum resources for investment in our social housing in the near future. As part of the blue skies thinking and the public service agreement plus review of the assorted methods of achieving decent homes, there is a lot of thinking going on. We will not move from our key target of decent homes throughout the social housing sector by 2010, although it is quite right that we should reflect on the vehicles that we utilise to reach it.

The Government are doing their part in providing resources that are tied to performance improvements. We make no apologies for that. However, if we preclude housing transfer, and therefore access to private finance, tenants will be in poorer condition housing longer than is necessary. That cannot be right. To those who defend everything but are ultimately defending only the status quo, and have no answers for tenants on a range of council estates, I say: take part in the full debate that will unfold from mid-January, and do not become lost in the notion of ownership. How our people live and how they achieve decent homes is what matters, not who owns the freehold.

Manufacturing Industry (Scotland)

12.59 pm

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): After 18 months of trying, this is the first time that I have been fortunate enough to secure a debate in Westminster Hall, and I am delighted to introduce it. I hope that today marks a change in my luck. I am also delighted that the Secretary of State for Scotland is to reply to the debate. As she will know, manufacturing is important throughout Scotland. When I discovered that she would be responding, I thought that I would find out the latest information from the web, and was pleasantly surprised to discover an unofficial Secretary of State fan club that describes her as

"by far the most glamorous doll in British Politics since Baroness Thatcher was put out to pasture".

Today's debate has been made all the more timely following the announcement last Friday from the Office for National Statistics of yet another fall in manufacturing output throughout the United Kingdom as a whole—down about 0.7 per cent compared with the previous month and 2.4 per cent. compared with the same time last year. Geoffrey Dicks of the Royal Bank of Scotland, financial markets described those figures as

"awful and the fourth successive monthly decline".

I requested today's debate not because manufacturing is a major source of employment in my constituency, but because of its importance throughout Scotland. I shall be paying tribute to some of the positive aspects of the Government's work, but it is my duty to point out some general concerns. I will not be talking down Scotland. It is sometimes said that people do that when referring to bad news. Today provides me with an opportunity to make a positive contribution and I look forward to the Secretary of State's reply.

Manufacturing industry in Scotland directly employs 290,000 people. A further 150,000 jobs are indirectly supported by the sector. In total, that is almost 20 per cent. of the work force in Scotland. That is well down on the equivalent figures in the late 1970s and early 1980s, but it is still considerable. Manufacturing accounts for almost 70 per cent. of all exports in Scotland, with the electrical and instrument engineering sector accounting for three quarters of that figure. Other exports include industrial gases, pharmaceuticals, paints, coatings and metal products.

I turn now to the textiles industry, which is the fourth largest sector in Scottish manufacturing. We have already had one debate this morning on textiles and my hon. Friend the Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) set out the particular problems that constituencies such as his in the borders are suffering. I shall not repeat the arguments, so I hope that the Secretary of State will understand if I do not refer too often to textiles, important as they are to Scotland.

A trawl through business news stories in Scotland over the past few years unveiled alarming events. However, for me, the problems in Scottish manufacturing manifested themselves abruptly when Continental Tyres suddenly announced the closure of its factory in Newbridge in 1999. Although I was not a Member of Parliament at the time, as a local councillor and someone who worked closely with the then hon. Member, Donald Gorrie, and a Member of the Scottish Parliament, Margaret Smith, I remember the devastating impact that that decision had on the people of Newbridge and surrounding villages. All in all, almost 800 jobs were lost and one of the community's major employers disappeared from the area. From then on, we in Scotland experienced announcement after announcement, job cuts after job cuts and closure after closure.

In 2001, despite the direct involvement of the Prime Minister and £20 million of Government grants, the mobile phone company, Motorola, confirmed its intention to close its factory at Bathgate to the west of my constituency in west Lothian. A local union official said that the whole community had depended on the plant and that the area would now be destroyed. Three months later, west Lothian was hit again when the electronics firm, NEC, announced 600 job losses at its plant in Livingston. The United Kingdom managing director of the company said that the semi-conductor trading situation was the worst ever encountered by the industry. Some people have been over-pessimistic about the situation in west Lothian. Its ability to recover has impressed many.

In November of that year came the announcement of Rolls-Royce to cut 400 jobs at its Hillington factory outside Glasgow after a downturn in the airline industry after 11 September.

This year, the trend has continued. In May, Newbridge in my constituency was hit again following the decision by Grampian Foods to close its Edinburgh site in what the Scottish Executive described as yet another "severe blow" to the area. More than 1,000 jobs have been lost in a year. Elsewhere, 650 jobs have been lost at the Erskine plant of Compaq—the computer firm—in addition to the 700 jobs that were lost the year before. About 400 jobs were cut when the Sanmina-SCI plant in Irvine closed, and Chunghwa Picture Tubes cut 600 jobs at Mossend in north Lanarkshire. NCR—the Dundee cash machine company and electronics firm—cut 150 jobs. Last week, APW Enclosures announced a plan to close its Scottish plant at Hamilton, with the loss of a further 300 jobs. It blamed the closure on the worst ever downturn in global information technology and computer markets.

I managed to get a note from the Library that sums up the whole matter. It shows the scale of the decline in manufacturing in Scotland. Between 1998 and the summer of 2002, more than 100,000 jobs in total have been lost in manufacturing, more than 30,000 of which were lost in the past year alone. Those are worrying figures, and I do not agree with those who say that the service sector can fill the gap created by the fall in manufacturing. Frankly, that could not happen, and even if it could, I doubt whether it is desirable. It is bad for the health of the economy for Scotland to be a nation of call centres. That is not to decry service sector jobs. In my constituency, for example, we hope that the completion of the Royal Bank of Scotland's global headquarters will give rise to the creation of a further 3,000 jobs. As the Select Committee on Trade and Industry commented, manufacturing output supports a large number of service sector jobs. A strong manufacturing sector is crucial if we are to create the knowledge-based economy that we all want.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry admitted that the Government have made mistakes. In particular, she admitted that they had given the impression that they had given up on manufacturing. At the Labour party conference in Brighton, she said:

"We allowed the impression to grow that manufacturing did not matter . . . We had bought into the myth that manufacturing was a thing of the past."

I respect the Secretary of State's honesty and courage in admitting that mistakes have been made. However, I look forward to hearing the Minister say today that lessons have been learned from those mistakes.

In June, the Trade and Industry Committee produced a thorough report on the manufacturing industry in the United Kingdom. It produced several key recommendations. I accept that they are not all the Government's responsibility, but the report posed some difficult and challenging questions for the Government to answer. The Committee found that the major obstacle to improving manufacturing was the long-standing shortfall in capital investment, which creates a serious challenge for the country's financial sector. It also found that UK companies find investment more expensive to service than do their European or American competitors.

It is clear that UK banks must re-examine their attitude to manufacturing and become more flexible and focused on the long term when considering their lending policies. I am keen to hear the Minister tell us what steps the Government are taking to encourage this sea change in attitude.

I welcomed the Government's manufacturing strategy paper, which they produced in May, and the seven pillars that the DTI believes are the basis for a successful future for manufacturing. I hope that the Secretary of State will accept that it will take much more than words on paper to turn round the fortunes of the manufacturing industries, and I look forward to the right hon. Lady telling us what steps have been taken some seven months since the paper was published. I note with interest, however, that the first of the Government's seven pillars is macro-economic stability. That contrasts with paragraph 16 on page 10 of the Committee's report, which says:

"While we welcome the long-term macro-economic stability to which the Government is committed, we note that the stability achieved over the period 1997-2002 has not been accompanied by an increase in productivity in the manufacturing sector. In fact, the reverse has applied."

I was also interested to note that the Committee reported the experience of business and the unions, which found the burden of regulation in the UK to be considerable. They called for further relaxation of the administrative burden. Clearly, the Committee felt that it was an important issue, but none of the seven pillars in the Government strategy paper appears to deal with it, which is odd, given that the matter falls so clearly under DTI responsibility.

I should not have been surprised either by the lack of mention of the euro. Irrespective of whether one is in favour or against it, the on-going uncertainty is at best unhelpful and at worst detrimental to the long-term strategic planning of business.

Globalisation has brought new opportunities for Scotland, but it has also brought new challenges. The increase in international competition has forced many companies to adopt even more efficient practices and structures and to produce cheaper goods of higher quality, which is not an easy square to circle. However, it remains clear that many companies have yet to adopt the best practice, which has been shown to improve productivity. The manufacturing advisory service clearly believes that companies can and should make greater use of lean manufacturing techniques and increased investment in information technology. I look forward to hearing what the Government are doing to help business in that regard.

Both the CBI and the National Skills Task Force highlighted the importance of making real improvements in the training of key management within companies. Responsibility for providing training and skills for workers and management in Scotland also falls under the Scottish Executive. There remains a need for work across government to ensure that the necessary skills are available to develop manufacturing. Once again, I am keen to establish what the Government have achieved in conjunction with the Scottish Executive.

Last August, the Centre for Economic Policy Research produced a report on Scottish manufacturing. I did not agree with the request for the Scottish Executive to cut income tax by 3p to encourage entrepreneurship. A year ago, the manufacturing summit concluded that the future for manufacturing lay in high technology, but that such a future would be realised only if there were investment in a high skill base. It will be no surprise that I, a Liberal Democrat, would rather see investment in education, training, IT and transport infrastructure before any tax cut.

I also agree with the Federation of Small Businesses in Scotland when it said that the attacks were "misplaced" and that responsibility for red tape and employment and environmental legislation lies with Westminster and the EU, not with the Scottish Executive.

Before concluding, I accept that it would be wrong to pretend that the entire picture is doom and gloom. To be fair to the industry and to the Government, it is not all negative. The October announcement of new money to set up a wind turbine and generator engineering operation on the Isle of Lewes offers potential for new job opportunities in the area and will mean the re-opening of the Arnish oil fabrication yard in Stornoway, which was closed three years ago.

The renewable energy sector has enormous untapped potential in Scotland and offers real promise for a boost to Scotland's manufacturing. It is widely accepted that Scotland has enormous strategic potential for making use of renewable resources. It offers Scotland exciting new possibilities and a prize that is there for the taking, if the Government, the Scottish Executive, local government and industry have the courage and determination to go out and win it.

Scotland's enterprise companies should now be actively and aggressively pursuing the manufacturing capability of engineering components to harness wind energy. From there, the construction of large-scale wave energy and tidal stream devices could provide further long-term stability for the manufacturing sector. Such success would require real direction and support from the Government, for which I look to the Minister today.

Aside from renewables, it would be wrong not to highlight the new Rolls-Royce £85 million manufacturing centre near Glasgow airport, which will

[John Barrett]

provide a welcome and much needed boost to the area. The managing director, Royan Anthony, said that the plans would provide a new centre of excellence for aerospace component manufacturing in Scotland. I wish the project well.

Closer to my own constituency, firms such as Excell Biotech in Livingston are flourishing in the expanding biotech market and making drugs that many of us hope will one day combat cancer and cystic fibrosis. There are good news stories, and it is important for balance, for the industry and for Scotland that they are highlighted. Regrettably, however, such announcements are fairly few and fail to make up for the on-going job losses across the industry.

I am conscious of the time and want to ensure that the Secretary of State has adequate time to address the points that I have raised. In conclusion, I have noticed in many instances that when anyone dares to utter concerns about the Scottish economy, they are rubbished as talking down Scotland. I hope that the right hon. Lady accepts that I have not done that today; I have merely tried to raise real concerns that I and many other hon. Members have about the problems in Scottish manufacturing and the trends in the industry over the past few years.

Mr. John MacDougall (Central Fife): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and on the way in which he has introduced it. I share his concerns about the industry, but I want to highlight one or two of the points that he made. Does he accept that a key indicator for measuring the success of the economy is whether unemployment levels are better now than they were in, say, 1997? I think that the hon. Gentleman will accept that they are. With regard to a sound economic policy, will he also accept that we could not measure the type of unemployment figures that he may be considering, although he may have had slightly better manufacturing—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is a rather long intervention.

Mr. MacDougall: May I just say—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This intervention is becoming a speech, and Mr. Barrett has the floor.

John Barrett: I take the points that the hon. Member for Central Fife (Mr. MacDougall) raises. When it comes to improvements in unemployment levels, whether in manufacturing industry or in the growing service sector, it is important to consider the overall picture. The picture is certainly not of doom and gloom: there are some areas where there is real growth in the service sector. In my constituency in Edinburgh, and particularly on the west side of Edinburgh, there is phenomenal growth in the service sector, but there are other areas in Scotland.

As I said at the beginning, I requested the debate not to raise the parochial interests of my constituency, but to raise wider concerns about those areas in Scotland where manufacturing is vital. In some areas, the work force that has been employed in manufacturing would like to see a continuation of manufacturing jobs, not a move to call centres only. I look forward to hearing the Secretary of States reply to the points that I have raised.

1.17 pm

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): I congratulate the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) on eventually securing the debate; I did not realise that it had taken him so long to come up in the ballot. I also congratulate him on a balanced speech. I was a little worried when I heard the hon. Gentleman's opening remarks: if he was trying to get on the right side of the Minister, he was not exactly going the right way about it. However, the speech was extremely balanced, as I said, and I would expect nothing less of him.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman pointed out the success of economic policies affecting his constituency, because the unemployment rate there is 2 per cent. It has fallen by almost 35 per cent. since 1998 and is an exemplar of what can be achieved in a community that has much of its basis in the service industry, not least the financial services sector.

The hon. Gentleman also referred to the biotech industries, which are showing unprecedented growth in Scotland. Indeed, the growth of biotechnology in Scotland is outstripping growth throughout the European Union at something like 30 per cent. per annum, and we feel greatly encouraged by that. We are similarly encouraged by what is happening on software, despite the terrible catastrophe that happened in Edinburgh at the weekend and our anxieties about the artificial intelligence department at Edinburgh university. I hope that we will have reassuring news about that before too long.

Let me put the hon. Gentleman's remarks in context. I agree entirely with the statistic that he uses for manufacturing, and about the importance of the manufacturing sector to Scotland. I will not pretend that there are no difficulties, because the difficulties are apparent to all. Like the rest of the United Kingdom and, indeed, all the major economies throughout the developed world, Scotland has seen manufacturing companies struggle. In Germany, manufacturing output fell by 5 per cent. It fell by 6 per cent. in the USA, 14 per cent. in Japan and in the UK overall it is down by 5.5 per cent. He is concerned, as I am, about the fall in Scottish manufacturing output for the eight successive quarters up to 2002 and he acknowledges the impact of restructuring in the electronics sector. Our vulnerability in that sector is well recognised.

It is reassuring that the sharp decline in output was halted in the latest quarter. It was 0.2 per cent. down in quarter two, compared with quarter one, but there is no scope for complacency. Indeed, a large number of issues need to be addressed in a completely non-partisan way. They have been live in the Scottish economy for many years. There are structural issues about levels of skill, training and the nature of past investment in the Scottish economy. Our vulnerability to electronics, which we welcomed with open arms when that development came to Scotland, has meant that the corporate sector has perhaps not put enough emphasis on research and development.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his last Budget extended the research and development assistance available to small firms to larger firms to ensure a bigger input of research and development activity in Scotland. Indeed, my friend and colleague, the First Minister of Scotland, is in Dundee today inaugurating a new intermediary technologies institute, which will help to stimulate research and development out of our universities to help industry on the ground to get that competitive edge.

There are specific issues relating to competition globally that we have to take into account. A number of low-cost labour markets that are anxious to secure manufacturing development are emerging. They include not just India and China, but the accession states into the European Union. That offers us an opportunity in that it expands markets, but it poses a challenge too. The main way to meet that challenge is through high added value. Scottish manufacturing has been highly successful in the high added value end of the market.

I am not sure whether British Aerospace is in the hon. Gentleman's constituency or in the one adjacent to it. I was privileged to visit there recently to see the Eurofighter helmet, which is a world-beating example of Scottish engineering, manufacturing and research and development. That kind of development will never be the volume development that we have been used to in the past. We have to seek a situation where we can develop more broadly our manufacturing output.

Annabelle Ewing (Perth): While we are talking about the plight of the manufacturing sector in Scotland, will the right hon. Lady accept that as the greater part of Scotland's exports go to European Union member states, being outwith the eurozone is deeply damaging to Scotland's economy?

Mrs. Liddell: I note the significance that the hon. Lady attaches to the single currency. As a Government we are in favour in principle of joining a single currency, provided that the economic conditions are right. That is a very important point for Scottish manufacturing. We must be confident that the economic conditions are right. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has made it clear that he will evaluate the five economic tests between now and June 2003.

To look on the positive side—the hon. Gentleman was very fair in doing that—new technologies are transforming manufacturing as much as every other sector. We have to welcome the extent to which manufacturers are themselves embracing new technologies. I have one criticism. Everyone knocks call centres. People should bear in mind that many of the jobs in call centres, such as those in my constituency, are high-level jobs often filled by graduates and those with language and accountancy skills. They are significant generators of employment.

John Barrett: Will the right hon. Lady also agree that in many areas where manufacturing has been the traditional employment, the change to sitting in a call centre at an office-based computer is not the way forward?

Mrs. Liddell: I would disagree with the hon. Gentleman. We must get away from the notion that you have to get dirty to have a good job. There are good jobs, where you do not necessarily get dirty, which have a high skill component. It is a tribute to people who have been prepared to change their careers that they have moved on to such employment. The hon. Gentleman cited Motorola and Continental Tyres; they are examples of where, with a co-operative partnership, effort by the Scottish Executive, the Department of Employment, the local authority and local employers, the majority of people can rapidly be found new employment. We congratulate people on doing that.

As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, the Government published the manufacturing strategy in May, strongly supported by many manufacturers, trade associations and the trade unions. About 18 months ago, our colleagues in the Scottish Executive published their own booklet entitled "Created in Scotland: the way forward for Scottish Manufacturing in the 21st Century". The Government and the Scottish Executive are committed to working together to harness the best of our high-skilled work force to ensure a future for manufacturing industry.

The hon. Gentleman almost dismissed in passing the impact of economic stability. Because we have had five years of macro-economic stability there is a danger that we take it for granted. Think back to the days when interest rates were 15 per cent. and think of the consequences that that had for industrial investment. The hon. Gentleman talked about capital investment; in his pre-Budget report, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer made much of his attempts to encourage capital formation on the part of UK companies, and that capital formation is made a lot easier because we have had the longest period of sustained low inflation since the 1960s. Inflation has remained within the narrow band of between 1.5 per cent. and 3.2 per cent. since the 1997 election. That is a crucial platform for manufacturing industry for investment, innovation and enterprise in British and Scottish manufacturing.

I wonder whether the hon. Gentleman spotted a piece in yesterday's "*Business a.m.*" about the poor take-up of the research and development tax credit in Scotland. That is an issue for us; we should all be working together to encourage Scottish companies to take advantage of the available opportunities and funding. I take the point that we must look at new means of encouraging companies to invest. The best way to do so is to allow them to keep more of the money that they earn. That is why the Government have reduced corporation tax. The UK now has the lowest ever corporation tax rates for small companies and the lowest starting rate among major industrialised countries.

Budget 2002 introduced a zero starting rate, which is very important. Many small companies in Scotland are unincorporated and as such they depend on low levels of personal taxation, which is aimed at helping them to get the necessary capital to allow their businesses to function.

I entirely take the hon. Gentleman's point about regulation. The Government are committed to ensuring that regulations are fair and effective, so that they protect the vulnerable but do not stifle enterprise or productivity. Our policy is to regulate only when necessary, and we have significantly strengthened the systems that control the regulatory burden. We are

[Mrs. Liddell]

recognised as providing a more entrepreneur-friendly environment than the United States and many other major EU countries, and fostering growth companies more effectively, as a recent survey shows. We work hard with the Scottish Executive at improving regulation.

Many of the drivers of significant change in the manufacturing sector relate to skills and the Scottish Executive has been upfront in taking forward the skills agenda. It is taking steps to drive forward productivity growth, working with the Government. With the Minister for Enterprise and Lifelong Learning, I met the Chancellor yesterday specifically to talk about the productivity agenda and to discuss how we promote enterprise, innovation and skills throughout the country. Lifelong learning, which is driven in Scotland by the Scottish Executive, is a key to the Government's economic strategy. That partnership between the Executive and the Government is critical in driving forward the productivity agenda. The Government spend about £1.3 billion on in-work related training in Scotland. Learndirect is the Scottish Executive's one-stop shop to encourage people into learning.

The hon. Gentleman's points, which he raised in a very balanced way, are extremely important. We have to sit down and work out the inhibitors to productivity growth, and then work together to attack those inhibitors. The debate has been around for the better part of 30 years; we should now move towards a solution. I congratulate the hon. Gentleman again.

Lymphoedema

1.29 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): Twice in recent years I have suffered from a medical condition that affects around 100,000 men, women and children in this country every year. Its name is lymphoedema and it has a frequent associate, cellulitis. Very few people who have not known the condition in their immediate family would be able to name it or describe it. In brief, it is a chronic swelling due to the failure of the lymphatic system to drain properly.

The lymphatic system pervades our whole body and usually receives only cursory coverage during the training of general practitioners. Usually, when the lymphatic system is working properly, a clear liquid is squeezed from blood capillaries into our tissues by the pressure of the heart's pumping and it bathes all the living cells in our body. That liquid then flows back into the lymphatic ducts and is returned to the blood system through the lymph nodes in our groin, chest and armpits. The lymphatic system is part of our immune system, which is why infection is so common when it is working at less than 100 per cent. efficiency.

It is amazing that so few conditions that affect the lymphatic system are recognised as key areas for medical study or feature in the popular vocabulary. Contrary to the situation in some other European countries, I understand that no specialist lymphological consultants are employed in any hospital or university in this country.

Lymphoedema is typically associated with women who have had breast cancer and have suffered consequent damage to their lymphatic system from the cancer, from surgery or from radiography. It can be a chronic condition or it can be a one-off. It can come and go. The associated infection—the non-specific infection called cellulitis—can be excruciating, chronic and, in some cases, life-threatening. However, the condition is not exclusively related to cancer, as my own experience shows.

One evening in 1995, I developed an inexplicable fever and a terrible feeling of cold. That passed after a few hours, but by the next day a tickling sensation in one leg was followed by a swelling in my calf. By the following evening, a severe swelling and red discoloration of my entire leg had caused lameness. By the third day, the fever had returned, the swelling was worse and red lines were visible all the way up to my thighs, tracking the lymphatic vessels in the general direction of my kidneys. This was cellulitis. I was finally persuaded to see a doctor. I was rushed to hospital. Within an hour, I was completely lame and, by evening, my temperature had reached 104° F. I was given eight intravenous antibiotic injections every day for the next week. It was 10 days before I could walk again and I had to use walking sticks for about six weeks.

Apart from the intravenous antibiotics, the only treatment that I had was to have my leg elevated to help the drainage. I was given no massage, no physiotherapy and no advice on how to prevent the circumstances from arising again. However, at least I recovered. Interestingly, the word lymphoedema was not used throughout the period that I was in hospital.

In the middle of the general election campaign, it happened again. One afternoon, at 12.30 pm, I felt ill; at 2.30 pm, I phoned NHS Direct; by 4.30 pm, I had been diagnosed with cellulitis again and was back in hospital; and, by 6.30 pm, I was having intravenous antibiotics and my temperature had shot up yet again. However, this time I had recognised the symptoms and taken swifter action. NHS Direct had done its job and, although the symptoms were just as bad as before, at least my recovery time—just two or three weeks—was significantly faster.

Since that time, I have altered my lifestyle a little. I pay a sports masseur for a deep lymphatic massage two or three times a year. She often reports fluid retention that I was not aware of in my leg, and she shifts it manually. I have regular pedicures to keep the skin of my feet supple and to prevent it from cracking—which makes it more difficult for microbes to enter the skin.

Two episodes of cellulitis linked to lymphoedema have scared me so much that I do not want to go through that again. I am more acutely aware that lymphoedema is a chronic condition and a fact of life for some people and that cellulitis is therefore a constant risk.

I do not want to criticise the medical staff who treated me but I now understand the concerns of bodies such as the lymphoedema support network, which is a voluntary sector organisation that advocates and encourages self-help for lymphoedema sufferers and campaigns for better medical understanding and care. Most of its work is done with chronic lymphoedema sufferers. It believes that insufficient is being done to counsel sufferers on ways to avoid flare-ups of lymphoedema or cellulitis. It believes that the non-specific bacterial infection that causes cellulitis never really goes away in many cases. It also believes that there is widespread ignorance of prophylaxis in the medical professions.

For example, the network advises lymphoedema sufferers to keep a two-week supply of antibiotic tablets handy to treat cellulitis immediately, if it arises. However, it is very rare to find a general practitioner who will prescribe antibiotics under such circumstances.

The Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears), in a written answer last year said:

"specialist nurse training"—

for lymphoedema—

"is carried out mainly in the charitable sector by organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Relief and Marie Curie Cancer Care."—[*Official Report*, 23 November 2001; Vol. 375, c. 570W.]

That reflects the high incidence of lymphoedema among cancer patients, and especially the one in four breast cancer patients who suffer from it. There is increasing evidence that prostate and gynaecological cancer patients are at a significant risk of lymphoedema and cellulites, although cancer specialists in our hospitals have little professional expertise in treating lymphoedema, with a few notable exceptions. People who have had their spleen damaged or removed are under an equivalent risk of the condition and the infection. However, private health insurers avoid lymphoedema and cellulitis like the plague, and people who suffer from the conditions find it very difficult to get private health insurance.

About 1 per cent. of pensioners in this country suffer from swelling that could be treated by specific physical therapy designed to improve lymph drainage, such as massage. Diuretics and prolonged treatment using pressure pumps are often wrongly prescribed by GPs to treat such swelling. They can, and do, cause further damage to such patients. Too many patients find that lymphatic clinics are simply not available, and even if they are, consultants and GPs alike are not always aware of their existence and do not routinely refer lymphoedema patients there.

A week's occupancy of a hospital bed taking antibiotics intravenously—as I did twice—is a very inefficient way of treating a condition that is relatively simple to avoid and of which it is relatively easy to identify high-risk patients. The present reactive response of treating the condition after it has arisen rather than preventing it makes no sense from a cost perspective. I might add, to give an international scale, that elephantiasis—the Minister will be familiar with it—which is a swelling of the legs commonly associated with water-borne tropical diseases, is an extreme and chronic form of lymphoedema that causes permanent changes to the tissues of the limbs and affects about 40 million people throughout the world.

The British Lymphology Society says that the treatment of lymphoedema should be relatively simple. It should consist of skin care to maintain good tissue condition and to reduce the risk of infection. External support and elastic compression garments, which can be used throughout the entire life of a person with a chronic condition, should be used to reduce lymph formation and to enhance its drainage capacity. There should be a programme of exercise to maximise lymph drainage without overexertion. Lymphatic drainage by simple hand movements that are designed to be easily accessible to patients and their relatives should be taught, because that allows people to self-massage to keep the lymph flowing. There should be prompt administration of antibiotics to cure cellulitis and to ensure that, if there is the risk of recurrent attacks, a prophylactic approach of taking antibiotics in advance of the problem arising should be adopted.

Clinics with experience of treating lymphoedema are listed on the BLS website. In the whole of Greater Manchester, only three national health service facilities are listed—predominantly associated with cancer—and only two in my county of Derbyshire. Lymphoedema patients who do not have cancer may not have access to the people who are likely to be able to refer them with knowledge to the correct clinic for the correct treatment. Every general practitioner's surgery should be able to offer such good quality advice to patients with lymphoedema, but that is not the case.

I end by putting seven specific questions to my hon. Friend the Minister. Why are statistics related to lymphoedema not collected centrally and not maintained by the NHS? Why is there no official NHS guidance on the treatment of lymphoedema? What plans does he have to ensure that lymphology has a higher profile in terms of GP training and academic research, perhaps through the creation of a chair of lymphology at a major training institution?

Will lymphoedema be specifically included in the preparations for the national service framework for long-term conditions, and, if not, why not? Is my hon.

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

Friend satisfied that the onus for medical care of lymphoedema patients appears to rest on nurses and the charitable and voluntary sectors rather than GPs in the NHS? Do patients receive specific guidance to access nurse services?

How can additional funding be provided not only for the treatment of lymphoedema, but for advice? The lymphoedema support network itself could be funded—it receives some 2,000 referrals for advice each year but has no statutory funding. The number of referrals is a fraction of the estimated 100,000 people who suffer from the condition each year.

I thank my hon. Friend the Minister for his attention in the debate. He will know that lymphoedema is a major concern to many people. However, it is largely ignored by a medical establishment that simply does not find the condition sexy enough to develop a proper strategy for patients who are at risk of, or suffering from, a condition that is at best uncomfortable and unpleasant, and, at worst, very dangerous. Having suffered the condition myself, and knowing the pain and discomfort that it can bring over a long period, I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will respond positively to my points.

1.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Mr. David Lammy): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt) on securing this debate. All hon. Members will be sorry to hear that he suffers from lymphoedema. He describes in the most moving way how distressing the disease can be as well as the pain and the swelling of the limbs and the body that go with the complaint. There are many types of lymphoedema, including primary and secondary. The lymphoedema support network estimates that 2 per cent. of the United Kingdom population could be affected. My hon. Friend draws attention to the website.

There is currently no cure, but lymphoedema can be well managed with appropriate treatment. As my hon. Friend explained, such treatments consist of a combination of skin care, exercise, massage and compression garments or bandaging. In a few cases, it is possible to help surgically, for example, by transplanting lymph vessels.

My hon. Friend asked why we do not collect and maintain statistics on individual conditions such as lymphoedema. I understand why he, other hon. Members and voluntary organisations would like to have such information. However, I am sure that he will appreciate that we do not ask the NHS to compile such statistics because of the enormous range of conditions and diseases that exist.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Mr. Edward O'Hara): Order. I ask the Minister to speak nearer to the microphone, as the *Hansard* reporter is having difficulty in hearing him.

Mr. Lammy: The administrative burden of developing and maintaining a conditions database would be huge and tremendously expensive, and it would divert energy and resources away from the main function of the NHS, which is treating patients.

However, we do have some statistics on finished consultant episodes of lymphoedema that I can share with the House. A finished consultant episode is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person might have several episodes within a year, but they show that since 1996 there have been around 2,000 such episodes a year.

Treatment for lymphoedema is generally seen as a supportive therapy. Good management will enhance the patient's quality of life and reduce morbidity. The condition can include infection, which sometimes leads to prolonged hospital admissions.

Mr. Levitt: I am sure that my hon. Friend would wish to confirm that consultant episodes are a very small minority of all of the episodes, the vast majority of which would never reach consultant stage.

Mr. Lammy: My hon. Friend is correct. The condition pertains to both secondary and primary care. The information that the NHS currently collects shows that 2,000 people receive secondary care, so it is clear that that figure represents less than the overall total.

My hon. Friend expressed concern about the fact that nurses are largely involved in the care of patients with lymphoedema. I think and hope that he will agree that once the initial diagnosis is confirmed, nurses should be able to manage the day-to-day treatment of patients with lymphoedema—or of some of them, at least. However, there will always be support from doctors, if that becomes necessary.

After diagnosis, patients will be able to access the full range of appropriate NHS services. If that is not the case, it is important that all of our constituents ensure that they are communicating with our new primary care trusts. We have devolved power in the NHS to those local trusts and they should be ensuring that the ranges of services from primary care through to secondary care, and their relationships with local hospitals, are bearing dividends for patients with this chronic disease.

My hon. Friend talked about poor service provision in the NHS. We start from a particular base, and I hope that the extra resources that we are putting into the NHS—such as the £40 billion that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor announced earlier this year—along with the reform, will bring better services across the board for patients with lymphoedema, and for others. That is our wish. We are all proud of our NHS, but it can do better.

I am, however, pleased to say that there are many examples of good practice throughout the country. I will mention two. In 1997 a clinic was established at St. George's Healthcare NHS trust to treat patients with primary lymphoedema and cancer. Other clinics in south-west London treat patients with cancer and lymphoedema, but the St. George's service also meets the particular needs of patients with non-cancer lymphoedema. St. George's provides a specialist service and receives nationwide referrals. That trust is also one of the places where academic and epidemiological work related to lymphoedema is progressing, including a recent study run by the lymphoedema epidemiology project group. Another good service is based at Arthur Rank house in Cambridge, where lymphoedema services are provided for patients with primary, secondary and palliative lymphoedema.

My hon. Friend asked for guidance on the treatment of lymphoedema to be made available to the NHS. I sympathise with that request. Although lymphoedema is a condition that is well understood and managed in the NHS, extra guidance would help raise the profile of that condition.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence is currently developing guidance for supportive and palliative care as part of its cancer service delivery programme of work. That will provide guidance on best practice in supportive care for all cancers. The areas covered will include evidence-based recommendations for supportive care networks; information delivery and communication; inter-professional communications; symptom control and access to specialist palliative care. The guidance will underpin the development of supportive and palliative care strategy, which is one of the national cancer director's top priorities. It will complement the guidance relating to the current programme of cancer service delivery that covers the treatment of the main tumour groups. The guidance will help people with primary and secondary lymphoedema. I also understand that the British Lymphology Society has produced guidance on the use of manual lymphatic drainage and simple lymphatic drainage for lymphoedema, which can be downloaded from the BLS website. There is also a useful section on lymphoedema on the NHS Direct website.

My hon. Friend mentioned raising the profile of lymphology through GP education and academic research. I hope to deal with research later on, but I agree that the availability of appropriately trained staff is one of the key determinants of the quality of the care that a patient receives. Medical education is a continuum that begins at medical school and continues through basic and higher training and beyond through continuing professional development. Most doctors who are trained in the UK will work primarily in the NHS, so it is essential that the priorities of the NHS are identified and integrated throughout the training continuum. I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that the responsibility for the content, standards, management and delivery of medical education is properly shared between the professional regulatory bodies and others.

It is not practicable or possible, nor is it desirable, for the Government to prescribe exactly the training that each doctor should receive. There is no syllabus for general practice training. The training that each GP receives depends on the case mix and the patients that he or she sees during their time as a general practice registrar. Training for GPs will, however, always deal with a broad spectrum of health problems and will include information about the treatment and management of patients, their families and their carers. I am, as I have already said, sympathetic to what my hon. Friend suggests and I recommend that he take the matter up with the Royal College of Physicians. I can, of course, make a copy of this debate available to that society.

I have heard what my hon. Friend said about research. Recent research that has been carried out in Australia into the molecular mechanisms that control blood vessel growth has led to the identification of molecules that also regulate development and growth of the lymphatic vessels. That is generating a great deal of interest in the molecular control of lymphatics.

I hope that, over time, such research will provide a breakthrough in the understanding and treatment of lymphoedema. We must be realistic about such a process, however, and make sure that people understand that scientists are not offering immediate solutions. That research approach is no magic wand and it may be some years before an effective drug becomes available. Nevertheless, it is an important development and we remain in close touch with what goes on throughout the world.

The main research agency in this country through which the Government support medical and clinical research is the Medical Research Council, an independent body that receives grant in aid from the Office of Science and Technology. The MRC is not currently funding any research into lymphoedema. It did, however, fund a two-year trial entitled "Hyperbaric oxygen therapy for chronic complications of radiotherapy in breast cancer patients". The trial ended in December last year and it is being followed up.

Since 1997, more than 30 research projects on lymphoedema have been carried out within the national health service or are ongoing. The largest of them are funded by charities, in particular, the Wellcome Trust. The Department meets the costs to the NHS in supporting the research. The remainder are carried out in-house with no direct funding. In addition, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council has recently awarded a grant of £262,225 to the Institute of Cancer Research. The project will develop advanced imaging techniques for the clinical assessment of lymphoedema and tissue fibrosis that occur as side effects of breast cancer treatment.

The MRC always welcomes high-quality applications for support into any aspect of human health, including lymphoedema. They are judged in open competition with other demands on funding. The MRC does not as a rule earmark funds for particular topics, such as lymphoedema. When appropriate, high-quality research in all areas that the MRC is promoting may be given priority in competition for funds, but research excellence and importance to health will continue to be the primary considerations when making funding decisions. I will ensure that the chief medical officer brings the debate and my hon. Friend's request for more research into lymphoedema to the attention of the Medical Research Council.

My hon. Friend asked whether lymphoedema would be included in the national service framework for long-term conditions. National service frameworks are set out in the White Paper "The New NHS", and they are intended to set national standards and define service models for particular services or care groups. The NSF for long-term conditions will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological conditions and brain and spinal injury. We are also clear that that NSF must tackle some of the generic issues that affect a wide range of people with long-term conditions as well as their families and carers. It will not address lymphoedema directly, but the NSF is likely to set some general standards that will improve the quality of treatment and care for all people with long-term conditions.

[Mr. Lammy]

My hon. Friend asked about sources of funding for voluntary sector organisations. The Department runs an annual award scheme, the section 64 general scheme, which represents the greatest single source of financial support that the Department provides to the voluntary sector. The closing date for this year's exercise has now passed, but there is nothing to stop voluntary organisations active in lymphoedema from applying in next year's round. In 2001-02, 575 grants totalling £21 million were awarded to about 400 voluntary organisations.

I hope that my hon. Friend will agree that we are providing services that help patients cope with lymphoedema and that developments in research offer some hope for the future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 11 December 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Policing (Nottinghamshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Charlotte Atkins.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I am very glad to have the opportunity to open a short debate on the problems of policing in Nottinghamshire. I see, looking around, a good turnout of my fellow Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament, so I shall try to keep my contribution brief.

I am sure that those hon. Members are all here because their recent experience has been the same as mine. There has been an upsurge in feeling about policing standards in the county, to a level that I do not recall for many years. I have experienced occasions previously when crime and disorder problems have featured large among my constituents, and I campaigned on that issue at the last general election. However, during the past six to 12 months, strength of feeling in many towns and villages in my constituency has risen again. I do not recall having received for many years such representations about the levels of service that people are receiving from the Nottinghamshire police service.

Tomorrow evening, 12 December, a public meeting is to be held at Harry Carlton school in East Leake, at which the chairman of the police authority will be present to try to reassure my constituents. Bingham town council has asked me to arrange a meeting with the chief constable to address the public in Bingham on the problem. My correspondence as a constituency MP and my regular contacts with my neighbours and the residents of my constituency make it obvious that this problem has come to the fore, and that people feel disturbed about it.

My constituency is rural and suburban, and my constituents have a high regard for the police service and for the policemen who serve them. I think that, like me, they enjoy the company of policemen. They support the police service, feeling that it is something that all responsible citizens should back. However, there is discomfort about the way in which the service is being delivered at the moment and a sense that people do not have good enough protection.

The background is that the Government are making much of the reforms of the police and criminal justice system that they are instituting. They are setting vast numbers of targets and seeking to demonstrate that they are raising the level of service across the country. It is therefore rather suitable to be having a debate in which we can ask why no sense of achievement in that field is getting across—to the residents of southern Nottinghamshire, at least.

I have been Home Secretary in the past, so I have views about how the police service should be reformed and improved. I continue to hold the view that the problem with policing in this country is not primarily one of resources. It is inevitably the case when discussing most public services that, because they find it difficult to think of anything else to say, people automatically say that problems must stem from a lack of money and resources. I really do not think that that has been the case with the police service in this country or in my county for many years. We have never had so many policemen in the county nor so much money spent on the police service. It is the effectiveness with which those resources are disposed of that really counts.

Sadly, I read in the local newspaper that the chairman of Nottinghamshire police authority is, as is the case with police authority chairmen up and down the country, only too inclined to put problems down to lack of resources. After this year's settlement he is calmly saying that the police precept is likely to go up by 27 per cent. next spring. If that goes ahead, I fear that it will add to my constituents' anger because in recent years, percentage council tax rises in Nottinghamshire have usually been in or near double figures, and they seem likely to be next year. I hope that the Minister will address himself to the organisation of the police service, not just turn it all into a demand for more money.

I never put too much emphasis on the theme of bobbies on the beat, which is a focus group approach to policing. If one asks an ordinary member of the public who has no personal experience of how to organise a police service what they think should be done, they tend to answer, "There should be more bobbies on the beat." As a result, at every general election all parties commit themselves to that. Nowadays, especially in rural areas, it would be nice to think that one could go back to the old police house in the village and visible foot patrols, but that is neither possible nor the best way of dealing with modern criminality. However, I do not totally dismiss the concept of beat policing in the sense of a feeling of the ready availability of the police service. My constituents do not feel that, and that is what most disturbs them. They do not really expect to see a policeman walking down the main street of Ruddington at most hours of the day, but they do want to feel that if they need help it is quickly available—that there is contact and the sense of security and protection that the police service should be able to provide. People do not feel that that ready response to their problems is available.

The Minister will almost certainly be aware that the Nottinghamshire police service has genuine problems, both in its history and with current problems of criminality, as I readily acknowledge. Although no form of statistics is less reliable than crime statistics, the area is said to have the second highest crime rate in the country in terms of offences per 1,000 of population. There are certainly parts of the county that are not quite lawless, but troubled by serious crime. My constituency goes up to the boundaries of Nottingham city, parts of which have very serious crime problems that the police have to concentrate on tackling. We have a serious drugs problem in the middle of the city; we have gunfights breaking out in the city; we have a lively city centre that creates problems to which the police have to give high priority. Because that area has to be the No. 1 priority, people outside it in the towns, villages and suburbs often feel that they have lost their access to help and response. That is a problem that I am now seeing as Member of Parliament for Rushcliffe.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

Recently, we had a new chief constable, Mr. Stephen Green. I met him soon after he was first appointed, and found that he was determined to introduce a process of reform of which I wholly approve. Although the Nottinghamshire police service has never been exactly bad, it has never been particularly distinguished or remarkable. I believe that the last national league tables rated it as second from bottom in terms of effective police services in England. The new chief constable is determined to tackle that through a reform programme, which I wholly support. I was extremely impressed by his declaration of his intention to turn round the baseline performance of his police service in key areas, to undertake a more proactive style of policing and to target his service more effectively. The police and the chief constable assure us that that has not resulted in any transfer from rural to urban areas or vice versa. That makes it all the more puzzling that my rural constituents feel that that is precisely what has happened—that the problems of the Meadows and St. Annes, including gunfights and highly publicised major crime, have led to lower responses in the areas in which they live.

I have already mentioned the rurality of my constituency. It is actually suburban and rural, but the geographical area is largely rural. The biggest troubles arise in the larger rural villages cum towns that are a feature of my part of Nottinghamshire—places such as Bingham, Ruddington, Keyworth, East Leake and Cotgrave. There are also problems in the suburbs of West Bridgford and Edwalton.

My constituency's geography is rural, but Nottinghamshire does not benefit from the Government's rural policing fund and does not have any particular rural policy of which I am aware applied to it. Given that policing is meant to be community-based, it is unclear to some in my constituency exactly how policing is meant to be delivered in the large towns in particular. At one point, for example, a contact point, at which six or eight officers would be based, was going to be set up in Keyworth, but my constituents have told me that those officers have recently been moved away and are back in West Bridgford.

In rural areas and in the suburbs it is inevitable that, in 2002, people expect to use the telephone to get the response that they require. If one cannot have a policeman walking past one's gate and cannot expect to see a police car driving down the village street regularly, one expects to be able to speak to the police on the telephone. A feature of representations to me over the past 12 months has been that almost everyone complains that no one answers the telephone when they try to make a non-emergency report. There has been controversy about responsiveness, which has been quite high and is getting better, to 999 calls. The real problem occurs when responsible citizens do not misuse the 999 service, but try to call what they believe to be their local police station or the divisional headquarters to report a routine incident, which is serious to them, in which they have been a victim of crime or have witnessed vandalism or rowdiness. I have been told over and over again that it is a waste of time trying to telephone the police because frequently no response is available or, if a response comes, it is very late. When the response comes it can be extremely unhelpful, with someone merely saying, "Nothing can be done to send anybody out to deal with the incident that is taking place."

I can understand the difficulties in providing a telephone response service in today's world, because everyone now carries a mobile phone. In the old days, people could phone the police only by going to the considerable trouble of finding a telephone. Now everyone has a telephone in their pocket, which means that the propensity to ring the police has greatly increased. That means that staffing must be increased because those calls are very important to the people who make them.

In the early part of this year, responsiveness to phone calls of any kind fell to dreadful levels. I could not find the figures for the early part of this year, but by August matters had apparently improved as 39 per cent. of non-emergency calls were being answered within the target time. Of course, 39 per cent. is an appalling figure, but the situation was worse before August. I have been told that staff are being recruited and trained, and now 75 per cent. of calls are being answered within the target time, but that is still a fairly dismal performance. The Minister will no doubt explain the targets that the Government expect police services to achieve in response to the telephone. My constituents' experience has not adjusted to this so-called improvement because I have not yet found any falling away in the number of people telling me that it is a waste of time telephoning the police. It is also sometimes a waste of time going to the large police station in West Bridgford, which was once a divisional headquarters, because often the desk is not manned or the door is closed and no one is available to provide a service.

What subjects do people ring up about? In rural areas, people suffer to a lesser extent than elsewhere the problems of burglary, which is carried out by slightly more sophisticated burglars who travel out to rural areas. There is also car crime, which has decreased in recent years. Joyriding is not as fashionable as it once was among the young delinquent population of my part of Nottinghamshire, and although cars are still stolen, they are burnt out less frequently. [*Interruption.*] It sounds as though the delinquents have moved to the Nottingham, North constituency.

Antisocial behaviour of a semi-criminal kind is the real problem in my constituency, particularly in the large villages. I do not recall a time when things have been quite so bad. Large numbers of young people hang about in key places: in the centre of large towns and villages and small towns or in set places, such as cul-de-sacs and the edge of villages near fields where motor bikes can be ridden. Those young people make a general nuisance of themselves and commit crime. The crime in question is often vandalism; it can be petty and can constitute little more than abusive and difficult behaviour towards passers-by and people living in the locality. However, it can be quite serious and if the behaviour is repeated it has a most damaging effect on the quality of life of those who have the misfortune to live in places where it occurs, who happen to use the shopping centre that is regularly vandalised, or who find that the centre of their village is unusable.

I shall return to the subject of the transfer of resources and what is being targeted. I am not sure whether the police service has almost given up on the type of behaviour that I have described. At the moment, its response is not very adequate. I acknowledge the difficulties: more serious crime is being committed in the centre of Nottingham and it is quite difficult for the police to deal with large groups of unruly and antisocial youths because they need evidence of a criminal offence against an individual before they can move in and effect an arrest and turn to the criminal justice system. However, that does not mean that the problem can simply be abandoned. If it is, people are left feeling that there is no visible police presence and that no police will attend to improve the situation and perhaps persuade the delinquent young people to disperse.

Surely special constables could have more of a role in this area. I trust that the Minister is aware of the problems that exist in relation to special constables. Numbers have collapsed and recruiting is difficult. I have always thought that we should pay special constables. We need to acknowledge that that is the best way to persuade that type of volunteer—if they were paid, they would be volunteers with inducements—to enter the service. There are many people who would readily serve.

The Government lay great stress on the introduction of community support officers. The officers are meant to have limited powers to deal with minor crime. I cannot think of anything more suitable for them to deal with than rowdyism in the middle of Cotgrave. Apparently, 12 community support officers are planned for the enormous county of Nottinghamshire; my constituents will not be able to take much comfort from that. I should like to know when the idea will be tried out on an effective and bigger scale so that it might make some difference to the perceived level of the service.

Those are the problems that I want to raise. I am conscious of being surrounded by other hon. Members who wish to join in. It will reinforce my case, and everyone else's, if the problems that I have mentioned become a recurrent theme because other Members of Parliament have experienced the same increase in public disquiet and the same problems in different parts of the county—the south seems particularly well represented, so that area clearly has this difficulty.

I cannot forbear from reminding the Minister that while we are in the middle of the problem that I have described, his Department proposes to put an asylum detention centre in Newton. I mentioned Bingham as one of the places that suffers from criminality and vandalism. Bingham is about three miles away from the proposed centre and the residents do not welcome the prospect of 750 asylum seekers being put in a large camp where they will have little to do during the day but wander into Newton and encounter those who are already causing trouble in and around the market place in Bingham. If the building of the centre goes ahead, there are obvious implications for the police service in Nottinghamshire. I do not see how anyone plans to address the policing implications of putting a transient population of 750 people in the middle of the area that I represent.

It is important that we see delivery in Nottinghamshire of what are supposed to be national priorities, of which I strongly approve. First, we must get some speed into the criminal justice system because when dealing with young delinquents it still takes far too long from arrest to any type of disposal in court. That is a persistent weakness in the criminal justice system in our county. I will not open up on that theme because I have already taken some time.

If one is going to improve the effectiveness of the police service and make better use of our police men and women, the Government's drive to reduce red tape and paperwork should be improved. I approve of that because I had a similar drive when I was Home Secretary 10 years ago. We have talked about reducing paperwork and the demands on the police service. I blame my successors for the fact that the problems seem to have got infinitely worse since I announced my drive, and I see no sign of improvement in the near future. It is a problem for all police services that in any shift, the time in which a policeman is available to carry out any duties of a serious policing nature is greatly reduced by the amount of time spent filling in endless forms and paperwork and the sheer bureaucracy that has descended on the police service in this country.

I am sure that hon. Members and the Minister have got the flavour of the complaints that I am trying to raise on behalf of my constituents, who think that the Government's rhetoric, which always sounds quite stirring when it comes to raising the quality of the police service in this country and achieving reform that will make it more effective, contrasts starkly with the reality in the villages and suburbs of southern Nottinghamshire.

Having explained the problem, and the perception that it has got worse during the past 12 months with a deteriorating service, I look forward to hearing what encouragement and response my constituents will get when the Minister replies.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I advise hon. Members that the winding-up speeches will commence at 20 minutes to 11. If hon. Members are concise with their remarks, more may be able to catch my eye.

9.51 am

Mr. Graham Allen (Nottingham, North): I am pleased to speak in this all-party debate. There is a majority of Nottinghamshire Members of Parliament from all parties present in the Hall at the moment. I am also pleased to speak in a debate convened by someone born in the heart of Nottingham, North, in Bulwell. I am pleased to pick up on some of the themes of the opening speech.

Several facts are beyond doubt. First, the Nottinghamshire police force has more police officers and more money than at any time in its recorded history. Secondly, the public in Nottingham, North feel that our streets are less protected than ever before. They ask me, "If we have all these extra officers, where are they? What are they doing? Why are they not there when we need them?" I ask those questions of the chief constable. I should like to raise several important issues about the management of the police service, all of which have had dire consequences for my constituents.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): My hon. Friend mentioned the record number of police officers. Will he also confirm that over the past four months, crime has been falling each month consecutively in Nottinghamshire?

Mr. Allen: I intend to discuss the perception of crime and whether the perception and reality are the same. I shall also mention the amount of time invested in putting out a public view about the crime statistics that has often been totally at odds with my constituents' experience in the last four months, regardless of whatever the statistical finesse may be.

Like the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), I could recite the contents of letter after letter and phone call after phone call from constituents who have seen that perceptible deterioration in law and order, for example in Bulwell, where my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping) did many years of valuable service. Each Saturday, I hold an open meeting in my constituency that people can attend to raise any issue that they like. Traditionally, topics have ranged from global warming to housing repairs. Those meetings are now almost entirely monopolised by frightened constituents, those who have suffered individual incidents or a reduction in their quality of life due to antisocial behaviour, and those with stories to tell about bad recent experiences with the police.

Over the past 15 years in this House, I have totally supported the police in the extremely difficult job that they do. My commitment to the constables, sergeants and inspectors who serve Nottingham, North remains absolute. I have enjoyed good relations with chief constables since 1987 when I was first elected—including the present incumbent.

My surprise was therefore all the greater when, in May of this year, I heard from officers in my constituency that the chief constable was proposing to abolish the individual beat officer—the bobby on the beat to whom the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe referred—in the Nottingham division, but nowhere else in Nottinghamshire. One of the four inspectors in my constituency, who had carefully constructed a beat system, immediately requested a transfer from his existing duties. The impact on morale of the beat bobby has been catastrophic: some applied for a job in April only to be told that they were irrelevant at the end of May. Where does that leave the Government's rhetoric on community policing? Everyone pays lip service to the concept, but the reality is that a chief constable can on a whim do away with whatever he declares is not operational. Home Office Ministers are impotent to do anything about it; there is no redress.

We all live on rumours about what will happen next. To this day, I am not privy to a clear plan of action of what the chief constable is trying to achieve. If there is one, I would appreciate a copy and it should be put in the public domain so that everyone can debate it. I accept the need for change, and I endorsed the chief constable's desire to see it; one can hardly object to the word change. However, if there is to be change, the most basic management textbook would suggest that some effort should be made to discuss that with the public, and with the officers who are due to implement it.

The core question is, what is the right balance between reactive and proactive policing? Of course we need both. We need preventive policing; we need the community; and we need people doing what is often called proper policing, which is detecting and arresting criminals.

If I understand the chief constable correctly, his reason for establishing a centralised response team for the whole of the city of Nottingham was to respond and so leave officers based in local stations to be longer term and proactive. However, the majority of officers in the local stations were individual beat officers who were already doing longer-term policing. Those are the very people who are now leaving in droves because their jobs are soon to be abolished. Should beat officers be doing longer-term, proactive stuff, or more reactive policing? What should the mixture or balance be? That needs to be made clear to all of us who are consumers of the police service. We also need that expectation to be clearly established between the chief constable and the divisional commander. It sometimes seems that we are receiving mixed messages.

In place of a professional personnel policy, an insinuation has been spun to anyone who questions the decision that individual beat bobbies did not do their fair share of responsive policing. People are given a nod and a wink—or something more clearly disparaging—that bobbies just wanted a soft nine-to-five job. If that were true—I doubt that it is—it is a reason not to abolish the concept of the individual beat officer in the community, but to get stuck in to making the management of police officers more effective at local level.

The other smokescreen put up to conceal recent performance is the idea that we need more funding. Until the record amount of funding and the record number of officers are deployed competently, no one should seriously expect the Government to throw yet more money in our direction. We must be able to handle properly the extra and large amounts of money that we have in the Nottinghamshire police force.

If the idea was to build a proactive capacity in the local stations, we must ask, why move officers out of each of the Nottingham stations into the centralised response team, which is reactive? That is happening at the same time as stations in Bestwood, Bulwell, Basford and Strelley are each losing a sergeant and two experienced officers to the street crime initiative. I fully understand the problems in city centres of large-scale movements of young people, particularly at weekends, because of the entertainments and bars in city centres, and the other very difficult problems of the inner city, which are often related to drug and gun crime.

However, to adopt a totally undifferentiated policing strategy for the whole city of Nottingham, including my outer-city council estates, which are white, working-class areas where an older generation lives, and to assume that the problems faced by my constituents are the same as those in Rushcliffe or other parts of the city of Nottingham is a nonsense and a crude way in which to manage a police force.

These are not academic questions. The hollowing out of my four local stations has got the hyenas circling. Burglars, drug pushers and yobs know where their best chances are and they move to where the police are not.

It would at least be some consolation if the response team worked properly, but the failure of the centralised response team has resulted in blameless officers who remain at local stations becoming the butt of public resentment. The obvious question is why the master plan—should one exist—which has not been published and on which there has been no consultation, was not tested on local officers or at least piloted in such a way that it could be corrected as it was rolled out. Rather, it has been imposed and is resented. It is a failure—in the chief constable's words, it is "not working properly"—and has required a permanent process of tinkering since April.

Yes, I know all the management-speak about change being painful, but change introduced without anyone in the service or in our communities buying into it, and without ensuring the maintenance of basic policing services, is unnecessarily excruciating for my constituents, who depend on us, and for the loyal, hard-working and long-serving local police officers who see only decline and demoralisation in local policing and, frankly, deserve a lot better.

Leaving aside the J curves, police college jargon and crossed fingers, the question to which we have never been given a clear answer is, on what date can we expect the system—whatever it is—to be working properly? How long do we give it before someone says that enough is enough?

As I understand it—I am not privy to any plan, should one exist—individual beat officers in my constituency have had seven months of drift since April and May, in which they have been told that their jobs are redundant but have been given no clear idea of what is to replace them. I now understand that they are at some time to be replaced by "sections"—a new word—which are much larger areas with five or six officers attached to them. The chief constable said in a recent letter to me that he had come to the conclusion, "with hindsight", that 60 beat officers were not enough.

Despite the fact that the Nottinghamshire constabulary has more police officers available than ever before, it is now evident that the deployment strategy was based on guesswork, was not supported by consultations with Nottingham's police officers, the crime and disorder partnership or local representatives, and is still being made up as we go along. The centralised response team is now being cut into four parts. Well, let us give that a try for a couple of months and see whether it is any better. Law-abiding citizens in my constituency are being treated like lab rats in an experiment.

While we still have time, let us not depend on hindsight to judge the effectiveness of sections. We can make a judgment about them now. If we do not give individual officers clear personal responsibility, the result in my constituency will be pass-the-parcel policing. In reality, sections are likely to become mini response teams with less and less connection with the public or the beat and more and more responsibility for picking up the leftovers from the response team that failed to get to the scene the night before. Every hon. Member of every party in Nottinghamshire knows what is happening on the ground. They know, as local inspectors do in the local stations, that that is the truth of everyday experience.

The chief constable, rather surprisingly, asserted in a letter to me recently that there is no shortage of information coming to the Nottinghamshire police. I hope that that does not mean that the police feel that they can afford to pass up masses of intelligence from a public who have learned not to call the police any more; or ditch experienced beat officers and their painstakingly built up networks of information. Some of those officers have been five years on the same patch and are known to the community, feeding valuable leads and intelligence from local community activists who personally know the number of an individual officer. I hope that in January Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will discover why this incredibly valuable asset has been deliberately bled out of our local policing in Nottingham, North. People are applying to join traffic or antisocial behaviour teams or to be dog handlers, having spent years building up intelligence on the good families and bad families in my constituency. We cannot afford to dispose, although we are disposing, of that talent. I hope that HMI will ask whether this has been by accident or by design; either answer will raise very serious questions that need answering.

I am afraid that there is a massive loss of confidence in policing by the public in Nottingham, North and my colleagues will refer, if they wish, to the same phenomena elsewhere in the shire. The public find that it takes longer to get through, that there is a longer wait for a response and that they receive a poorer quality of response when it is finally forthcoming.

However expert the spinning of the statistics and of the media—I must tell the Minister that that is one area of massive improvement in the last couple of years—the chief constable knows, I know, local police officers know and the public know the reality on the ground. Those ill-conceived and poorly implemented changes have had an appalling impact on the police service in my constituency and on my constituents, whose lives are blighted by the inability of good, sound police officers to be allowed to get on and do their jobs effectively.

Yes, there is a massive cultural problem in the police service, which must be tackled. Sadly, the way in which the chief constable has imposed and poorly managed change exemplifies rather than eliminates those cultural problems. I hope that if, even now, the chief constable will listen, not to Members of Parliament but to his own officers and to the Nottingham public and the communities to whom he is duty bound to provide a service, the guesswork and secrecy that have brought such a loss of confidence can yet be substituted with careful planning, patient involvement and confidence-building.

I am not starry-eyed about my constituency. As someone born and bred in it, I know that it has always been a tough, hard place, but I also know that the vast majority of my constituents are law abiding, want to help the police and are the salt of the earth. I genuinely feel that my constituency has little time left if the degeneration that we have all witnessed over the past year is to be halted and we are to restore acceptable levels of law and order in the outer estates of Nottingham. We have been the subject of an experiment. It has failed and it will take a big man to change direction now. I have to ask the chief constable, or he must ask himself, whether he is that man.

10.8 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate. I also congratulate the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) on a powerful speech.

I fear that I shall sound like a stuck record. Although I shall talk not about south Nottinghamshire but about north Nottinghamshire, many of the problems that we have heard about in both speeches are common to those prevailing in my constituency. My constituency, not unlike that of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe, is a rural, market-town constituency, which suffers from a level of crime similar to that of other rural areas. However, there is no doubt that during the year and a bit that I have been in Parliament the majority of the contents of my mailbag reflects police and policing difficulties. The majority of my time as a new Member of Parliament has been spent trying to deal with those problems. That has been exacerbated—or helped, whichever way one likes to look at it—by my personal knowledge of the chief constable, whom I have known for more than 30 years, and by the fact that in a previous profession I was closely associated with the police. I hope that I have brought some empathy to the problem, but I have been bombarded with complaints at every opportunity about the way in which Newark, in particular, is policed.

I start by congratulating Inspector Gary France and Inspector Gerry Butler and their policemen and women on their efforts in Retford and Newark to contain a difficult situation. My support lies entirely behind the lower ranks, the officers on the beat, the sergeants, the inspectors and the chief inspectors who do so well in an increasingly difficult job. My support has been unswerving for these officers; my admiration for them is huge, and so is that of my community, but that is being put in danger now by the problems that we face.

As the Minister knows, I have been pestering him and the Home Secretary for improvements in funding in Nottinghamshire. I have mentioned several times the 21 per cent. rise in police precept in Newark and Sherwood, which council tax payers in my constituency greatly resent. I have pestered the Minister for the Home Secretary—and the Prime Minister—to visit the constituency; the Prime Minister has never done so. The Minister knows that this is a particular subject of mine; I have pointed out several times that Nottinghamshire constabulary has about half the officers of Merseyside police, and about half the funding, despite the fact that 9,000 fewer crimes are reported in the Merseyside area; 160,000-odd crimes are reported in Nottinghamshire.

I am grateful to the Minister that in the next financial year we may receive a rise of 4.9 per cent. in police funding. However, like my hon. Friends I am not convinced that that money will be spent wisely. As has been said in both the previous speeches, it is not simply a matter of improvements in crime figures or in response timing, or in extra sums of money given to the police; what is crucial is the ability to communicate those improvements to the average man and woman on the street who feels that their police officers are not doing the job for which they are paid and perhaps resourced. It is the essential element of reassurance of constituents that is so badly lacking.

I want to thank the chief constable for the time that he has spent in my constituency; he is not Newark's or Retford's but Nottinghamshire's chief constable. I pay tribute to the fact that he has listened carefully to what we have to say, but the fact remains that although improvements are undoubtedly being reported, particularly by Newark police, there is a general lack of assurance and faith from my constituents in the job that is being done.

I understand Nottinghamshire's needs. I understand that the chief constable must put his resources where they are needed, in the big crime hotspots such as Nottingham, which, as we heard, faces the problems of gun crime—which is largely absent in Newark and Retford—and drug crime. However, the constabulary is about to get extra resources and I am not sure why the chairman of Nottinghamshire police authority is saying that it will make little difference and is calling for another rise in council tax of perhaps 27 per cent. in the forthcoming financial year. Like my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe, I believe that that will be deeply resented by my constituents.

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): To avoid confusion, does the hon. Gentleman agree that the 27 per cent. is 27 per cent. on the police precept, which is a small proportion of the total council tax?

Patrick Mercer: Yes, of course I agree, but that is 27 per cent. on top of a 21 or so per cent. rise, or in other words an enormous rise in the overall proportion of the council tax. I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

Improvements have been made in the way in which calls are handled. Speed of response has increased considerably. However, I am not sure that the advice that my constituents receive at the end of a telephone is always well considered. The chief constable has gone through that with me at length, saying that the staff for the new call centres need to be properly trained and to become familiar with the areas. They need to understand that Skegby is a hamlet just north of Normanton on Trent, not a considerable town near Mansfield. Clearly, the problems will take time to iron out, but the fact remains that they have not been ironed out yet. I very much look forward to my visit to a call centre to assure myself that things are improving.

I reiterate the words of my right hon. and learned Friend: if there is one problem that can be solved, it is the speed of response to telephone calls. That would go an awfully long way towards reassuring—I use that word again—my constituents.

In my day, when I worked alongside the Royal Ulster Constabulary, it worked on three pillars: attrition, deterrence and reassurance. I am reasonably convinced that, under the new strategy that the chief constable has introduced, attrition is being considered in some detail. Prevention is better than cure, and no doubt professional police officers have well and truly understood that lesson. However, deterrence and reassurance are the two pillars of the structure to which I am referring. If they are not implemented properly, that leads to a lack of faith and a wholesale fear among constituents that they are not getting the protection that they deserve from the officers whom they pay, however indirectly.

There has been a certain amount of flim-flam behind this issue. There have been sensational stories in the *Newark Advertiser* about anonymous police officers complaining about the way in which the police service in the county is handled. It is open to my constituents to judge whether that is helpful. It certainly spreads a huge amount of alarm and it is based on the authoritative voice of ex-police officers. I look to the chief constable to try to reassure those ex-officers and serving officers.

I echo the hon. Member for Nottingham, North about consulting the officers who will have to implement the changes. I hope very much that when the inspectorate is involved in January, the system under which Nottinghamshire is asked to do its policing will be considered in detail.

I reiterate the points about special constables. My view is that community support officers are not a good idea. However, they are here to stay. I regret the fact that the chief constable has been unable to produce more CSOs than the 12 whom we are offered, due to the fact that his funding is unsustained. I ask the Minister to consider that in detail.

In conclusion, we have excellent policemen and women, who are trying to do an extraordinarily difficult job. We are told that we have more money and more police officers in Nottinghamshire than we have ever seen before. In my constituency, however, we seem to have fewer police officers. It is being bandied around that we used to have 42 but we now have 29. It is the chief constable's job to ensure that my constituents are aware of a job being done better. He must reassure them that they can sleep safely in their beds. Above and beyond everything else, the wedge that has been driven between the people and the police force must be removed with speed.

10.19 am

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): I agree that there is disillusionment throughout Nottinghamshire. It is important that we examine why that is the case. As has been said, police numbers in the county are at a record high and crime is falling once again. Why is there that lack of public confidence? The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) spoke about the problems with the telephone. That is a key issue. People cannot get through on the telephone. There is no response—I have experienced this myself—and their disillusionment increases. To be fair to the Nottinghamshire police, the response has improved but we need to look at quality, not just quantity. The qualitative response from the telephone operators is abysmal at the moment. We must work harder to ensure that people who ring up in need get an appropriate response.

There has been some talk about the problems caused by the reorganisation. All reorganisation is dysfunctional, but over a number of years the Nottinghamshire police force has been remarkably complacent. Until recently it has been on a progressively downward spiral. Change was necessary. As the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) said, some police officers have found that extremely difficult. Those who go anonymously to talk to the *Newark Advertiser* are doing the service no good. I do not believe the Nottinghamshire crime statistics. I travel the country fairly widely and the notion that Nottinghamshire has the second highest crime statistics is inconceivable. There have been problems with the way that Nottinghamshire has recorded the figures in the past. The Minister needs to look at how crime is recorded across the country.

I want to make one essential point directly to the chairman of the Nottinghamshire police authority. The precept went up 20 per cent. last year. This week he is threatening that it will go up by 27 per cent. next year. He described last year's settlement as inadequate. Let us just consider it. It is a 4.3 per cent. increase. It represents £5 million extra in the budget, but that is not all. What needs to be considered is the extra money, particularly from the crime fighting fund. If all the specific grants are taken into account, such as those for tackling street crime, which is a real problem for my colleagues in Nottingham, the budget of the Nottinghamshire police would rise from £118 million this year to £130 million next year. That is an increase of £12 million or nearly 10 per cent.

I must tell the chairman of the police authority and the chief constable that unless performance increases—unless we get increased output from the Nottinghamshire police—there can be no suggestion that any Nottinghamshire MP will campaign for more funding for the Nottinghamshire police. The focus should be on making best use of the resources that are available, rather than crying in the dark for resources that will not come. The chairman of the police authority is doing his force and the community in Nottinghamshire no favours whatever.

10.24 am

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I shall be brief so that others may speak. I want to highlight three or four main points about policing in Nottinghamshire. We have heard about many of the challenges that face the police. Many of the complaints that hon. Members have made are similar to the those that my constituents make. The telephone system is the focus of one such complaint. It is improving, but it needs further improvement.

The plea that is made to me most often with regard to the police is for a visible police presence—to see more police officers on the streets. The intention underlying the change introduced by the chief constable and the chairman of the police authority was to try to achieve that, and I am sure that people will welcome it.

We heard about the importance of local beat officers in reassuring the local community, and we must make them the focus of our efforts. It is important to reiterate for the record that police numbers in Nottinghamshire are at an all-time high. By March 2003, the number will be 2,434 compared with 2,204 only three years ago—an increase of 10 per cent. We should welcome that increase, but Nottinghamshire and the rest of the country still need more police officers. While I am a Member of Parliament, I will repeat the demand that my constituents make to me for more police officers because they want a visible police presence on the street.

[Vernon Coaker]

I agree that effective management and the efficient use of resources are important, and those responsible for them should be held to account where they are lacking. Since I was elected in 1997, however, my fundamental belief has not changed a jot that this country needs a considerable number of extra police officers on the streets in addition to the extra numbers that the Government have made available. I shall continue to argue that point.

The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made the important point that, as well as increased numbers of police officers and better management, we, as a society, need to consider how to tackle the scourge of antisocial behaviour and criminal damage in our communities, which are very real problems. We need to consider the role of special constables and increase their recruitment and retention. I agree with the right hon. and learned Gentleman that specials should be paid for the work that they do. The Government have relented and are to consider pilot schemes for paying them. I ask the Minister to consider choosing Nottinghamshire for such a pilot scheme, if the chief constable and the chair of the police authority believe it to be appropriate, so that we may determine whether we can use special constables to work alongside police officers.

I also want there to be more community support officers, not only in the city, but throughout the county. Why is Nottinghamshire not one of the areas in which we may pilot giving community support officers the power to detain people for 30 minutes? Community support officers in six areas have that power; it should be available to ours, too.

I want the Government to put more pressure on councils to tackle some of the problems that they have with antisocial behaviour. The police are continually called to deal with antisocial tenants and other such problems, but it is the councils' responsibility to deal with such problems, and they should do so much more effectively.

Will the Minister ask the Lord Chancellor and those people who are responsible for the courts why persistent offenders are still being bailed? Months ago, we said that the courts would not bail persistent young offenders, yet police officers continually tell me that they do. What does it do for morale and reassurance in the community when a police officer catches people who are then bailed by the courts? When we say that courts should not bail persistent offenders, we should ensure that they do not and that we support our police.

Finally, would it be appropriate, following reflection on our debate, for a delegation to meet the Minister privately to discuss the key issues in more detail? We need to talk them through and find a way forward that both supports the police and addresses the identified problems.

10.29 am

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I am an avid reader of the *Newark Advertiser* and would love to exchange the problems of Newark and Rushcliffe for the problems of Worksop and its surrounding area. I represent a 360 square mile area and my mailbag is also bulging. After analysing the problems, I know that road humps and traffic are higher on people's agenda than policing. That is a fact. I have found that every time one of the 80 parish councils meets and has a police officer present—as they nearly always do—the councils, unsurprisingly, want to discuss policing. When an expert on traffic is present, they unsurprisingly want to discuss transport.

I urge the chief constable to stop sending an officer or himself to every parish council. I cannot get around all 80 of them. They should be grouped together, perhaps 10 at a time, and in those circumstances I would offer my services to chair meetings at which traffic and police issues could be discussed at the same time. Indeed, a correlation exists between them.

Management of change is always difficult. I spent many years trying to negotiate change in the car industry. Without people biting the bullet of change and without the advance of technology, we would have no car industry left. I want to state in the strongest terms that, however painful the change, I want the police service in my area to have the most advanced technology. Many of my constituents still hold dear the concept of PC Plod travelling around the 360 square miles on his bike, but we cannot go back to that notion. I want the police service to use the most advanced technology and I congratulate the force on the changes that have already taken place. Major teething problems have occurred, but they resulted from the way in which the new technology was first introduced.

The management of change will also be painful for local officers. I should like to see fewer phone numbers: I have never known an area in which it is so easy to bandy around different numbers of the local police station. When people ring the local police station and are dissatisfied, who is blamed?—the Government. The police say that they do not have sufficient resources to deal with problems. That occurs throughout the public services. Everyone likes to blame others and ask for more money because it is an easy way of getting rid of people on the other end of the phone. In the management of change, that must be a top priority. I constantly receive feedback from people saying that there are not enough police. How do they know? Because, they say, the police told them that they did not have enough resources for effective policing. It is a critical part of the problem.

I frequently say to parish councils nowadays, "You complain, so you show me the people who are volunteering to be specials." Of course, the Home Secretary has the advantage of a much stronger economy these days, which should help to pay for change. Doubtless the absence of a strong economy was why it was turned down in the past. I should like to see closed circuit television paid for by my own parish council and others in order to deter; it might dislodge criminals to other areas without CCTV. I applaud the Government's efforts and would like even more money invested in CCTV.

About 95 per cent. of recorded and unrecorded crime in my area is caused by drugs. I ask the Minister for my area to be piloted under the Criminal Justice Bill: let us quantify the savings to the police service resulting from diverting criminals into treatment. I suspect that they would be substantial, not to mention the large savings to legal aid budgets. Please make us a pilot area.

10.33 am

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): Police funding is increasing by 10 per cent. this year, so the number of police officers—2,434—is the highest that Nottinghamshire has ever had. However, the context is important, and we must recognise that Nottinghamshire has the second highest crime rate—in terms of the ratio of crimes per 1,000 people—and the highest ratio of crimes per officer in the country.

I represent an inner-city constituency in which the bulk of crimes are committed. We must understand current policing demands and what the police are being asked to take on. Since April, robberies in Nottinghamshire have increased by 18.6 per cent. There have been 31 shootings and three fatalities. There have been 150 arrests for drug or gun-related crimes, 31 of which resulted in deportations. One killing was of a young man who grew up in my front room, and I feel very angry about the nature of his death.

It is wrong, however, to say that all that is the fault of the chief constable. His arrival in Nottinghamshire was one of the best pieces of news that the county had had in a long time. When he arrived, the safest place to be in the county was police headquarters, which was not surprising because of the number of officers who were tied up there. One thing that the chief constable has done is make a commitment to devolve resources and put officers into the communities that they are supposed to be policing. There are problems with that, and with a resistance to change, but my constituents welcome the deployment of police in different ways.

I do not want to repeat the points that have been made about the answering of telephone calls to the police. Those are legitimate criticisms, but I want it to be recognised that some of the issues thrown at the police have to be set in a different context. We live in a society that faces rising crime. Despite that, police in Nottinghamshire have the highest ratio of arrests to charges in the country. For that, they should be congratulated.

Those police also have a background record of much more substantial involvement in diversionary and antisocial behaviour programmes than we have yet seen. The most successful scheme is a project called Wheelbase in my constituency, which has an incredible record of deflecting young people away from patterns of crime. The tragedy is that the scheme has to survive on a hand-to-mouth funding basis, for which we all have a responsibility, rather than the police who set it up and whose support underpins it.

I shall list four challenges in relation to Nottinghamshire police that I hope that the Minister will consider. Clearly, the central issues are drugs, guns and crime. The connections between the three are pivotal to crime in the county. We must accept that the community is often afraid not only of crime, but of coming forward to identify crime. Witness protection is crucial to detection rates. We should consider a gun amnesty, but only on the basis of introducing a statutory five-year sentence for the possession of guns.

Finally, I urge the Minister to think carefully before we charge down the path of 24-hour licensing in cities, because that will mean 24-hour provision of emergency services, and I am not sure that we have the capacity or cash to provide that at present.

10.37 am

Dr. Nick Palmer (Broxtowe): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate and on his measured introduction. I agree with 99 per cent. of what he said. The paradox is that the level of crime has been falling over the past few months and, indeed, since 1995, but we perceive that it is getting worse. I believe that the reason for that perception is the undoubted rise in antisocial behaviour. Most people do not see burglaries regularly, but they do see antisocial behaviour and they infer that all other crime is also getting worse.

There is little time to speak because we need to let those on the Front Benches have a go, so I shall restrict myself to a couple of comments.

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I should be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would give his opinion on what the police authority in Nottinghamshire should be doing. Some of the problems that we have heard about could perhaps be tackled more proactively by ensuring the right balance. Having made that comment, I waive my right to speak, so that the hon. Gentleman has a little more time.

Dr. Palmer: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady for her helpful intervention in both senses. She makes an important point on the role of the police authority. We do not have a great sense of democratic accountability, because of the indirect election to the authority, so it is all the more important that it is seen to be taking a lead. I support the police authority's efforts to get the Government to reconsider the way in which police funding is allocated to different areas, because there are paradoxes. If we make comparisons on population and number of crimes, we see that Nottinghamshire appears to be underfunded in relation to a number of other areas. I ask the Minister to reconsider that.

I shall focus on what we are asking the Government to do. First, they must consider the funding formula and ensure that Nottinghamshire gets its fair share. I am launching a petition in my constituency to gather support for that move.

Secondly, I understand that the chief constable is reluctant to introduce too many community support officers before he has commitments on long-term funding for them. Obviously, he does not want to recruit and train them, only to let them go again a couple of years later. That is one reason why only 12 are lined up. It would help if the Government showed a long-term commitment to the concept.

Thirdly, I was talking to Lord Falconer at a conference on identity cards. There is very wide support for those among my constituents, to back up the police. Fourthly, I support the efforts to reduce paperwork and waiting time in court so that the police that we do have work more productively. I am concerned about the slow introduction of links between computer systems. I understand that a year or two ago, it was still the case that a police officer might have to enter the same personal data about suspects 16 times in different systems. That figure has decreased a little, but it could come down much more.

Finally, I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) in volunteering my area as one where the new compulsory treatment for offenders on

[Dr. Palmer]

heroin is introduced. That will be of very substantial benefit, and we should like to be part of it. I look forward to the Minister's comments.

10.41 am

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate. The strength of feeling about the situation in Nottinghamshire has not gone unnoticed by those of us from other counties who take an interest in police matters. Before the debate, several hon. Members representing Nottinghamshire constituencies had already expressed their concerns in the Chamber and elsewhere. We have heard many different views, and it is not for me as an MP from another county to presume to comment on the detail of policing in Nottinghamshire. However, I want to make a few points that I hope will be helpful.

Most hon. Members have mentioned resources. Understandably, many Labour Back Benchers have said that there is a record number of police officers in Nottinghamshire at present. That is perfectly true, and I would not take that away from them. However, it is interesting that during Labour's first five years in government, numbers in Nottinghamshire fell by 65. One hon. Member even compared the figures with those for three years ago, as though the previous three years did not count.

There are record numbers of police officers, but it is not just a matter of numbers. As my right hon. and learned Friend said, it is a matter of how resources are used, and an issue of organisation. I sympathise with hon. Members who said that the police do not always help themselves. I, too, have heard of police officers telling victims of crime, "I'm sorry, but we can't get there—we're the only ones on duty in 500 square miles." That certainly does not help the public perception, whatever the truth may be.

Telephones and response times have been mentioned. It is time to consider having a second tier of telephones, as they do in many parts of the United States for the less urgent calls—not emergency calls. I have recently been a victim of crime, involving the loss of property worth several thousand pounds. On reporting it, all that I received was an incident number. It is now three months later and I have still not seen a police officer. I have explained that to my force, and it knows my views on that, but that demonstrates that we are all open to the problem of not getting the response that we expect from telephone calls.

I also want to refer to the term that my right hon. and learned Friend used: "bobbies on the beat". He referred to that as a focus group concept, and I am well aware of his attitude to focus groups, which I largely share. If that is seen, as some chief constables have said to me, as purely a matter of reassurance because people want to see bobbies on the beat, then I share my right hon. and learned Friend's cynicism; it is a pointless exercise. However, I contend that bobbies on the beat could provide not merely reassurance but effective policing—[*Interruption.*]—if such police officers are proactive, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen) is saying sotto voce, by gaining intelligence on the ground. Other officers can then bring intelligence together, using modern technology to develop pictures of crime areas and views on the causes of crime and the factors leading to it—perhaps environmental factors, or factors such as licensing, as the hon. Member for Nottingham, South (Alan Simpson) mentioned. The two can work together. To have people out there on the streets, looking after their own patch and leading the search for intelligence, is a major way of addressing, especially, more minor crimes such as the antisocial behaviour to which so many hon. Members have referred.

I would argue that such work is not a job for special constables. There is not time to debate specials now, but being out there, dealing with the community, is such a crucial job that experienced front-line police officers should be doing it. Decisions about that should be taken locally. The Government should not and cannot enforce that kind of policing. However, they can set about stimulating it by removing barriers and obstacles, and encouraging and enabling the necessary co-ordination.

Antisocial tenants were mentioned. That problem highlights the role of an effective community officer with very close organised links with all public agencies involved in an area, including housing agencies and authorities. The Government have much more work to do to make such community policing happen. Yes, decisions must be made on the ground by local police chiefs, working with police authorities where there is room for considerable improvement; but the Government should not shuffle off all responsibility. They should facilitate those developments, get rid of barriers and build partnerships. That will lead to more effective policing on the ground in Nottinghamshire and throughout the country.

10.47 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I congratulate the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) on securing the debate and on the manner in which he presented his case. It was up to his usual standard, on this very important matter.

Two themes emerged from the debate. One was the gratifyingly high level of concern and commitment from all hon. Members who contributed; I congratulate them on that. The other was that although some concerns are shared there is a real diversity of view on some of the basics, and there are different opinions about what is and is not being achieved and the chances of success.

There was a request during the debate for a delegation to meet me to discuss the problems again. Hon. Members are aware that Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary will have some involvement in Nottinghamshire in the near future. I can tell hon. Members from all parties who have expressed heartfelt views on this matter that if they feel that such a delegation—I am here picking up the point raised by the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice)—would help to draw together the various opinions in the county without trying to second-guess what is not the Government's job, or is HMI's job, or is the local chief constable's job and the local police authority's job, I should be more than happy to undertake that.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) said, change is hugely difficult. It is proving to be difficult and painful for individuals in the force and in the wider community in Nottinghamshire, and I am prepared to do anything that might assist with that. I cannot speak for the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, who is unable to be here, but I am sure that he would be equally willing—and perhaps a more appropriate person—to meet such a delegation. Between us, we are prepared to try to sort it out.

I shall try to deal with the points that have been raised. I do not expect to be able to do justice to them all, but we shall take away all the issues that have been aired and try to be as constructive as we can.

Nottinghamshire police authority has not fared badly under the provisional funding settlement. For 2003–04 it was allocated general grant of £123.7 million—an increase of 4.3 per cent., or £5.2 million. In addition, there are several specific grants, including £4.32 million for the crime fighting fund. Taking into account the crime fighting fund, as well as grant funding, Nottinghamshire police force will benefit from an overall increase of about 4.9 per cent. No hon. Members have disputed that. On top of that, there is £1.13 million towards the cost of Airwave and £0.85 million to tackle street crime. In the current financial year, capital provision rose by 26.2 per cent., and the notional credit approval of £21.4 million was given for the public-private partnership contract signed last year for the new traffic wing and supply and maintenance of vehicles.

Street crime has fallen in Nottinghamshire by 14 per cent. during the course of the initiative. Street robbery has increased significantly in the constituency of the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe. As he would accept, however, he does not live in the most dangerous part of the county, or indeed the country—quite the reverse. I do not know whether that is all down to the representation that he manages to provide. I am sure that he recognises that despite the rise in street crime, the problems that his constituents face are dwarfed by those in other parts of the county.

There are concerns about how resources have been redeployed in the county. The chief constable tells me that there has been no denuding of posts around the county for the sake of Nottingham city centre. Posts remain as budgeted on 1 April. Because the proportion of probationers in the city division was significantly higher than in any other division, experienced officers were transferred into the city division. However, the proportion of probationers in Nottingham is still higher than in the surrounding divisions.

Another matter that has been the focus of much comment this morning is the programme for change that the chief constable launched on 1 April. It will include a review and is intended to reduce demands on resources, to realign basic command units with local authority boundaries, to support partnership and to ensure that community-based problem solving is at the heart of the policing culture. The chief constable tells me that resources have been devolved to the basic command units and that 52 officers have been devolved to divisional operations from the HQ departments. He tells me that Operation Roman, in utilising scientific support, has seen a 20 per cent. increase in DNA and fingerprint identification from the extra 20 per cent. of crime scenes visited.

Operation Stealth has been concerned with the problem of firearms in the city of Nottingham; it has seen 150 arrests, of which 31 resulted in people being deported. Doubtless Nottinghamshire Members will be aware of much more being done. It is important to recognise that it takes time for the results of any change programme to come through. I recognise that there are varying degrees of confidence as to whether the change programme will work; along with the chief constable and the police, we shall try to take that into account.

Hon. Members know that HMI will be involved in the force in the near future. In January, there will be a pre-force inspection, and a best value review inspection of Nottingham city basic command unit. Later, in March next year, HMI will be formally inspecting the force based on the earlier inspections. The report will be finalised within five weeks, and it will be available to allow us to assess the performances that concern several hon. Members who have spoken this morning. HMI plans to write to all the MPs concerned in the near future to alert them to the inspections, to give them details of what it intends to do and to invite them to state their views on the problem.

I cannot respond to the many individual issues that were raised. The right hon. and learned Gentleman and many other hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Paddy Tipping), raised the issue of response times. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right that there have been improvements and response times are below the national average, which is one thing that HMI and the police authority will want to consider to see whether improvements can be made in that area.

On CSOs, a variety of opinions was expressed. The Nottinghamshire force has been given what it bid for. If it makes further bids, they will be considered. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe and other hon. Members support the concept of CSOs but are impatient for the roll-out of the programme. A great deal of scepticism was expressed by Conservative Members during the passage of the Police Reform Act 2002 about whether we should be going down that route. I was amused by the report this morning that the hon. Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) does not support CSOs but that he wants funding stability to enable an ongoing commitment to them. He knows, because he served on the Standing Committee, that the Opposition attempted to slow down the giving of powers to CSOs, and to have CSOs piloted rather than rolled out quickly. Any diminution in our ability to roll out CSOs as quickly as we would like is partly due to opposition expressed in this House.

Patrick Mercer: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Ainsworth: I do not have time, because we are coming up to the wire.

Another issue about which hon. Members are greatly concerned applies not only to Nottinghamshire but elsewhere. It is antisocial behaviour. The Government have plans to deal with that in the new Session. All hon. Members will want to have an input into the plans to ensure that they are as effective as possible.

[Mr. Ainsworth]

On local issues, I am more than happy to meet a delegation if people believe that it will be constructive and will help to bring people together. Judging from the debate, I am certain that every single Member of Parliament for the county passionately shares the underlying desire to improve policing in Nottinghamshire for the benefit of all the people who live there.

Copenhagen Summit

11 am

Mr. Stephen Byers (Tyneside, North): I am delighted to have secured a debate to discuss the common agricultural policy in relation to the Copenhagen summit. I follow a debate secured by the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke); Westminster Hall is clearly becoming the venue for former Cabinet Ministers to continue to tread the boards. I hope that this debate proves as interesting as the one on policing in Nottingham.

I welcome to the Front Bench my hon. Friend the Minister for Europe. Many of us were delighted by his appointment. He has shown a deep interest in Europe, not only during his time in the House, but for many years before that. I know that he will be a strong and forcible advocate for Europe both within and outside the House. I look forward with interest to his response to the debate. I think that he is covering the main debate in the Chamber later today, so it will be a busy day for him. I apologise for that.

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): What about the shadow Minister?

Mr. Byers: I never apologise to shadow Ministers. That is one of the few things that I have learned during my time in the House.

Most importantly, the Minister will be able to deal with the CAP and the extent to which it may be debated at the Copenhagen summit. I say "extent" because, as many of us are aware, there was a fair degree of discussion about the CAP at the European Council meeting towards the end of October. Some decisions were taken there and they have set the framework within which any changes or reform will take place.

The Copenhagen summit will primarily be discussing enlargement—something that is very important for the future of Europe. It just so happens that many of the candidate countries for entry into an enlarged European Union have extensive farming interests. However, farming in those countries is outdated and inefficient. Enlargement and the nature of the agricultural sector in the candidate countries mean that there will need to be changes in the CAP. We should use enlargement as an opportunity to drive through major changes. Perhaps we should even reconsider the idea of giving subsidies for production, which has led to many of the present difficulties.

Andrew George (St. Ives): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for securing this important debate. I checked the EU website this morning and found that the CAP is not on the agenda to be raised formally at the meetings of the European Council in the next couple of days. Does he share my concern that the only debate will be in stand-up rows in the withdrawing rooms? Which language does he recommend that those stand-up rows be conducted in?

Mr. Byers: From my former experience, I know that even though there is a formal agenda at such gatherings, the Heads of State discuss a range of relevant issues. I do not doubt that there will be friendly discussions—I

cannot say "comradely" now, given the nature of the political complexion in France. I have to say that the Prime Minister speaks very good French. He would have no problems speaking in French if he wanted to, but I am sure that he will speak in English. Enlargement will be raised both formally and informally in the context of the agreements made in the European Council in Brussels and I make that point because we now have the parameters for any changes that need to be made to the common agricultural policy.

I want to raise three issues in this debate. First, I want to consider the high price that taxpayers and consumers in the United Kingdom are paying for the CAP. Secondly, the way in which the CAP works at the moment threatens the livelihoods of some of the poorest farmers in the world. Thirdly, if the argument for the CAP is that it safeguards the future of small farmers in the United Kingdom, the latest figures from the European Commission show that that is not the case because they are not benefiting from the way in which it operates.

The Brussels conclusions at the end of October resulted in one decision being taken and one being deferred. The first decision was that there would be an agreement on the overall level of spending on the CAP in line with the Commission's recommendations for 2006–13. The decision assumes that there will be an inflation rate of 1 per cent.—the single European currency is working well and I doubt whether inflation will be down to 1 per cent. for all those years—and therefore there will be a real-terms reduction, which was agreed in Brussels, in the amount that will be spent on the CAP.

The clear area of disagreement was reform because, as part of the deal on the capping of spending on agriculture, it was argued that there should be no reform of the CAP before 2006, which means that the status quo should apply until 2006. That was not agreed, but it was accepted that any reform should be part of the mid-term review, which will be conducted in line with the conclusions of the Berlin summit in 1999. The mid-term review will go ahead, and reform must form part of it.

It is very important that the European Union gets its act together and makes urgent progress. We all know of the failure of the World Trade Organisation talks in Seattle, and many lessons were learned as a result. As part of the European Union, the United Kingdom Government were in the forefront of arguing that there should be a new ministerial meeting, which should consist of a development round of trade talks. At the Doha meeting 12 months ago, we managed to re-establish and restart the trade talks. The round of talks will concern development, but as part of the deal it was recognised that agriculture had to change within those trade discussions.

The European Union is the only one of the main trading blocs that has not put its proposals forward. As part of the Doha process, it has quickly to put its proposals forward for change on agriculture. If it fails to do so—it probably has to do so by the end of this year or in early January at the very latest—it will derail the Doha talks, so it must make urgent progress. Even if it happens informally, I hope that the urgency of making progress on submitting our proposals within the European Union for change to the WTO will be realised and that that will take place at Copenhagen. If we fail to do so, we will carry a very heavy burden indeed.

I mentioned that I wanted to tackle three issues. I am pleased to see that the shadow spokesman is taking notes of what I am saying; he might learn a good deal. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) has just passed him a pen. The fact that the shadow spokesman did not bring a pen shows his remarkable state of readiness. Even the Minister is lending a pen—a better quality one, of course. I shall speak slightly more slowly, so that the shadow Minister can take full note of my contribution.

On the cost to consumers and taxpayers, it was interesting that when I secured the debate and it appeared on the Order Paper, someone contacted me to ask, "What is the relevance of this to your constituency?" Tyneside, North is an urban area with very little farming and few farmers, so the conclusion was that the subject was not terribly relevant to my constituents. However, it is relevant. Many of my constituents are concerned about the effect of the common agricultural policy on the developing world.

A few months ago, I attended a very good meeting organised at St. Bartholomew's church in Benton in my constituency. Many people who attended were concerned about the way in which the CAP operates and its effect on the developing world. Another concern—perhaps, a more self-interested one—is the fact that people in my constituency pay to fund the CAP. About £3.30 a week for every man, woman and child in the country is paid to the CAP, either by consumers through higher prices or by taxpayers through their taxes. From my constituency, £270,000 a week goes to the CAP—a total each year of £14.9 million.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): Is not it also in the interests of the right hon. Gentleman's constituents that the CAP has produced food security for several years? That is as important as the other issues that he has mentioned.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman's comments show the time warp in which some of the debate takes place. Food security may have been an issue 20 years ago when the CAP was in its infancy, but it is not the issue that it was. There is now overproduction in many parts of the world, particularly because of the way in which the CAP operates. If there is a need for a common agricultural policy, surely we could get away from a system that supports overproduction in the United Kingdom, which is dumped on small farmers in the developing world. I shall deal with overproduction shortly, particularly in the sugar and dairy sectors. If there is an argument about food security, it is one on which I have yet to be persuaded. The CAP as presently constructed does not address food security—perhaps there should be a debate about how it could be reformed to reassure the hon. Gentleman.

The pensioner and the young mother doing her shopping pay higher prices to support the CAP. That goes down badly with shipyard workers and miners who have lost their jobs, because there was no Government subsidy for their industries. They have gone through the painful process of redundancy, and have retrained,

[Mr. Byers]

learned new skills and found work, only to pay higher taxes to support the CAP, which provides subsidies to very rich farmers in the UK. They resent paying higher taxes to subsidise the farming sector.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The right hon. Gentleman referred to very rich farmers, but I represent a constituency in which hill farm incomes have sunk to about £4,000 per annum. That is not rich by any definition. I hope that he is not intent on giving a false impression about farmers. I agree that there is a need for drastic reform, but it is not the case that all farmers are fat cats.

Mr. Byers: I accept absolutely the hon. Gentleman's point. For family reasons, I know his constituency very well. I shall later disclose figures that show how payments under the CAP are made to farmers in Great Britain, which will confirm the hon. Gentleman's point. Many farmers—small farmers and particularly hill farmers—are struggling in very difficult circumstances. If they receive €5,000 a year from the CAP they are doing well. Others are paid more than €500,000 a year. A few farmers and big businesses are doing very well out of the CAP, but many small farmers are struggling and are not receiving any benefit from it. That is the self-interest issue and why consumers, shoppers and taxpayers are paying heavily.

The second issue is the effect on farmers in the developing world. For understandable reasons, much of the debate about helping farmers and countries in the developing world has focused on increasing the amount of aid that we give to those countries and on writing off debt. Those are important initiatives and I do not decry them, but a greater prize is available, to us and to those countries, from liberalisation and greater trade. It has been calculated that if Africa increased its share of world exports by just 1 per cent., it would generate $70 billion going into Africa. That is five times the amount received in aid.

The issue is not just one of breaking down barriers and tariffs. I admit that it was a mistake on my part, but when I considered the matter in the past, I saw it as the European Union breaking down tariffs to open up the EU market. That is important and we are taking steps to do that. I applaud the fact that some of those tariffs are coming down, albeit a bit too slowly, but at least they are moving in the right direction. However, the real problem for many small farmers in the developing world is the way in which subsidies are used to support certain sectors of farming in the United Kingdom. The result is overproduction, which is then dumped in those countries at a low price. The two worst sectors for that are dairy and sugar. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development estimates that in 2001 the European Union dairy sector was subsidised to the extent of €16 billion. That is equivalent to more than $2 a day for each of the 21 million cows in the European Union when 100 million people in Africa live on less than $2 a day. That must be the ultimate obscenity of the common agricultural policy, yet some European leaders argue for no change and want the status quo. They do so for a simple reason: their view is that change to the CAP will cost them votes. However, the message is clear: the way in which the CAP works is costing lives in Africa.

Andrew George: Further to the point raised by the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd), does the right hon. Gentleman agree that more than half the amount either supports export subsidies or goes to processors and trading companies, not farmers? Does he also agree that many of the subsidies do not help farmers in this country; they help large companies and exporters to dump on the third world and undermine the livelihoods of small farmers in countries about which we are all concerned?

Mr. Byers: Free from the constraints of ministerial office, I now have the opportunity of attacking big business, which my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) will applaud. I do not intend to do that because, rather than attacking big business, which sees a system that it can use to its own advantage, we, as politicians who are accountable to people in our countries, must ensure that we change the way in which the CAP operates. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) is right; it rewards a few at the expense of many. I shall carry on with my speech, as many hon. Members want to take part in the debate.

Dairy products are being dumped on developing countries and Jamaica is a good example. In the past 10 years, its imports of milk powder from the European Union have increased fivefold; the European Union is spending about €4 million a year to subsidise production in Jamaica. As a result, Jamaica's own milk production has fallen by 35 per cent. in the past two years. Local producers now supply only 12 per cent. of the domestic milk market. That is a good example of how subsidies to dairy producers in the European Union act against the interests of developing countries.

There is a similar tale to be told about sugar, which was brought home to me recently when I visited Peter Makokha, who farms 10 acres of land in western Kenya, just outside a town called Mumias on the border with Uganda. He farms mainly for his own use for produce for cattle and sheep, on which his family live. He has one cash crop: sugar cane. He uses the money he gets from selling the sugar to send his children to school, for health care and to buy fuel—the simple, basic necessities. With the other farmers in Kenya, Peter produces white sugar at €280 a tonne; the cost of production in Europe is €670 a tonne. Peter's worry is that he is being denied access to his own local market. He will not be trading his sugar in the European Union or the United States. For Peter and the other farmers in Kenya, what really matters is the local market 10 miles down the road or the bigger market in a regional centre. These are the poorest farmers in the developing world.

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): In the light of his experience at the Department of Trade and Industry, will my right hon. Friend reflect that, if no more European or American subsidised products were dumped in Africa, as I would wish, and Peter, to whom my hon. Friend referred, could sell his products locally, how would we handle the problem of Australia and New Zealand, which can produce unsubsidised sugar and

other commodities at even cheaper prices? The last time I checked, those two countries were not among the poorest nations in the world.

Mr. Byers: They are not, but as the figures show, when the cost of transport and so on is added, Kenya, Nigeria and other developing countries would be competitive when one compares the amount and cost of sugar coming from those other countries.

Peter is affected because the European Union is subsidising sugar. In the last year for which information is available, Kenya imported $2 million-worth of sugar from the European Union; it exported only $11,000-worth of sugar to the European Union. The effect of dumping goods subsidised by the CAP on the developing world is clear. Some people say that that is the consequence of liberalisation and open markets. What I find offensive is that the European Union is a great advocate of opening up markets and its members do so behind the comfort of pretty hefty tariffs. We tell the developing world that they must open up their markets, then we hide behind big tariffs. The reality is that immediate liberalisation—leaving it to market forces—has not worked for many of those developing countries. There must be an incremental approach—in the long term, that will be best—in which markets are opened up, but in a way that is compatible with development goals. That needs to be phased in and it needs active assistance from Government.

The third issue is that of the benefits to UK farmers from the common agricultural policy, which has already been raised by a number of hon. Members. There would rightly be concern about changing a common agricultural policy system where large amounts of money go into the farming sector. Small farmers, who have been through difficult times in recent years, are worried that they might be adversely affected by any changes to the CAP. We are all sympathetic to those concerns. We must examine where the money from the CAP goes. There is an assumption that it is spread around pretty evenly, but hill farmers in north Wales, for example, have to leap through bureaucratic hoops to receive very little.

When we dig down and get the details of where the money goes, it makes fascinating reading. This information is not easy to get hold of. Some 166,000 farmers in Great Britain receive some money from the CAP. Let us see who gets what: 41,000 get less than €1,250 a year in CAP payments. Those will be the hill farmers the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) mentioned. Another 11,000 get between €1,250 and €2,000. Another 25,000 farmers get between €2,000 and €5,000. Another 22,000 farmers get between €5,000 and €10,000. The big winners, although they are probably more agribusinesses than farmers, are the 376 who get between €200,000 and €500,000 a year. The real winners in this expensive lottery are the 80 farmers who get more than €500,000 a year.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. I, too, congratulate him on raising this important issue. He will no doubt be aware that one of the proposals in the mid-term review of the CAP was that there should be a limit of €300,000 per farmer. Does he agree that that limit is far too high and that if there is to be real reform, the limit should be set at a much lower level that reflects the needs of farmers and sustainable rural development rather than the needs of a big agribusiness?

Mr. Byers: I accept that absolutely. That proposal is a sign of tinkering around at the edges, rather than the fundamental and radical reform that many Labour Members want.

Mr. Llwyd: To reinforce the right hon. Gentleman's argument, 380 farmers receive up to €500,000 per annum. The comparable figure in Italy is 70 and only 10 in Portugal. There is an urgent need in the UK for reform.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point about the way in which the system operates here and in other countries in Europe. A small number of big businesses—sometimes multinationals—are scooping the pool while the farmers in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, who would win public sympathy, are not benefiting by anything like as much. Most people would assume that the money would go to the small hill farmer in north Wales who is struggling to make a living in difficult conditions.

Mr. Roger Williams: The right hon. Gentleman quotes some interesting figures. Perhaps he will reflect on the fact that some of the farmers who receive small amounts are not commercial farmers but people who run smallholding operations and probably have other employment too. The support for farmers should perhaps be directed to the commercial farmers rather than those who receive only small amounts.

Mr. Byers: The hon. Gentleman introduces an interesting debate about the role that farmers—even those with other interests—play in maintaining the countryside. We could begin to tackle some of those issues if the CAP were more flexible and not based solely on production and subsidies for production.

Finally, the figures show that 78,000 farmers earn less than €5,000 a year, but fewer than 500 earn more than €200,000. Under the CAP, taxpayers, consumers and shoppers are now paying billions of pounds for a failed system that benefits only a small number of farmers, who receive a significant amount of money from it. It also leads to higher prices in our shops and to greater taxes for those people who pay them.

The livelihood of small farmers in developing countries is being put at risk. About 100 million people in Africa live on less than $2 a day and any regime that spends more than $2 a day on every cow in the European Union—there are 20 million of them—is simply unacceptable and has to change. Change will not be easy; it will require political leadership. Many hon. Members and people in this country expect that political leadership to come from the Government.

11.31 am

Tony Baldry (Banbury): I do not disagree with anything that the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) said. Many hon. Members want to take part in the debate, so I will try not to repeat any points that he made.

[Tony Baldry]

For a short while, I was fortunate to have been a Minister in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food. On occasions too numerous to mention, Ministers made speeches about the need to reform the CAP. Of course, some Members represent fringe agricultural areas and their constituents need to be protected, but there is almost total unanimity in this House on the need for that reform. We were always being told that we should not worry: enlargement would make everything all right, because the current CAP system would not be able to cope when Poland, Hungary and the other countries joined the European Union. Many of us went along with that and hoped that the process would change on enlargement.

In his reply, will the Minister tell us what the impact of the shabby deal between France and Germany has been? To most of us, it appeared to be a disgusting attempt to stitch up reforms to the CAP. In the halcyon days when it was permissible for the Conservative party to have a close relationship with the Christian Democrats in Germany, I made a fraternal visit to the Christian Social Union in Bavaria. Franz Josef Strauss, who led the CSU, told us that Germany had been bribing its farmers for their votes for generations and did not intend to stop.

I understand that Germany and France want to continue to bribe their farmers for their votes, but that policy is costing people dear, and not only in this country. On the "Any Questions" programme last weekend, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry said that the CAP cost a family in the United Kingdom about £16 a week. If the CAP was a cost only to us, we could make our own judgment about it. However, it costs the poorest of the poor very dear. In no way can we meet the millennium development targets of taking people out of poverty if that wholly unfair system is allowed to continue. The economies of many countries are based on agricultural production and the need to ensure that more of their agricultural produce can enter European and other developed markets.

I was fortunate enough to be Chairman of the Select Committee that visited Ghana and Nigeria earlier this year. They face not only the difficulty of exporting cocoa at a fair trade price into Europe, but the effect of dumping. Supermarkets in Ghana are full of tomato paste dumped from Italy, but Ghanaian farmers cannot sell their tomatoes on street corners. Three Secretaries of State—for International Development, for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and for Trade and Industry—wrote an excellent letter that appeared in *The Independent on Sunday*. That newspaper is a good one, but there is a limit to how much one can cope with on a Sunday, so I hope that the Minister will arrange for the letter to be copied to every hon. Member. I suspect that no Member would disagree with it.

We cannot keep having this conversation among ourselves, however. It is nice and friendly, gives us all a warm glow, and we go away saying that we all want to reform the CAP, but we must move on, as must non-governmental organisations such as the Catholic Fund for Overseas Development. CAFOD must persuade the Catholic Church and Catholic NGOs in other European countries that they should lobby their Governments. Christian Aid should do likewise with the Protestant churches in Germany, France and elsewhere.

We must work out how to engage with parliamentarians in other member states, from whom we have become almost totally divorced. Members of the European Parliament have this discussion in debates in the European Parliament, but MPs do not. The International Development Committee managed to find its equivalent in every EU member state, and under each presidency the chairmen of those groups at least have a meeting. That is a slow and basic start, but it is a step forward. Parliament needs to develop mechanisms for expressing our views to colleagues elsewhere in Europe, otherwise this discussion that we have among ourselves will continue this year, next year and beyond.

We need to ensure that parliamentary colleagues in France, Germany and other member states recognise that we are appalled at the stitch-up that their countries are trying to perpetrate, not only against the consumers of Europe, but more importantly against the poor of the world. If we do not start to take that action, all the talk at Johannesburg and at other meetings about reducing the number of people who live in poverty will be for nothing. I must say to NGOs in this country that it is no good continually berating us. They are pushing at an open door and instead must help us to persuade Parliaments in other parts of the EU that the time for the reform of the CAP is long past, but it must happen now. As the right hon. Gentleman said, consumers will have lower prices, member states will pay fewer subsidies, but most importantly, developing countries will have a level playing field, and we can take more people out of poverty.

11.37 am

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) on securing this important debate and, even more importantly, on the quality of his contribution, which was excellent. I agreed with it almost completely, which surprises me. That unanimity bodes well for the future and not only for the Government.

I shall base some of my remarks on what my right hon. Friend said. I suggest that the real subject of the debate is the abolition, not the reform, of the common agricultural policy. Reform can mean many things to many people and some of our European Union colleagues would no doubt suggest that a slight change means reform and that we can all go home and carry on with the CAP as usual. Reform is unspecific and can be relative; my right hon. Friend referred to tinkering at the margins, which is what has happened so far. The proportion of the total EU budget spent on the CAP is reduced, but it is still there, as large as life, and is still causing the damage that it has always caused. We need to abolish the CAP and repatriate agricultural policy to member states, subject, of course, to international agreements. However, if we want to sustain agriculture nationally, we can do so selectively, and using our own mechanisms.

As we have heard, the CAP grossly distorts agricultural markets. It is bad for the EU and for eastern Europe. It also puts enlargement at risk, as some countries in eastern Europe are becoming very unhappy

about the CAP and could vote against joining it—today's edition of *The Times* even carries an article to that effect. Above all, the CAP is bad for the poor countries of the world. The developed world has been considering ways in which to assist the poor, but it has not tackled that fundamental problem.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My hon. Friend puts forward an interesting notion. Can he enlarge on the point about allowing member states to have their own individual rights to change tariffs and subsidies for their farms? That would make it more difficult for developing countries, which would have to enter into more bilateral agreements instead of multinational agreements under the World Trade Organisation. They do not have the capacity even for multilateral negotiations; moving to bilateral agreements would make the situation worse. Given that they will be up against powerful countries such as ourselves, France and Germany, their chances of achieving any success will be even lower than they are now.

Mr. Hopkins: I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention; I appreciate her point. I shall be making some suggestions on how we can move forward. We must accept that in future we will concentrate to a greater extent on other forms of production, relative to agriculture. At the same time, we have to sustain our farming community, at least for the foreseeable future.

The perverse redistributive effects in the EU are significant. Denmark benefits enormously, Ireland benefits considerably and the United Kingdom is a net contributor. That bears no relation whatever to the relative prosperity of those countries. Denmark is a more prosperous country than the UK, and Ireland is now comparable, but they receive substantial net fiscal transfers as a result of the CAP. That cannot be right.

If agriculture is to be subsidised, member states should do it on a selective and targeted basis according to their own national needs. The hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) mentioned his friend Franz Josef Strauss and his desire to bribe his farmers. That is fine, if he chooses to do it within the confines of Germany. At the moment, however, German farmers are being bribed with money taken from the taxpayer in Britain and elsewhere and through the high prices that we pay for our food, which also goes to subsidise the farmers of Germany and other EU countries.

We should move away from price maintenance arrangements for subsidising agriculture. That is the core of the problem. If a relatively high price is set, producers know that they are guaranteed to get that price however much they produce. There is no demand curve at all; they just carry on producing and surpluses arise. The developed world wastes on subsidising agriculture resources that could and should be concentrated more on the poorer countries of the world. The former Member of Parliament for Boston and Skegness wrote a fine book saying that we were losing our industry at a rate of knots because we had failed to look after it, and that we were subsidising European agriculture when we should be tackling our industrial problems.

I am not suggesting that we should starve our farmers. Agricultural subsidies should be targeted in certain areas and based on a deficit funding system, which we had before we joined the European Common Market and the European Union. That system would guarantee income to the farmer, but would not have the CAP's distorting effects on the market. We could provide stable farm incomes, especially for hill farmers. There is no reason why we should not choose to sustain small farmers who may not be very efficient or profitable, but are essentially part of our culture and help to maintain the countryside. Small farms are important for animal life and the natural life of our countryside—hedges and so forth. The CAP has led to the disappearance of wildlife in eastern England—my region. Hedges have been destroyed and there is mass industrialised agriculture, which has caused terrible devastation to our environment. There is everything to be said for selective subsidies for our farmers.

We should be able to import cheap food if we wish. That would have a tremendously beneficial effect on prices in the shops for consumers. My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North mentioned that. My constituency, like his, contains no farmers because it is purely urban, but it has taxpayers and consumers, many of whom are poor, who are paying high prices for their food when they could pay lower prices if the CAP were abandoned. Above all, that would benefit the poor producer nations, which is the primary concern.

We can overcome the political problem of abolition if we have sensible transitional arrangements. A big bang would clearly cause a political explosion, which would not be realistic. We ought to introduce a tapering system of fiscal transfers, and we could look at the current situation and introduce a 10-year taper. The countries that are joining the European Union will be subject to a 10-year taper towards the CAP. The amount by which they will benefit from the CAP will initially be limited to 25 per cent., but by 2013 they will receive the full benefit—if one can call it that. Why not introduce a tapering arrangement in that period to overcome the problem of fiscal transfers? In time, the distribution of the budget in the European Union should be determined by the relative levels of prosperity in the different nations of Europe. The rich would pay more and the poor would benefit, in which case we would not require our rebate because the system would be fair for all nations.

In the short term, we must, of course, protect our rebate because we are unfairly big net contributors to the European budget, but we could overcome all those problems over the 10-year taper period. We know that our colleagues in France are very upset about the prospect of the CAP being abandoned, but let us consider the national effects that France experiences in terms of fiscal transfer and how they could be dealt with. It could choose to subsidise its small farmers; indeed, I hope that it continues to sustain certain elements of its small-scale agriculture, in particular the producers of good wine, which I am sure we would all continue to enjoy.

Anti-EU sentiments are growing in eastern Europe, which is a problem. As I mentioned, an article in *The Times* today refers to Poland, where a supermarket, which sells western European produce at lower prices than those at which Polish farmers can afford to produce, has been threatened. The threat is serious because if that idea takes off and there were a referendum, Poland might vote not to join the EU. That

[Mr. Hopkins]

is its choice, with which we may or may not agree, but it is a real threat. Anti-EU sentiments are also growing in Estonia and, to an extent, the Czech Republic. If we do not deal with those problems, enlargement may be threatened. Enlargement will force us to rethink the CAP, which we should rethink now rather than later because enlargement may not happen if we do not think about it now.

I do not expect my hon. Friend the Minister to respond immediately, but I hope that my suggestions are taken seriously in the private councils of government. I hope that my suggestions will at least be debated intelligently with some of our colleagues on the continent of Europe and elsewhere in the EU. The abolition of the CAP is the way forward; we should face up to it.

11.48 am

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) on obtaining the debate and on the fair and balanced way in which he put forward his case. It is clear that there is almost unanimous support in the House for the reform of the common agricultural policy because it is damaging not only for domestic agriculture, the consumer and the environment, but for third-world farmers.

The process of reforming the CAP has gone on for a long time, although I shall not take everybody back to the corn laws, which obviously predate it. The Agriculture Act 1947, which was introduced by the post-war Labour Government, was seen to be beneficial. The hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) referred in passing to the deficiency payment system, which provided a substantial income for farmers, and reasonably priced food. Because Britain was not self-sufficient at that time and did not produce excess foodstuffs, the system had little or no effect on the world market and therefore had little impact on third world farmers.

Food security was an issue at that time. Although we seem to feel today that Britain has access to almost unlimited food, food security issues can still arise suddenly for nations and Governments. What with wars, rumours of wars and the full effect of climate change on food production not really being understood, food security should still command some attention.

We entered the European Union with the treaty of Rome at a time when policy was based on intervention buying to keep the price up for farmers in the EU. That was the worst system of all because it led to high prices for consumers, and specifically to the beef and butter mountains and wine lakes, and various other commodity surpluses, that were dumped on the word market with subsidies that we paid almost directly to commodity traders and food processors rather than to the farming community. The MacSharry proposals in the early 1990s started to move policy away from such support and intervention towards something less harmful to the market, directed at the breeding of animals rather than supporting a commodity.

We may now see a positive reform of the common agricultural policy. A lot depends on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and its work in the EU, in arguing a case along the lines that the right hon. Gentleman described. It needs to do so in a forceful, rigorous and positive way. Recent criticisms that have been made of the Department by Select Committees lead us to suppose that it does not have the heart for the job. I hope that it does, as so much depends on it.

It could be a win-win-win situation. It could be a win for farmers. Over the past few years, they have been unable to run their businesses as businesses and have been locked in a bureaucratic nightmare of accessing subsidies. A typical livestock farm in my constituency would be involved in the beef special premium, the suckler cow premium, the sheep annual premium, the extensification premium and Tir Mynydd, which is the Welsh equivalent of the hill livestock compensation scheme. Those schemes mean that farmers are involved in retention periods for animals, keeping extensive records—quite properly as they are in receipt of public money, so an audit system is required—

Mr. Llwyd: I am following the hon. Gentleman's speech carefully and I agree with him. Does he share my concern about DEFRA's gold-plating of the regulations? I am not saying that rules should be dodged, but there is not a level playing field across the EU for the way in which the regulations are administered. DEFRA is keen to administer them, but if there is a slight mistake the subsidy is lost.

Mr. Williams: I take the hon. Gentleman's point on board. As he, too, represents a rural constituency, I am sure that he comes across tragic cases of farmers who have been deprived of support because they have made minor mistakes such as entering numbers wrongly.

Proposals to decouple support from production and use a different basis will allow farmers to run their businesses as businesses and to make commercial judgments rather than judgments on how they can access subsidies. Decoupling will also help the consumer because it will mean readier access to British markets to food from other sources, and farmers being able to compete on a level playing field.

The right hon. Gentleman said that it was up to the European Union to make its proposals for the trade round very quickly. However, he should also accept that America has almost undermined that trade round by its action in giving massive subsidies to its own farmers. At this stage, we should be more and more critical of America's double standards in such matters.

There could be a win for the environment—for the British countryside. The money that has gone to support production will now be available to farmers to enhance the environment and provide access for people to the countryside. There will also be a win for third world farmers. The right hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) made their points on that very well. When the fair trade lobby came to Parliament from my constituency, I undertook to write to DEFRA, pointing out the importance of CAP reform in the support of third world farmers.

Today's debate has been useful and points the way forward. Considerable cross-party support for radical reform is gathering, and we look to DEFRA to lead the country in those efforts.

11.56 am

Andrew George (St. Ives): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) on securing this debate and giving a speech, during which he took a large number of interventions, that took a consistent line. I entirely agree with that line, and strongly support his analysis. He expressed the frustrations shared by all parties that the common agricultural policy, although it has been blatantly in need of radical reform, has become almost unreformable because of the processes needed. That is frustrating for us all.

We are today again seeing the benefit of having the right hon. Gentleman on the Back Benches, especially if he is prepared to use that freedom to say some of the things about big businesses that he was not able to say before. He was very much a victim of shoddy treatment and of a tawdry media feeding frenzy of the kind that we have had to endure over the past few days. I hope that, with so many more important things going on around the world, the media will concentrate on matters of substance rather than poking their noses into people's private affairs.

The key issue due for debate during the next couple of days is not the common agricultural policy but enlargement. As the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) said, that provides a good opportunity for reform, but there is a problem with the message being given to potential accession countries—a diplomatic issue that the Minister must deal with. The enlargement countries are getting the idea that, rather than the time scale for CAP reform being coincidental, or its being a convenient opportunity to push forward more rapid reform, it is in fact a conspiracy against them before their arrival in the EU. The Government must overcome that diplomatic problem.

Whether the EU is enlarging or not, now is the time to reform the CAP. The CAP has been blatantly contradictory and achieved the opposite of what it set out to achieve in relation to protecting and promoting the interests of rural communities, small farmers and the rural environment. The Government's official figures released about a month ago show that during the past year more farmers have been forced out of agriculture—they have gone out of business—than at any time since the second world war. More than 15,000 farmers in Britain have been forced out of business—they have not left voluntarily—during the past year. That figure is all the more dramatic because we are talking about declining numbers since the war. Most of that figure will comprise small farmers. The CAP is clearly failing, if its purpose is to defend farmers.

The Government are working very closely with Lord Haskins, who has connections with the processing business. They are being advised by him about reform of the agricultural sector. He uses the word "restructuring"—a euphemism for getting rid of small farmers. I find it rather difficult—as do the farmers—to accept the advice of a man who is intricately connected with the processing sector, which has done rather well out of the CAP.

As farm-gate prices have fallen in relation to retail prices during the past few decades, we must ask what the processing and retail sectors will do to ensure proper support for farmers in this country. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) that it is desirable to have a policy that provides food security and an element of self-sufficiency. Clearly, we cannot be self-sufficient in bananas, but we can be self-sufficient in domestic produce. That may be desirable, but we must assess that against its cost. As it would impoverish the rest of the world and result in large taxes on consumers, it is not a desirable policy in itself. It is possible to construct an argument that moves in that direction, but we need to weigh up the balance of how we would achieve it, and the cost that we would be prepared to pay.

The key issue on the right hon. Gentleman's domestic questions is that if production supports continue into the future, we will end up with a British landscape that is predominately prairie and ranch. Small farmers will be pushed out as it becomes uneconomic to maintain small farms, field patterns and rural communities. We will have an agricultural industry that is divorced from rural communities. They will become so small in number that the farm lobby will cease to exist.

Mr. Hopkins: The thrust of the hon. Gentleman's argument is that we need nationally determined policies that can be sensitively adjusted to the needs of the third world and our own farmers, but that the answer is neither the protectionist and rigid CAP, which has all the dreadful effects he mentioned, nor the complete free market, which would destroy the farming industry.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman tempts me down another route, but I cannot go there. I am concerned about agriculture and landscape throughout Europe. The issues apply to Europe as a whole at present. We need to think carefully about the impact on the industry itself and on the rural landscape. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mr. Lazarowicz) raised the issue of whether we should lower the proposed ceiling below €300,000. On the basis of the figures that were presented by the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North, there is indeed a strong argument for reviewing the ceiling.

In world trade terms, we need to move away from blue box subsidies towards green box subsidies. In other words, we need to move very rapidly away from supporting production, which can create millionaire subsidy junkies in the farming industry, to supporting the bedrock of rural communities, such as viable small farms.

The right hon. Gentleman raised several development issues, particularly in relation to the dairy sector and sugar. He made his points extremely well. It is important to recognise that some of the main beneficiaries in the dairy sector, for example, are the processing and trading companies and not farmers. Such companies receive more than €1 billion each year from European taxpayers in export subsidies alone. It is impossible to get a breakdown of those figures, because apparently the information is commercially sensitive. However, we do know that some of the very large companies do extremely well out of the system.

What assessment have the Government made of the costs of maintaining CAP subsidies, given the current levels of enlargement? Is it sustainable to maintain them? Is it the Government's position that enlargement

[Andrew George]

can proceed without reform of the CAP? Have the Government taken legal advice on the available avenues for challenging the legal basis of the current CAP? If so, what was the response? How do they propose to build a case for reform among fellow member states? What efforts have they made to build a negotiating bloc in favour of reform? That reform must be rapid.

12.7 pm

Mr. Richard Spring (West Suffolk): First, I warmly congratulate the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) on securing the debate and putting forward a number of important arguments. I was in Kenya a few weeks ago, so I was particularly struck by his argument about market access. He was absolutely right to say that the current structures in the world cost lives. Indeed, the terms of trade have swung against primary producers in the past generation and that has led to attendant problems.

Repeatedly, it has been demonstrated that Europe cannot isolate itself from the problems of famine and agricultural difficulties in Africa and the right hon. Gentleman was right to make that point. Opening our markets is crucial. That argument was taken up by my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), who is the distinguished Chairman of the Select Committee on International Development and who has enormous experience of agriculture in the third world. I agreed with the point about discussions with fellow parliamentarians in the European Union—such discussions have been lacking. The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) took up some of the themes relating to problems in the third world and market access and I agree with him.

The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) paid the right hon. Gentleman a rather backhanded compliment when he said that his contributions from the Back Benches are valuable. I hope that, after today's contribution, the right hon. Gentleman is soon in a position to re-climb the greasy pole.

The CAP is an important topic and the debate is timely. The CAP dominates farmers' lives and the European Union's budget. With the forthcoming enlargement of the EU, it will assume an even greater importance. As the hon. Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) pointed out, the CAP may account for a diminishing percentage of the EU budget, but that is still a colossal sum of money. We are talking about more than €44 billion: that is a vast sum.

The CAP's greatest weaknesses are that it has not produced prosperity for our farmers, it is inefficient and bureaucratic and it is harmful to the developing world. As the hon. Member for St. Ives said, the agricultural economy is effectively now in crisis and, like many areas of national life, needs reforming.

It is worth recalling that in July, Commissioner Franz Fischler presented proposals for reforming the CAP. The main tools proposed for reform were the uncoupling of subsidies from production and the introduction of compulsory modulation, which would reduce progressively all direct payments by 3 per cent. per year for a seven-year period, starting in 2004 and reaching 20 per cent. overall.

It is absolutely central to the work of the Copenhagen summit that is taking place this week that the agreements for EU enlargement should be finalised. Critical to the success of enlargement are CAP direct payments and quotas. Whether they are addressed centrally or on the fringes, they simply cannot be passed over. As the Minister will know, the Danish presidency has made its own specific proposals on how to deal with the problem of agriculture in particular and the acceptability of the European Union in the accession countries.

We must not forget that farms are businesses. Their core function is to make a profit by producing food that customers want to buy. The Commission's initial proposals to shift support from production subsidies to environmental payments are right in principle, but we all accept that the devil will be in the detail. An overwhelmingly urban and suburban electorate will be more ready to support the rural economy through taxes if payments are clearly linked to public benefits such as preservation and enhancement of the landscape.

However, elements of Fischler's package would discriminate against British farmers. That point has already been made this morning. For example, capping payments to individual farms at €300,000 would hit UK farmers particularly hard because of the size and scope of their production, whereas the smaller farms of Italy, France and Portugal would still receive the same amount of subsidy. Such inequity would be difficult to overcome.

There is a case for money for environmental schemes to be allocated locally and with as much flexibility as possible. The UK's agri-environment schemes must be reformed, as they are generally regarded as far too complex. We must have a system that reinvigorates and sustains our rural economy and environment, allows our farmers to earn a decent living and deals with the trade barriers that have been imposed on third-world farmers with devastating effect.

The forthcoming EU enlargement is the catalyst for CAP reform. We can analyse ad nauseam the faults of the CAP, but there really is a demand for leadership in the European Union and from the Government to try to resolve the problem. For example, we were told that in practice nothing could be achieved before the French and German elections. They have been held. As my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury pointed out, we were really stitched up in Brussels. We were told that the Government were working behind the scenes on the outlines of CAP reform. I am afraid that the situation in Brussels was hijacked and we were left standing on the sidelines.

The truth is that we have to grasp this nettle and that leadership is required. I hope that the Minister will have something constructive to say about this, because the vacuum that has been left is now being filled in a way that works against effective CAP reform, which is absolutely essential in the long term.

The result of not putting out clear guidelines for reform at Brussels the other day is that additional pressures are put on the accession countries. It was agreed that the CAP budget for direct payments and pillar 1 market support would remain at 2006 levels until 2013. That may reduce the relative amount of money, but it does not deal with the essential issue of reform.

Such support will remain a huge burden on the EU's budget at a time when Germany, which is the largest contributor to the EU, is in serious economic trouble. What does the Minister think will happen to the EU's finances if Germany suffers a prolonged recession?

It is also not true that the Brussels deal is a short-term fix that will prepare the ground for a huge argument on payment distribution around 2008, when the new countries will be receiving half the standard direct payments. A limited direct payments budget will have to be redistributed among the farmers of 25, rather than 15, countries. That could be difficult and divisive.

I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Luton, North: regrettably, there is an increasing sense of antagonism towards the EU, particularly in a country such as Poland, which has to face a referendum on the issue. As was the case in the election in Serbia the other day, there is a 50 per cent. cut-off point in Poland, so the issue is important. Unless we set out the tram-lines of reform and consider with some flexibility how we will deal with that, Poland may unfortunately reject EU entry. That is why I hope that the Danish presidency's proposals, which offer a way out, can be considered in Copenhagen in the next few days. Again, I hope that the Minister will reflect on that.

We desperately need leadership on this issue. It has been a matter for discussion for many years, but we are now on the brink of enlargement and we cannot deal with it any more by avoiding central reform. Other countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden have been keen for CAP reform, but we have been unsuccessful at persuading the Germans. There is a vacuum to be filled. For those of us who want a successful and viable EU, that challenge simply must be addressed.

12.16 pm

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane): I, too, congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) on securing the debate, which has been wider ranging than some of our CAP-bashing moments in the House. I thank him for his kind words on my appointment. I share the view of the hon. Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring) that over the next two or three Parliaments, as Labour stays in power, my right hon. Friend will resume his place in the leadership of our national council.

In all discussions on the CAP in the House and the country, we have to start from the famous Irish perspective that it is impossible to know where to start, except that one would never have started from where one began to get where we are. Surely the fundamental point for our country is that we were not there when the CAP was born. It was born in the 1960s, when the broad outlines of the CAP were laid down, and because Britain was absent from the scene, we were not able to shape it.

The best message that the House can send to our friends in Poland is a united message, from all parties and almost all hon. Members, that EU membership and wholehearted participation in the EU is a good thing, even if on the CAP and other areas, we have criticisms. If we want to shape the rules of a club, we have to be members of it.

CAP reform is a long and arduous process. I like to run marathons now and then and have foolishly entered myself for the London marathon next spring. CAP reform must be seen as a marathon, not a sprint. In 1980, the CAP took 73 per cent. of the total EU budget. In 2002, it will take 45 per cent., so there has been a reduction. However, it is absurd that any budget that is part of the governance of all our European nations devotes almost half to just the agricultural sector.

We will keep up the pressure for reform. My hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) called for the absolute abolition of the CAP. As a social democrat, I am in the reformist camp. My hon. Friend is a revolutionary figure—I mean that in a complimentary sense—and wants sharp upheavals. We have to find ways of speeding up the process of reform.

I gently urge all hon. Members campaigning on CAP reform, including the three Ministers who wrote that very good article in *The Independent on Sunday* to which the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) referred, to stop making speeches or writing articles and pamphlets in English because we have won the argument in our own country. I do not have to persuade hon. Members and I do not have to be persuaded by them on the need for CAP reform. From the *Socialist Worker* on the far left, to *The Daily Mail* on the right, everyone is agreed that the CAP should go. The Conservative party thinks that the CAP needs reform, so do we, and so do members of the Liberal Democrat and nationalist parties. The Confederation of British Industry and the National Farmers Union think that it should be reformed. It is no use our talking to each other, however. We must take the argument to our friends and partners in Europe. Oxfam and the other development bodies that rightly criticise the CAP for its impact on the agricultural economy in poor countries should learn French, Spanish, Italian and even Irish and talk directly to the politicians, the non-governmental organisations and the churches in those countries and elsewhere in Europe to explain the need for CAP reform.

We also need to do more with our friends in Poland, Hungary and the other applicant countries because when they enter the European Union in 2004, as I hope will be confirmed this week, they will start sending large cheques to the agricultural multinationals and big farmers in the rich countries of western Europe, including our own. In 2004, the first full year of membership for the enlarged Europe, the new member states will contribute €990 million—a euro is about the same as a US dollar at the moment, so that is nearly €1 billion or $1 billion—to the CAP receipt of France, Germany, Italy and Spain. France is the main beneficiary. In 2004, it will receive €300 million from the incoming countries in east Europe—Spain will receive €200 million and Italy €175 million. Ireland will receive a transfer of about €50 million to its agro-industry from the Exchequers of Lithuania, Slovakia and the other poor countries of east Europe. Even Luxembourg, one of the richest countries in the world, is a net beneficiary under the CAP. Can anything be more absurd than the taxpayers of Poland and the other new member states, with an income per capita that is one third that of Belgium and Luxembourg, having to send yet more money to the farmers of western Europe?

I have been visiting applicant countries as busily as I can since my appointment and I know their sense of disappointment at not receiving a more generous cash offer from Brussels—a matter to which the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for West Suffolk referred.

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

I told them that that was in part because nearly half of the EU budget of €90 billion goes to subsidise farming and to allow products thus subsidised to swamp the markets east of the Oder-Neisse line. In addition to learning to make the arguments for CAP reform in French, Spanish and so forth, we also need to teach ourselves Polish, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Czech and Slovak to explain to our new partners why CAP reform should be high on their agenda once they are full members of the European Union.

I very much agree with hon. Members' comments on the need to connect with our political parliamentary colleagues in Europe. The House allows each hon. Member to make three visits a year to the capital cities of the European Union and the applicant countries. I urge hon. Members who are interested in CAP reform to visit and make the case.

I welcome the return of Her Majesty's Opposition to the mainstream of European Conservative parties. They can now be there and argue face to face with Herr Franz Josef Strauss's political descendants on the need for CAP reform. Mr. Stoiber, the right's candidate at the last German election, is now coming out against Turkey joining the EU and, during the campaign, he was against giving American planes the right to fly over Germany in any conflict with Iraq. He is a staunch defender of the worst aspects of the protectionist agricultural policy. I urge the hon. Member for West Suffolk to go to Germany and explain how wrong-headed his opposite number is in so many aspects of politics.

Mr. Spring: We will be doing that.

Mr. MacShane: I am glad to hear the hon. Gentleman say, from a sedentary position, that he intends to do so. Well, keep it up. I hope to see all the Conservative parties of Europe supporting CAP reform in the next year or two.

My right hon. Friend provided some powerful figures on the impact of dumped CAP-subsidised products in Africa. We must think of the third world when we discuss the need for reform. Oxfam recently produced an excellent report, which I commend to all hon. Members. As I suggested in a brief intervention, we must examine CAP reform in Europe and engage with our American partners to encourage them to remove their excessive subsidies and tariffs. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, American cotton farmers receive a subsidy of more than $1 million a year, and we do not want them to dump their subsidised product on the cotton markets of Africa.

Mr. Byers: The Minister is touching on the American approach and we are all concerned about the farm Bill. Australia and New Zealand are major players. In the context of the Doha trade round, they all announced what changes would be made to the agricultural sector. The European Union is the only main trading bloc that has not yet made proposals. The context of world trade is critical. From his ministerial position—and, hopefully, at Copenhagen—can my hon. Friend stress the importance of the EU submitting its proposals so that the trade talks will be successful and not be derailed?

Mr. MacShane: Indeed, I can give that reassurance. The Prime Minister won the fight at the Brussels Council after it was agreed that CAP payments would be frozen at present levels plus 1 per cent. to 2013—spread over 25 rather than 15 recipient countries, that means a bearing down on the CAP budget. As I said, it was the Prime Minister who fought so hard for it. In the newspapers, it became "le row" over the need for the final declaration to refer to the Franz Fischler proposals and mid-term reviews, and the Doha round. I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend's leadership in implementing the Doha round: for the first time since world war two, agricultural subsidies are on the agenda of world trade discussions. Britain is in the van of taking that forward.

When three British Ministers wrote an article in *The Independent on Sunday*, making a case for CAP reform, seven European Agriculture Ministers responded with a large piece in the *Financial Times* a few months ago, effectively saying no to our ideas. That is why we should be engaged in Europe and why I shall continue to make the case for CAP reform. I urge other hon. Members to declare their full support for the EU and for participation in all of its economic and agricultural activities. Only by being members of the club and at the heart of Europe can we argue our case for a progressive direction for CAP reform.

Flooding (Moray)

12.30 pm

Angus Robertson (Moray): The House will appreciate that the recent floods in Moray were a terrible event, which wrought misery close to Christmas for a great many of my constituents. May I express my appreciation for the opportunity to raise this important constituency issue at greater length than normal and to hear the Government's response? I start with a word of commendation for the Minister's officials who have been very proactive and understanding in seeking advance notice of various questions so that she can give a full and informed response. I also declare my interest: I am patron of the Moray flood relief fund, although I am not directly involved in the dispensation of assistance to flood victims. I should also like to put on record my appreciation to the Lord Lieutenant, Air Vice Marshal George Chesworth and the other trustees and committee members of the fund who are doing such an important job.

Before coming to the debate, I sought the views of a great many people in Moray, especially the victims. That includes many residents who have lost literally everything and business men and women whose commercial future is in doubt. I spoke to community representatives such as Councillor Pearl Paul of Rothes who represents one of the worst hit areas, and only this morning I spoke to Roma Hossack, the convenor of Elgin community council. I held meetings with the council, and this morning I discussed issues with the chief executive, Alastair Keddie. I spoke to the emergency services, the RAF and volunteers who assisted when the waters were rising, then dispersing, and in the clean-up operations. There is a tremendous appreciation for everyone who worked hard to help the flood victims and to prevent the waters from damaging even more. I pay tribute to them all again.

On 15 and 16 November 2002, the third flood in five years devastated parts of Moray when the rivers Lossie and Spey and the Mosset burn burst their banks causing flooding in the county town, Elgin, as well as in Rothes, Forres and a number of villages and rural areas. At its worst, the Lossie was flowing at 140 tonnes per second through Elgin. After bursting the riverbank, water swamped Boroughbriggs, parts of Kingsmills, South Lesmurdie, Pansport, Ashgrove, the Tyock industrial estate and other areas. In Rothes, waters flooded much of the town, swamping houses and causing structural damage to roads and bridges. In Forres, the Mosset burn burst its banks on to the streets.

Hundreds of residents, especially in Elgin and Rothes, were forced to leave their homes, losing many of their possessions to flood damage, and a considerable number of businesses have had to cease trading because of the floods. I am pleased to report that a number of those businesses have worked extremely hard to try to get their operations back on track in the busy build-up to Christmas. There is a great appreciation for the work that has been done, much of it by volunteers and customers of those businesses. I have visited most of the affected areas, several times in some cases. Despite the waters receding, the damage is still clear to see. Many streets have skips outside every house, which are full to overflowing with discarded and often irreplaceable family possessions. A great number of businesses are still closed because of the damage to their stock, their machinery, their records and the wherewithal to trade.

It is impossible to put a price tag on the damage caused, or to calculate exactly what might have happened if various other policy options had been pursued before the floods. Certainly there are still outstanding questions about the reallocation of millions of pounds of flood prevention investment by Moray council, which has not been spent on measures that could have made a difference. Nevertheless, the task before everybody in authority at present is to act swiftly and decisively to ease the plight of so many people in Moray. That is why I am glad to be able to put the case for maximum Government assistance here today.

Much of the response to the floods has to come from Moray council and the Scottish Executive, as local government and flood issues are devolved to the Scottish Parliament, where Margaret Ewing, the Moray MSP and my Scottish National party colleague, has regularly raised the question of flooding. I am glad that she and Bruce Crawford MSP, the shadow Scottish Minister for the Environment, have been pushing for a national flood strategy in the Scottish Parliament. I hope that the Labour-Liberal Democrat Executive reconsider their opposition to that in the light of the Moray experience.

In the meantime we need to consider how the UK Government can best respond through key areas such as social security, Treasury powers over landfill tax, the financial services industry, military aid to the civil power and Scotland's representation within the European Union. Those are all reserved matters to Westminster. The Minister will appreciate that I would far rather that all those questions could be resolved in Scotland, just as in any other normal independent European country. This debate is not about political difference, but rather to secure a joined-up response to this disaster.

As I mentioned, the floods seriously affected parts of Elgin, Rothes and Forres and other villages and rural areas. It was the third flooding in five years. This is a double whammy for the constituency, as coastal communities brace themselves for massive cuts in fishing, which, together with the floods, will cause untold misery and job losses. Recently at Prime Minister's questions, I asked:

> "Will the Prime Minister outline what the Westminster Government will do to assist, how long that will take and whether he will visit Moray as a matter of urgency to see the devastation at first hand?"

The Prime Minister replied:

> "First, Moray council will apply to the Scottish Executive for assistance under the Bellwin scheme . . . Secondly, people who have no other safety net can apply to the Department for Work and Pensions for immediate emergency assistance through the social fund. Thirdly, Her Majesty's Customs will work with businesses on VAT payments and other problems".—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 241.]

I was grateful to the Prime Minister for outlining the help that will be offered, although I was disappointed that he did not refer to my request to visit Moray to see the damage at first hand. This is an extremely serious issue and the people of Moray need to know that Government at the very top in both Edinburgh and Westminster are doing everything possible to assist.

[Angus Robertson]

This debate is extremely important so that Moray residents can hear in detail exactly what the Westminster Government are doing to help them. Social security is one mechanism that the Westminster Government can use to assist. A great number of victims live in low-income areas. According to a recent survey by the General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trades Union, Moray—not central Scotland or urban inner-city Scotland—has the lowest average weekly income of any constituency in Scotland. The floods occurred in areas of the lowest income in Moray.

The Minister will appreciate that social security can play a key role. For example, officials in the Department for Work and Pensions can assess requests sympathetically. I am aware that staff locally intend to do that, and I would be grateful if the Minister could give an overview of support to victims such as crisis loans and social fund payments. How many people have been seen by Jobcentre Plus staff in Moray in connection with the effects of the floods? Does she share my concern that there is a lack of flexibility in the rules when dealing with clients who have already reached a £1,000 ceiling on social fund grants or loans? Are clear instructions being given that would allow for a generous but responsible handling of claims by such flood victims?

The Minister might not be aware that the two current social security offices in Elgin are in the process of being unified into one office. That single office is in the middle of one of the worst-hit flood areas in Boroughbriggs. Does she share my concern for the future, that if, God forbid, there is another flood, staff will find it almost impossible to assist at all, unlike this time?

Another major area where the Westminster Parliament holds reserved powers is in connection with the financial services industry. That encompasses insurance, which is a critical guarantee for residents and businesses alike. In a written answer in the Scottish Parliament to Margaret Ewing, MSP, on 28 November, Minister Alan Wilson, who visited Moray after the floods, said:

"Recent guidance from the Association of British Insurers is that the industry will look to continue to provide insurance cover in areas with defences in place or where these are planned to be in place by 2007."

The Moray council intends to have improved flood defences in place by 2007, but there are a great many people who already cannot secure insurance in Moray. Many businesses and householders had a major problem getting insurance even before the most recent flood. Most residents and business people think that that will get worse, with serious knock-on effects for residents and the housing market, for the viability of businesses and for jobs.

The difficulties are great for residents as access to mortgages is endangered and people cannot properly insure their property. It is not dissimilar for businesses; one must consider the losses from the recent flood which, in the case of one distillery alone, amounted to more than £500,000. Massive losses were suffered by other businesses too, and there are fears that many more enterprises and residents will not be able to secure insurance cover. There are huge question marks over whether there will be any cover at all in the future, regardless of the premium. That, of course, has a knock-on effect on employers' liability.

At a meeting in Elgin last night, one insurance broker said that an insurance company had informed him that the framework agreement on flood cover by the Association of British Insurers does not apply to Scotland. Does the Minister have any knowledge of that and does she agree with me that insurance companies need to take their responsibilities seriously, regardless of where in the UK people live? She will appreciate that with the level of destruction, a great deal of material from people's homes and businesses is beyond repair and needs to be disposed of. As I said earlier, many streets have skips outside every house.

Moray council has made arrangements for the pick-up and disposal of the material, which will cost more than £50,000, and it is not certain that the Bellwin scheme will compensate the council. That is why I have already asked the UK Government to look at landfill tax and to suspend charges in connection with flood damage. They have said that they have no plans at present to do so. Why not? It would make a major difference to Moray. Is no discretion available to Ministers to suspend landfill tax in extreme circumstances? If this is not such a case, I do not know what is.

Despite the fact that I would far rather Scotland had normal representation and was able to make applications for funding directly, we are reliant on Westminster Ministers to apply for European Union funding. That is why I raise the matter in connection with this issue. Recently, European Commission President Romano Prodi wrote to my SNP colleague Ian Hudghton MEP. In that letter, he said that a considerable range of options are open to the member state to apply for special funding to areas that have been flooded or where flood prevention measures are set to be constructed. I should be grateful to know what the UK Government have done, or will be doing, to ensure that maximum benefit can be derived for flood-hit or flood-prone communities such as those in Moray. On the basis of what President Prodi said, has the Commission been contacted since the Moray floods to discuss those possibilities, and if so, what was the outcome?

The third flood in five years in Moray was devastating for many people throughout the constituency. It came only weeks before Christmas, and families have lost their homes and possessions and businesses have been washed out. The United Kingdom Government have the ability to make a difference. They can act in key areas such as social security, to give people on low incomes a helping hand; the Treasury can assist with the suspension of landfill tax; Ministers can remind the insurance industry of its responsibilities to cover households and businesses; and the Government can access European Union funding to help Moray.

It is in times of crisis that Governments need to act if they are to have credibility. The floods in Moray are such a crisis, and it is time for the Government to act.

12.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) on looking after his constituents so assiduously in this regard. I am not surprised that he is doing so, because of the consequences of the floods that he described. As he said,

it is not the first time that his constituents have been in the situation in which they found themselves on the weekend of 15 and 16 November. It was clear from his declaration of interest that he does everything he can to assist his constituents, as one would expect. I commend him for doing so and for taking the opportunity of this debate to raise the matter on behalf of those of his constituents who are affected by the flood.

I take this opportunity to say directly to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, many of whom have lost everything in this event, how concerned the Government are to do what we can to assist them. I shall do my best to respond in the debate to the issues that he has raised with me. However, if I cannot deal with all the points that he made in the inevitably restricted time available, I undertake to contact him further.

We are well aware of the efforts that were made by volunteers, by the statutory services, by the emergency services and by the forces to try to deal with the sudden inundation that overtook parts of the hon. Gentleman's constituency. I pay tribute to the efforts that were made, whether by people who were only doing their job or by those who just turned out to help. Such efforts were deeply appreciated by the community and by the constituents who were affected.

When considering the efforts made to cope with these sudden problems, I was impressed at the success of our staff in Jobcentre Plus. Despite the fact that their office was flooded, they were able to maintain a service for customers on the Monday following the floods, which showed me that our contingency planning in respect of such matters worked well at a time when it was tremendously important that it did so. The hon. Gentleman referred to the low level of income of many of those affected. It was vital that people could get their benefits, pensions, or whatever we were due to pay them, as speedily as possible. I am glad that our contingency arrangements worked so well.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to give an overview of the support that people who have been affected by these events might obtain from the Department for Work and Pensions, especially from the social fund, which is one of the funds designed to deal with such contingencies. The social fund can provide emergency financial help to those who are affected by flooding or other such disasters. He referred to crisis loans, which are indeed available to people with limited resources to protect their health and safety and to meet the cost of essential items that are urgently needed to replace those lost or damaged through floods.

Community care grants are the other resource within the social fund to which people can turn at such times. They are available to people receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. They can help people to rebuild their homes after a natural disaster such as a flood by meeting the reasonable costs of replacing destroyed or damaged household items, such as carpets, cookers, beds and furniture.

The hon. Gentleman asked how many people had been seen by DWP staff in Moray in connection with the effects of the floods. There have been 29 crisis loan applications as a consequence of the floods, and all have been allowed, to a total of £2,968.71—he wanted me to be precise. The loans have been made, and the average was £100. Two community care grants have also been awarded, totalling £744. A further six are being processed as speedily as possible, and the amount applied for is £10,369.

The hon. Gentleman will know better than anyone that 400 to 500 households were affected in some way by the flooding, so those numbers may seem small to him, but we expect more applications, particularly as people return to their homes over the next few months. In many ways, that is the time when one would expect them to make applications. We will do our best to ensure that they are dealt with as speedily and sympathetically as possible.

The hon. Gentleman asked what lessons could be learned from the reaction to the floods. As I said, our staff and our business continuity planning certainly kicked in and worked quite well. That is probably because we devolved responsibility to the lowest level that we could. Each of our business units not only devises its business continuity planning but is responsible for implementing it. They are the best people to have that responsibility and power: they know what the situation is locally. We were pleased that Jobcentre Plus staff in Elgin were able to continue to deliver a service to customers straight after the floods. That is a testament to their success.

We were able to visit elderly and perhaps more vulnerable people in their homes to ensure that they received their pensions. To the extent that they did not quite know where to go to get their payments, because of the floods, we ensured that they were all made. I am pleased that we were able to do that.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether more could be done on insurance. I am aware from what he said and from my briefing for the debate that this is not the first time that his constituents have been affected. Living on a flood plain, they appear to have had a number of problems. Quite rightly, he spoke about how people can ensure that they are protected against the financial loss that repeated inundations can cause them, whether they are businesses or individuals.

I can confirm that the Government have been talking to the Association of British Insurers about those issues countrywide. The hon. Gentleman reported that an insurance broker in his constituency had suggested that those discussions, and the agreements reached between the ABI and the Government in an attempt to ensure continuity of insurance cover for people living on flood plains where there have been problems, did not apply in Scotland. That is right in the sense that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Treasury and the Environment Agency have been working closely with the ABI this year and talking about the issue with the aim of ensuring continued availability of affordable insurance. However, the Scottish Executive have held similar discussions with the ABI relating to flood issues specifically in Scotland.

Those discussions are ongoing, and we think that they are likely to reach the same conclusions and the same kind of agreement as in England. In that sense, there should not be a big difference between arrangements in England and those in Scotland.

Angus Robertson: My question is a bit unfair, because the Minister is not responsible for this matter in Scotland, but she says that discussions are ongoing in Scotland to try to establish the same system that exists in England and Wales. Does she not share my concern that some insurance companies might use the fact that no agreement exists in Scotland as an excuse not to fulfil for the people of Moray the obligations that they would—rightly—have to fulfil in England and Wales?

Maria Eagle: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point. As ever in debates touching on reserved and devolved issues, I have to be careful not to step on the toes of others who have responsibilities. I often do not know as much about what is happening as they do. I say that with some care. I am unaware of the latest state of ongoing discussions.

In discussions with the ABI, the aim of the authorities, whether the Scottish Executive or the Westminster Government, is to prevent petty avoidance of responsibility for issues that must be dealt with. We found that the industry was willing to discuss problems and come to some agreement. The industry has gained a reputation for trying to avoid its responsibilities: we all know of instances when the small print is referred to. We hope that that will not continue, that the discussions will be constructive and that no one will seek—on the grounds of the current state of negotiations—to avoid responsibilities for paying out to those who should be paid. The Scottish Executive expect, and we hope, that similar sensible arrangements will be made in Scotland.

Reference was made to the Bellwin scheme, which was established under the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 as a means of offering financial support to local authorities that have to deal with disasters or emergencies. It is obviously relevant to our concerns. These are devolved matters, so the council's application will go to the Scottish Executive.

A meeting is being held today between Scottish Executive officials and those of Moray council to discuss the level of claims. A claim has not yet been submitted, but the amount requested is likely to be about £1 million. The scheme is intended to provide additional support when exceptional incidents take place. Local authorities should plan for the unexpected. Floods have broken out before, so it is likely that the council has built contingency planning into its reserve balance arrangements.

Angus Robertson: I seek clarification. Was I correct in hearing that Moray council has applied for £1 million under the Bellwin scheme? In 1997, it applied for £2.5 million.

Maria Eagle: No, I said that a claim had not yet been submitted. A health warning is necessary: neither the Westminster Government nor I are involved in these negotiations, which are a matter between the Scottish Executive and the Moray council. I said that although a claim had not yet been submitted, it was expected to be in the order of £1 million. Doubtless the Scottish Executive and the council will agree a suitable figure. I have no knowledge beyond what officials discovered and informed me about for today's debate. I cannot assist the hon. Gentleman about whether the sum is sufficient, but the Bellwin scheme has certainly been activated and invoked, and further discussions about additional help are ongoing.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the possibility of benefits from European funds. He mentioned a letter sent to an MEP colleague by the Commission President, Romano Prodi, which states:

"Furthermore, a number of current regional programmes, including those of the UK, enable European funds to be used for the financing of a wide range of measures in the area of flood protection. Prevention programmes can also benefit from the additional funds available for the performance reserve, which could be earmarked to support projects in areas affected by natural disasters."

The hon. Gentleman has been assiduous in seeking sources of funding to deal with the problems debated today. I understand that decisions on the distribution of European funds are a devolved matter and that Moray council could make an application for funding to the Highlands and Islands development partnership.

I hope that I have answered some of the hon. Gentleman's questions. He asked several other detailed questions that I will not have time to deal with, but I undertake to write to him to clear up those issues. I finish as I started, by expressing my sympathy with his constituents who have been affected—and not for the first time. I hope that all agencies of Government—statutory authorities, volunteer forces, emergency services, MPs, MEPs or whoever—can do their best to help alleviate their plight.

National Football Museum

1 pm

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): The National Football museum in Preston is, as the name suggests, a museum of national significance. It is the national museum of the national game. It was awarded national museum registration status by Resource, the Government body for promoting standards in museums, libraries and archives. It is also of international significance, preserving England's and the world's finest football collections. It has more than 25,000 items, including the FIFA museum collection. FIFA chose the National Football museum of England as the permanent home for the FIFA museum collection because England is recognised worldwide as the birthplace of the game.

The museum has recently been nominated for the European museum of the year award 2003. Following the success of the museum's exhibition in Japan during the World cup, it will be mounting an exhibition in China during the women's World cup in 2003. UEFA has approached the museum with a view to creating a display to mark UEFA's 50th anniversary in 2004. It is in discussions with FIFA regarding several projects, including an exhibition to mark FIFA's centenary. The museum has advised the national football museum projects in Norway, Germany, Wales and Mexico. It has been used extensively by the British Tourist Authority to attract overseas tourists, by the use of museum displays, for example, at the trade fair in Frankfurt.

I would like the Minister to be aware of the media's reaction to this wonderful museum that is housed in Preston. *The Times* said:

"It is a fantastic place. Yes, fantastic".

The Mail on Sunday described it as "brilliant". It has also had excellent support from great names in football. Sir Bobby Charlton said:

"It's a world first. I've never seen a better football Museum . . . a most marvellous museum".

Alan Ball said it was "fabulous, unbelievable." Mark Lawrenson said:

"The best football Museum in the most appropriate place".

Denis Law said:

"It's important to have something like this. It is for the future and hopefully it will give inspiration to the youngsters of today".

Gordon Taylor of the Professional Footballers Association said:

"The museum will be with us as long as football exists".

I have some key questions for the Minister. The Government have a policy of free access for all to national museums. That being the case, why are they not providing free access to the National Football museum—the people's museum of the people's game? It would cost as little as £400,000 per annum for Department for Culture, Media and Sport to allow free access to all. Why are the Government allowing that exception to their policy to continue?

Will the Minister clarify what the definition of a national museum is? Does DCMS consider the National Coalmining museum to be a national museum? If it does, why does it not also recognise the National Football museum as a national museum? It has met the same registration standards with Resource as the National Coalmining museum. If it does not, why then does it give the National Coalmining museum £2 million of revenue funding per annum, including funding for free access for all? Why does DCMS not provide funding to the National Football museum when it provides substantial funding to a number of non-national museums, primarily located in London? For example, the Horniman museum receives £3.1 million, the Geffrye museum £1.1 million and the Museum of London £5.2 million.

I have two quotations from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The first is:

"The restoration of free access will enable the greatest collections we have...to be available to everyone, no matter what their income or background."—[*Official Report*, 5 November 2001; Vol. 374, c. 66W.]

The second is:

"My right hon. Friend will be aware of our determination to ensure that national museums and galleries have the necessary funding to maintain the popular public policy of free entry, which has seen the number of people going to our national museums and galleries increase, in some cases, by up to 75 per cent. He will also be aware of our clear aim to increase the level of investment in regional museums and galleries—a long neglected quarter."—[*Official Report*, 22 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 651.]

I shall give the Minister a chronology of developments concerning the museum during the past 18 months. On 22 June 2001, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport wrote in support of the museum, at its opening. He said in his letter:

"The National Football Museum will provide a testimony to how football has and can inspire and engage people of all ages and from all walks of life...It is an important initiative".

On 29 November 2001, the museum was awarded national museum registration status by Resource, the Government body for promoting standards in museums.

On 11 and 21 January 2002, the museum submitted briefings to the Minister for Sport, following which he and I had a meeting on 23 January. That is when the museum began to seek funding from DCMS for free access, following the award of national status. On 6 February and 5 March 2002, the museum submitted further briefings to DCMS. On 8 May, DCMS was represented at a round table meeting at the museum to consider the North West Development Agency-sponsored study into future funding for the museum.

On 22 May 2002, the Minister for Sport and the Minister for the Arts, Baroness Blackstone, had a round table meeting at DCMS to discuss the museum's future funding with me, museum managers, the North West Development Agency, officials from the Football Foundation, the Heritage Lottery Fund and the North West Museums Service.

On 11 September 2002, DCMS was again represented at a round table meeting at the museum to consider its future funding. On 29 September, the Secretary of State herself visited the museum and wrote in the comments book: "A real inspiration—excellent!" On 8 October, I wrote to her to tell her how urgent a decision on the matter was. On 31 October I received a reply from Baroness Blackstone, the museums Minister, which gave no firm commitments.

That whole process started in January this year, and we are now in the middle of December. The future of the museum is still uncertain. Throughout the year, I have

[Mr. Mark Hendrick]

listened to comments from Ministers such as, "Football should fund the museum." But football will not or cannot provide funding. To date, the museum has received from football £300,000 towards a capital project cost of £15 million—a meagre 2 per cent.—and £100,000 towards revenue costs. Why should football be expected to fund the museum in any case? Museums are not in general funded by their associated industries. The National Museum of Science and Industry is funded by DCMS, not by science or industry.

It has also been commented that the museum is a private initiative: that DCMS did not decide to set up the museum, and therefore has no obligation to fund it. The Minister will be aware that most of the national museums—and non-national ones for that matter—now funded by DCMS were originally private sector initiatives.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): I wonder whether the position would be different if this national museum, which is based in Preston and is of benefit to the north-west, were in London? Does my hon. Friend think that the Government would have a different attitude in that case, and would find funding tomorrow, just as they have for Wembley?

Mr. Hendrick: My hon. Friend can speculate about that. I decline to comment.

Ms Bridget Prentice (Lewisham, East): As a London Member who represents a borough in which the Horniman museum is based, adjoining the borough represented by the Secretary of State, I say to my hon. Friend that many of us support the National Football museum in Preston. We think that it is in the right place, as the north-west was the birthplace of football in England. I hope that he would equally support our bid to have the Olympics in London.

Mr. Hendrick: I would certainly concur with my hon. Friend, and I support an Olympic bid for London.

As I said, many museums were previously funded by local authorities, rather than Government, such as the Horniman museum, the Geffrye museum, the Museum of London and national museums and galleries on Merseyside. Most of the national and non-national museums now funded by DCMS were originally private initiatives: the Tate gallery, founded by Sir Henry Tate, Sir John Soane's museum and the Horniman museum. There are many precedents for Government funding museums that they did not initiate. The museum is an independent charitable trust, created thanks to public funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

I have also heard it said that, worthy though the National Football museum is, DCMS does not have any funding available. DCMS has been able to find £2 million per annum to fund the National Coalmining museum for England in Wakefield. It provides £200,000 per annum to the non-national Design museum in London. It provides substantial funding to a number of non-national museums, primarily in London, as we have already mentioned. If the Department is saying that the National Football museum is not a national museum as defined by DCMS, and cannot expect to be funded, I put it to the Minister that DCMS did not define the National Coalmining museum for England as a national museum before deciding to fund it. Subsequently, it was given funding to allow free access for all.

DCMS provides substantial funding to several museums that it defines as non-national, primarily those in London. It is Resource, the DCMS-funded body for promoting national standards in museums that has awarded the National Football museum its national status. There is a complete lack of clarity about what DCMS defines as a national museum and why it funds some museums—national and non-national—and not others. I hope that the Minister will clear that up.

If DCMS is saying that the National Football museum is not currently a success because its visitor numbers are disappointing and it does not deserve funding, I say that that is all the more reason to provide funding for free access for all, which would significantly increase the number of visitors, as has happened at the other national museums. The museum's target for the current financial year is 42,000 paying visitors. Free access will significantly increase the number of visitors. According to DCMS figures, attendance at the national museums that have free access has increased by up to 75 per cent. Attendance at the National Football museum would very likely increase to at least 60,000 per annum.

I quote the Minister, who in a written answer said:

"There are no plans to extend free entry to museums beyond free entry to the permanent collections of the main museums and galleries in England to which the Government are committed to ensure universal free access."—[*Official Report*, 5 March 2002; Vol. 381, c. 267W.]

That statement in itself does not detail which museums have been selected or why. It is also notable that the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament take their own decisions regarding free access to museums.

I have heard it said that the museum should move location to attract more visitors in order to meet its costs. That is the view of some people in the sporting establishment who want to get their hands on the collection. The longer DCMS delays its decision, the more likely that is to happen. It would be a slap in the face for the new city of Preston, which has been awarded city status in this jubilee year by the Queen.

The museum is located in Preston for outstanding heritage reasons. In 1889, Preston North End was the first winner of the world's oldest football league, and it was also a founder member of the Football League. The museum is at Deepdale stadium, the home of Preston North End since 1878, which makes it the oldest football league ground in the world that is still in use today. Next year will be the 125th anniversary of football being played at the stadium, which will be a world first. Moving the museum would waste £9 million of public money that has already been invested, and cost many millions more.

On a recent visit to the museum, Sir Alex Ferguson said:

"As a founder member of the English Football League, Preston is an appropriate place for the National Football Museum and Hall of Fame".

The museum and I are making a plea to the Government for the support that it deserves. I ask the Minister for that support in deeds as well as words.

1.16 pm

Mr. John Lyons (Strathkelvin and Bearsden): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on securing this important debate. I raised the issue in April this year in early-day motion 1138. At that time, I sought to draw attention to the need for national funding of the museums in Preston, Wrexham and Glasgow—the English, Welsh and Scottish football museums. The motion attracted extensive support from across the UK.

Most football fans are not museum goers, and it is important that we do everything we can to encourage the initiatives at Preston and elsewhere. The museums are excellent and they need all the support they can get. It is up to the Department to take on that responsibility to ensure that the funding is there and that the museums are encouraged and supported. One cannot establish museums within two, three, four or five years. They need to be given proper funding so that in time they become known, people can access them and they grow popular, which is the way forward.

The English museum deserves support, but it is not the only national museum. The Scottish Football museum in Glasgow has been running since 1994, and it has struggled with many of the same problems as Preston and Wrexham in trying to get established without support and core funding. The Department needs to address that issue if it is going to talk about supporting football across the UK. Today's debate should initiate a wide-ranging discussion among not only football fans but parliamentarians about the importance of those museums, which supply employment and provide a facility for people, and especially young people, who would usually never go near museums. It may be that going to Wrexham, Preston or Glasgow gives young people a love for museums in general. I hope that the Minister's response will encourage museums throughout the UK.

1.18 pm

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Preston (Mr. Hendrick) on giving us the opportunity to debate the issue today. He has led parliamentary support for the museum since its financial problems became apparent late in 2001. He met Ministers at my Department on 22 May with museum representatives and other interested parties to discuss funding options. As he will know, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport would have been here, but he is in Moscow playing his part in trying to cleanse sport of drugs.

At the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, we agree that the National Football museum holds the world's most important collection of football artefacts and memorabilia, including the FIFA and Football Association collections, and Ministers are therefore as anxious as anyone involved to ensure that it is not broken up. My hon. Friend made an important point in that respect.

Moreover, we do not underestimate the wider value of the museum, because we are aware that the project embraces social inclusion through football, high-quality educative work and regional regeneration. Despite the institution's very poor performance in terms of attracting paying customers—it has been a great disappointment, as I am sure my hon. Friend will admit—we want to play a part in trying to save it. However, the scope of Government action is limited. The DCMS museums budget is hard pressed. In May, my noble Friend the Minister for the Arts explained those pressures to the museum and to others, including my hon. Friend, and I have to repeat that direct Revenue funding is not an option.

My hon. Friend asked about free museum entry. That policy applies only to museums directly sponsored by DCMS and/or museums established under parliamentary legislation. DCMS does not provide revenue funding to the National Football museum, and is not therefore constitutionally tied to the free access policy in that respect. That is an important point. The museum accepted that arrangement when it was set up. It accepted that it needed to charge at the outset of its career, and that remains the case. DCMS Ministers had no part to play in the Heritage Lottery Fund's investment of £9.5 million—a very substantial sum. Frankly, it would be disingenuous to suggest that the Government have no interest in safeguarding that investment of public money—of course we do. The bulk of it went into fitting out the museum, and in the event of its closure, it is extremely unlikely that the fund will recover much of its investment. There are no immediately apparent alternative uses for the high-quality galleries and other facilities included under the stands at Deepdale, Preston North End's ground, and Ministers are well aware that, should the museum close, much of the fund's investment would effectively pass to Preston North End football club at little or no cost.

Mr. Hendrick: The Minister has not addressed several important points that I raised. Is he willing to say how these other museums came to be sponsored? I am sure that they were sponsored not from the year dot but because Governments took a decision to take them on. Why cannot the Government do that in this case?

Dr. Howells: I cannot say why certain museums were included in the initial list and others were not. Many great museums are not on the list, some of which are doubtless called national museums. I tried to explain the original criteria and why the National Football museum was not included on the list, and that that discussion can continue, but if my hon. Friend wants me to answer his questions about funding, I shall try to do so. He must admit that there have been many attempts in Preston to try to turn the situation around, but they have not succeeded.

Free entry to a museum might be successful, but how on earth would it help on a day when it had seven paying customers? That will not turn a museum around—7,000 paying customers a week might have helped. It would be a huge burden for DCMS to take on, so I cannot give a carte blanche answer right now.

We have considered the role of the Football Foundation as a possible source of funding. The foundation is after all the primary funding body for football.

Mr. Hendrick: Does not the Minister agree that the Government's policy of making national museums free for all has meant that the general public are now not

[Mr. Hendrick]

willing to pay to go into museums? The museum has become the victim of a policy introduced by the Government, however much he would like to paint a picture that they are trying to help it.

Dr. Howells: I am sure that my hon. Friend would not want to reverse the policy of free entry to museums. It has been an enormous success story, but it has a downside: paying customers will decide where they want to go. Clearly, some museums will lose out as a consequence, and we are addressing that. As tourism Minister, I have been to many institutions—museums, theme parks and so on—that have had enormous success, despite the fact that people have to pay to go into them. That could be for many reasons: their location, they are convenient to reach, there is something special to see there or perhaps the institution has taken time to think about how it treats its customers.

I have not been to the museum so I cannot say why visitor numbers are so very low. However, even if, as my hon. Friend suggested, the figures increased to 60,000, I recall that the agreed break-even figure was 80,000.

Mr. Hendrick: It was 40,000.

Dr. Howells: Very well, I shall pass on that one.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport first asked the Football Foundation to assist the museum earlier this year. At that time, the museum sought £1.5 million to allow it to offer free admission until 2004. That would have meant the foundation devoting a large proportion of its entire budget for community and education projects to the museum for two and a half years. The board was understandably unable to agree to a solution that could have endangered the funding of its successful community projects around the country. Nevertheless, the foundation wrote off £200,000 of the museum's debts earlier this year, and lent it £300,000 in May, which was secured on one of the principal exhibits, the Thomas Webster painting "Football". My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport intends to ask the foundation to consider the museum again.

All those involved in assisting the museum must take a frank view of its prospects. There was a good historical reason to locate it in Preston, at the home of one of the Football League's original member clubs. However, we must recognise that location has played a part in the museum's financial difficulties. At the suggestion of my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport, the North West Development Agency commissioned a report on the museum's prospects from Jura Consultants earlier this year. Jura submitted its report in May. I know that the museum disagreed with some of the report's conclusions, but there was agreement on the overall assessment of visitor numbers: 30,000 visitors against a business plan target of 80,000 for the year left an immense hole in the museum's finances; it was better, but still well short of the break-even point.

The museum, and those who want to assist it, must be imaginative in considering alternative sources of funding. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport has bent over backwards to try to find ways in which to provide funding for the museum. Officials in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport have been fully involved with the steering group that was established earlier this year to consider funding options. My right hon. Friend arranged a fundraising dinner at the House of Commons on 23 July. It was well attended and he said that we would find funding to match commercial sponsorship funding, pound for pound, up to a maximum of £250,000. I understand that the museum has obtained £80,000 from sponsors to date. That is an encouraging start, but I am sure that my hon. Friend agrees that we need further substantial donations if we are to meet that match funding target, and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Nicholas Winterton): Order. Time is up, and we must now move on to the next debate, in connection with which I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on the photograph that appeared in a broadsheet newspaper at the weekend.

Chesham Bois Post Office

1.30 pm

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham): Thank you for your generous welcome to this debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I welcome the Minister to her place, but I must put on record my disappointment that her colleague, the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, who handles these matters, is unable to be here to reply, although I am sure that the hon. Lady will give as generous a reply as she can in the circumstances.

Last Friday lunchtime, more than 150 ordinary people left the comfort of their homes to stand in the pouring rain to protest about the closing of a precious asset in their community—their post office. I am grateful to Mr. Speaker for giving me the opportunity to give them a voice in Parliament and to give the Minister the opportunity to show that she cares about our community and to lend her weight to keep this valuable facility open.

The first post office in Chesham Bois was established in Percy Carter's cottage around 1905 and has been there ever since, providing not only post office services but a coffee shop, a meeting place, a shop, banking services and a vibrant centre of our village. It provides employment for Heather, Sheila, Olwyn, Yvonne and Denise during the week and the Saturday crew, Kat and Alice, as well as Tom, who goes there after school three days a week. Pauline, Betty and Ann make the cakes and Maggie runs the shop superbly. Many local businesses use the post office's facilities and many of our pensioners and families carry out their personal financial transactions at the shop and use it regularly. People also come from other villages as far away as Coleshill and the shop has attracted a petition of more than 500 signatures from people who want to keep it open as an operating post office.

County councillor Pauline Wilkinson, district councillor Mimi Harker—no less than the chairman of Chiltern district council—councillor Ian Gomm and the redoubtable parish council, led by Ernest Newhouse and the clerk, June Gosling, have all been fighting to keep the post office open. I pay tribute to them for all their hard work and indefatigable efforts.

All our local media have backed us. *The Bucks Examiner* ran a save-our-post-office campaign, the *Bucks Free Press* gave us front-page coverage and, as you rightly said, Mr. Deputy Speaker, even *The Sunday Telegraph* featured our campaign at the weekend.

I have asked questions in Parliament. I have presented a petition. I have even successfully invited a member of the Post Office board to visit us and meet us on site to see how successful the shop is in providing services to the community. Does that count? Apparently not. Not one person wants the post office to close and hundreds want it to remain open, but Post Office headquarters has decided that it must close and our wishes count for nothing. Indeed, yesterday I received the branch closure letter from the Post Office. However, we are not giving up. I am calling on the Minister today to take action to reprieve that village post office and I hope that I can convince her that it is worth saving.

I shall examine several issues: the classification of the post office as an urban post office, the code of practice under which it is being closed, the alternative post offices available to the community, the commercial viability of the branch and the potential for judicial review.

So-called urban post offices are subject to and targets for closure at the moment. In Chesham and Amersham, 15 branches are classified as urban, so if Chesham Bois post office goes, I stand to lose at least four more. Of the country's 9,000 urban post offices, 3,000 are under threat of closure. It is not only people in Chesham Bois who will suffer, but worried people up and down the country.

Chesham Bois is not urban, it is rural: it thinks it is a village, behaves like a village and would be eligible for help under certain rural schemes, such as the vital villages plan. I appreciate that the Post Office has adopted a certain classification, but why can that classification not be wiped out and replaced? The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, who is away at the moment, made much of an announcement of help for rural post offices and of the attempts to keep them open. Why cannot such support be extended to the post office in Chesham Bois, which has been placed in a certain category as a result of an accident of classification?

I thought that the Minister's Department ordered the Post Office not to close branches unless it was absolutely unavoidable. Surely it is avoidable in this case. Chesham Bois is an area of about 3,000 people. The post office could easily be reclassified as rural to reflect the reality of the situation and then it would qualify for help, not extinction.

From the outset, the parish council has felt that the classification of the post office as urban is a key issue. The Post Office has said that it is bound by Government guidelines when making a definition. The parish council has not had the advantage of seeing those guidelines, but from every other perspective, Chesham Bois exactly matches the categories that the Secretary of State described a week ago on Monday. The Secretary of State believes that post offices play a vital role in many rural communities and thinks that the money from the rural help programme will ensure that village post offices remain firmly at the heart of the community. Well, Chesham Bois is a community and the post office is at its heart.

The work that the parish council is doing on village revitalisation and appraisal, the views of Chiltern district council and the support that Chesham Bois is getting from Buckinghamshire Community Action point to the rural nature of the community. The Countryside Agency cannot give us a definition of urban and rural. Chesham Bois could be rural. Let us give Chesham Bois the benefit of the doubt and save the post office.

I am grateful to Alison Naisby—and to the hundreds of other constituents who have written to me—for her analysis of the code of practice, under which the proposed changes to branches are to be handled. Section B of the code of practice, which deals with the closure of a post office branch, states:

"Closure can happen in one of two general ways, either because a Post Office branch is thought to be no longer needed in that locality, or, much more commonly, because no suitable applicant and/or premises can be found to operate it."

[Mrs. Cheryl Gillan]

Neither of those things apply in any way to Chesham Bois. First, there is a volume of evidence from the community that the branch is needed. Hundreds of residents have expressed their views to the Post Office or have signed petitions or attended protests. More than 300 small businesses use the branch and they have made personal representations of dismay to me at the removal of this local facility.

The premises are eminently suitable for a post office. Indeed, they have served the community for many years. There is a suitable applicant to run the premises in the shape of Maggie—Margaret Joyce—who offered herself for the position this January. She is partly trained and ready and willing for the final stage of training, but she has not had her application acknowledged and was told that the Post Office was not taking on any more applicants for training courses, which is patently not correct.

The code continues that when there is a proposal to close a branch, the people concerned need to consider

"The distance which customers will have to travel to other Post Office Branches",

the "trading hours" of those branches, their convenience, including

"parking, public transport, pedestrian access"

and whether the surrounding area is hilly or flat.

I have a lot of concerns in relation to that part of the code. The closure letter that I received from the Post Office acknowledged that there were a number of concerns about the availability of public transport and car parking facilities. The letter states:

"A member of our network team has personally visited the area and walked the ground, obtaining information on local bus timetables and car parking for the nearest, most convenient alternative branches."

I presume that the network team are young and fit and think nothing of hopping on and off a bus, waiting for half an hour, or having to walk half a mile. The residents of Chesham Bois, however, are ladies with children and people in wheelchairs. Some people with white sticks, who do not see quite as well as the Minister or me, turned out for that picture for *The Sunday Telegraph*. There were also some senior citizens.

There are no parking facilities near Amersham post office. It is positioned in a particularly dangerous place at a very busy junction. On foot, I will concede that one could get to Amersham or Amersham Common post office on quite a flat path, but to get to Waterside, Chesham involves a very steep hill. Those routes are not easily travelled by people not quite as agile as the network team.

I should also like to know what consideration has been given to disabled access and disability discrimination legislation. It strikes me that Chesham Bois post office is perfectly placed because one can park immediately outside. Access to the so-called alternative post offices is not so convenient. I believe that two of them do not come up to the standards required by disability discrimination legislation. Can the Minister comment on that? Members of my community will be disfranchised from using their post office if the closure goes ahead.

The commercial viability of Chesham Bois post office is also a key factor in determining the future of the branch. The Post Office has always concealed that aspect from us under the guise of commercial confidentiality. The closure letter from Drew McBride tells me that

"the closure of this branch will give the remaining network, in the immediate vicinity, the opportunity to gain business, which is vital for their long-term sustainability. This is particularly relevant in the current climate with the very real financial threats our organisation is facing. We announced a loss of £163 million last year and, in addition, when the Department for Work and Pensions starts to move benefit payments from passbooks to bank accounts, there will undoubtedly be fewer customers using our network of Post Office branches despite the introduction of new services and products."

I cannot believe that this sub-post office is not viable. If it is not, why has the Post Office already invested in the electronic keypad to enable people to draw their pensions and benefits when the change to bank accounts finally happens? This branch has had some major disruptions recently. There was resurfacing of the pavement outside the shops and post office in Bois lane, then installation of gas pipes by Transco and subsequent road resurfacing. Both involved reducing the road to one lane, traffic lights right outside the premises and a total loss of the front parking spaces. That has now finished and everyone can, and does, use the branch freely again.

At the last demonstration, I spoke to someone who had just opened an account for her business for which she could use the post office, specifically because of the proximity of that branch and the ease of access for her. Under the quaintly titled "reinvention" of the post office network, the Post Office claims that the closure will save other post offices—which, I might add, will also be under threat of closure—by transferring business there.

I read the *Subpostmaster* magazine and I saw in it a letter from a sub-postmaster, Mr. Spinks. It completely knocks the claims on the head, saying:

"Mr Mill states: 'Many urban SPMs can't make a profit because there are too many branches for the amount of business available'. That is not true. The truth is that SPMs can't make a reasonable profit because they do not receive sufficient payment for the work they already do."

He writes that his office is a

"five counter, very busy office with no retail side. I employ seven part-time staff, work over 56 hours a week myself and we struggle to cope on busy days. Why in that case would I want more business from offices that are closed down under reinvention?"

What is certain, so far as commercial viability is concerned, is that if this post office closes on 29 January there will be not only an effect on that shop but a disastrous effect on the other businesses in the parade. Their future should be on the conscience of everyone forcing this closure on our community.

Quite where the cost savings will come from, I do not know. Amersham post office, offered as an alternative to this post office, has been consistently undermanned. Vacancies have been advertised, two as recently as October. If another counter clerk is required, how will that help the balance of payments in the Post Office? It is only right that the Post Office should now reveal the exact financial position of the branch and the savings it expects to make, and give the community a chance to help if the figures do not add up. The parish council wanted to know if it could make a contribution to keep

the branch open, but that was dismissed out of hand in the branch closure letter. I think that the Post Office should at least sit down with the parish council and explore what could be done and how they could work together to save the branch.

The village of Chesham Bois is now looking at the possibility of judicial review. Perhaps the Minister can advise me on that. The Post Office has already tried to put me off judicial review and has included a long and complicated paragraph in its letter telling me why the closure of the branch is not subject to it. If that is the case, can the Minister tell me how can we obtain justice for our post office? What process of appeal is there? How can the voices of my community be heard?

To summarise, the Chesham Bois post office is a much-used, much-needed and much-appreciated asset in the village. The enormous depth of feeling among the community has been expressed through marches, petitions, newspaper campaigns and even a demonstration at the Royal Mail area headquarters. The post office provides employment, and the heart will be ripped out of this Chiltern village if it closes. The alternative post offices suggested do not provide a viable substitute for the present service, and I believe that Royal Mail should relent on its closure notice and redefine this branch as rural.

The Post Office's headed notepaper announces that it is

"an essential part of everyday life".

Those words are blazoned across the front of its letter. It is ironic that the closure notice just says "Branch closure"—the strapline about everyday life does not appear.

The Department of Trade and Industry and the Ministers must help us to take the appropriate action to ensure the continued operation of this post office. Comments of the Minister's colleague, the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, were faithfully reported by Christopher Booker in *The Sunday Telegraph*:

"'Where it can be avoided it will be avoided,' Mr Timms said on *Today*, 'and we've imposed that requirement on the Post Office.'"

The Minister of State has repeatedly used those words and I hope that the Department will stand by them. If the Minister does not act now to save our post office, we will know that the voices of ordinary people do not count and that the words of the Minister of State were hollow and meaningless. I ask the Minister to give the people of Chesham Bois a Christmas present and save their post office.

1.47 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs. Gillan) on securing this debate. She has shown her commitment to her constituents' concerns about the future of the Chesham Bois branch by raising the matter with my hon. Friend, the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness, in the Post Office urban reinvention debate in the House on 15 October, and by presenting a petition to the House on 24 October. I welcome the opportunity to respond to the points that she raised, and do so as the granddaughter of a sub-postmistress of many years ago.

I want to assure the hon. Lady that we fully recognise the importance of the Post Office network. We are committed to maintaining a nationwide network of post offices and are aware of the importance of such outlets as a focal point of local communities, particularly for the elderly and less mobile. She made that point eloquently.

However, I must make it clear that since 26 March 2001 the Government's role in the Royal Mail group has been that of a shareholder in a public limited company. Under the Government's reforms, the group has been given greater commercial freedom, and an arm's-length relationship has been established so that the board can run the company on a commercial basis as it sees fit. Indeed, it has been the policy of successive Governments since 1969 that matters regarding the day-to-day running of postal businesses, such as decisions relating to individual post offices, are the responsibility of the company's management.

Mrs. Gillan: If the Department has no say in the day-to-day running of post offices, why did the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness say—I gave the quotation earlier—that where closures can be avoided, they will be avoided and that the Government have imposed that requirement on the Post Office? Surely shareholders have a voice in the running of businesses.

Miss Johnson: It would be helpful if the hon. Lady waited until I come on to the question of the urban regeneration reinvention programme, which is separate from the closure of the post office in Chesham Bois. That post office is not being closed as part of the programme because the closure was instituted before the programme's advent.

In light of the 1969 policy, it is not appropriate for the Government to intervene, because we do not have a role to play in individual closures, but I appreciate the depth of feeling in the hon. Lady's constituency. The proposal by Post Office Ltd., which is responsible for the post office network, is clear. I understand that since the departure of the previous sub-postmaster in November 2001, a temporary sub-postmaster has operated the office in Chesham Bois. Such arrangements are costly for the company, and they can be unsatisfactory for customers because of the inherent uncertainty over the temporary cover being maintained. During that period, the Chesham Bois office, which has a relatively small customer base for its location, has seen levels of business fall at double the average rate.

In August, Post Office Ltd. decided to review its long-term position on that office. The Post Office's review concluded that it was difficult to see a viable future for the Chesham Bois office, and it therefore put its proposal to close it to public consultation. Although the Post Office was fully mindful of the disappointment that its decision would cause, it remains of the firm opinion that the area is well provided for, and that the community of Chesham Bois will not be seriously disadvantaged by the closure.

Mrs. Gillan: Was the financial viability assessment carried out in the period when the post office was prevented from trading in its normal fashion by the works that I mentioned?

Miss Johnson: I cannot answer the hon. Lady's question, but I can undertake to write to her with whatever information may be at my disposal as a Minister. That information is obviously held by Post Office Ltd., and I am not sure whether it will be available. I will, however, share with her any information on that question that is available to me.

As the hon. Lady is obviously aware, in considering such issues, the code of practice on post office closure and relocation, which has been agreed by the independent consumer council Postwatch and introduced in November 2001, is followed and formal public consultations are undertaken. Under the code, the Post Office wrote to various parties, including the hon. Lady, on 30 August to notify them of the proposal and request their representations.

In the case of Chesham Bois, the hon. Lady mentioned that the nearest branch is the Amersham office on Sycamore road, which is roughly half a mile away. There is also an office at Amersham common, which is a mile away down the hill from Chesham Bois. Other branches exist at Waterside, Chesham and High street, Chesham, which are about a mile and a half away. All those offices can be accessed by bus services and have nearby car parking.

On the question of disabled access, I am advised that the nearest branch at Amersham is half a mile away and offers level disabled access. The Post Office has determined that there is ample room for wheelchair users inside the office, and it stands ready to discuss accessibility at other branches in the area because it is a live issue.

Mrs. Gillan: By virtue of what the Minister has said, she is admitting that some branches in the vicinity, which have been put up as alternatives, cannot be accessed by the disabled, which means that people who are disabled have a choice of only one post office. If such people live at the other end of Chesham Bois, the one post office is certainly not half a mile away from them. The post office with disabled access may be half a mile away from the post office that is being closed, but it is not half a mile away from their homes. The disadvantage to my constituents is therefore growing by the minute, and the financial advantage to the Post Office is diminishing, owing to the cost of the work that it will have to carry out at the other post offices. Surely it would be more sensible to leave the Chesham Bois post office open.

Miss Johnson: I believe that the Post Office stands ready to discuss disabled access, and I can only leave it up to the Post Office, the hon. Lady and her constituents to thrash out the details.

I turn to the classification of Chesham Bois post office, which has been defined as being located in an urban area. I know that that has been a particular bone of contention. Although the Post Office analysis of an area as either urban or rural is broadly defined by whether the post office branch is located in a community of more or fewer than 10,000 inhabitants, the broad definition was adopted by the Post Office in autumn 2000, when the formal requirement to prevent avoidable closures in the rural network was first placed on it by the Government. Post Office Ltd. has since developed a sophisticated geographical mapping model that measures population in terms of contiguous or very close agglomeration. In classifying Chesham Bois as urban, the model reflects the fact that it lies within the continuous urban catchment area of Amersham, which has a population of more than 10,000. I can appreciate that the residents of Chesham Bois consider themselves a distinct community, as the hon. Lady says. Because of that concern, the Post Office rechecked its analysis and confirmed its classification of the office as urban. Post Office Ltd. has adopted a consistent national approach to classifying its entire network. It compiles a list of branches by parliamentary constituency as of 20 April 2002, showing their classification. A copy of that list is held in the Library.

The hon. Lady asked about Chesham Bois at the urban reinvention debate on 15 October. It is important to clarify that the Post Office's proposal is not part of its programme to restructure its entire network of urban post offices and that it was announced before the urban reinvention programme had begun. It must be recognised that there may be isolated occasions when, in accordance with the normal running of a network of more than 17,000 branches, circumstances arise that necessitate considering the closure of an individual post office. As with Chesham Bois, however, such instances will continue to be considered in accordance with the code of practice that I mentioned.

The Post Office faces several challenges. People are not using post offices as they used to. Some 42 per cent. of benefit recipients now access their benefit payments via bank accounts rather than by order books, compared with 26 per cent. in 1996. Over the past five years, the number of retirement pensions and widow's benefit payments paid by order books and giros has decreased by more than 1 million—from slightly more than 6 million to fewer than 5 million—although the total number of pension recipients has risen by more than 1 million during that time. Incapacity benefit payments at the Post Office have fallen even more dramatically—from more than 2.5 million to fewer than 1 million.

Similarly, over the past five years Girobank transactions at post offices have fallen by 37 per cent., as has the number of stamps sold. Last year, Post Office Ltd. lost £160 million and the business as a whole lost more than £1 million per working day. The ability of sub-postmasters to sell on their businesses—the way in which people have moved on in the past—has taken a severe knock.

Mrs. Gillan: I am very interested in all the facts and figures on the Post Office, but if the Minister is not going to help us to keep the post office open, will she tell me before the debate ends how we can appeal against the decision and how we can buy more time to have it thoroughly looked into?

Miss Johnson: I cannot give the hon. Lady legal advice about such matters as judicial review, because I do not have it to hand. I undertake to write to her with whatever advice I can, but I cannot say what it will be or whether there will be much of it.

There is overprovision in urban areas, but the matter that we are discussing is not part of the urban reinvention programme. The Government want a profitable Post Office with branches that offer services that customers want, located in the right places. That is the reason for restructuring. However, this is not about restructuring but about a consideration of the viability of an individual post office that had started before the programme came into being. Post Office Ltd. believed that there were powerful reasons for dealing with it as it did, and closure was recommended. That is an operational matter for Post Office Ltd., and has always been considered thus. It is important that the company carries out its programme efficiently and consistently and ensures that the comprehensive consultation process has taken place for representations to be made to it before it takes such decisions, which we recognise are very important and difficult for local communities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 12 December 2002

[SIR ALAN HASELHURST *in the Chair*]

Future Vehicles Strategy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Gillian Merron.]*

2.30 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): It is customary at the start of an Adjournment debate to congratulate the Member who has been fortunate enough to secure it. I shall break with that custom because I secured the debate. Other Members who catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker, may not feel as constrained as I.

I hope that the debate gives us an opportunity to review our progress on lowering vehicle emissions and to look at how we move the agenda forward in future. I hope that we find a high degree of cross-party understanding on these important issues.

Road transport is central to the United Kingdom's economic success and a great source of personal freedom. To sustain a vibrant and flourishing economy as well as to maintain Britain's position and competitiveness in the world, good transport is not just desirable, but essential. However, transport and, in particular, road transport is the source of 25 per cent. of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions and a major source of other air pollutants.

The Government have done much to clean up transport. There have been significant reductions in local pollutants over the past decade because of improvements in vehicle technology and fuels. Those improvements have been driven forward by co-operation with our European partners. The European emission standards mean that a new car sold in the UK today emits 50 times fewer regulated pollutants than its equivalent on sale 30 years ago. Using a more recent time scale, today's cars emit 40 per cent. less particulates and oxides of nitrogen than new cars in 1996. By 2005, those emissions will be 70 per cent. lower than in 1996. That is a massive improvement over 30 years, including the improvements of the past 10.

However, yet further improvements are necessary if we are to meet our air quality targets and give everyone the benefit of cleaner air. Cleaner air means better health, better places to live and a better environment for us all. If we are to meet the challenges that road transport presents to the environment, we must capitalise on the opportunities that new generations of vehicle and fuel technology offer.

In July this year, the Government launched their powering future vehicles strategy. As the Prime Minister says in the foreword to that important initiative, our objective is clear: we want the UK to lead the way in the global shift to clean, efficient, low-carbon transport. Such a move will not only help the environment and improve our quality of life, but reduce the cost of motoring for those who choose low-carbon cars and build a competitive advantage for the UK's automotive industries.

The strategy provides the framework to promote the development and take-up of new technologies that will deliver significant reductions in emissions of greenhouse gases. It supports the delivery of our Kyoto targets and our domestic carbon dioxide goal of a 20 per cent. reduction from 1990 levels of carbon dioxide by 2010. The new vehicles will be clean as well as low carbon, delivering air quality improvement, especially in our congested urban areas. They will have significant effects for human health and the environment. It will mean an improved quality of life for those who suffer most from air pollution. For example, children with asthma or elderly people with heart or lung conditions are particularly vulnerable.

Cleaner vehicles are generally quieter than today's vehicles. That will bring real benefits to those who suffer from traffic noise. During a recent visit to Perkins Diesel in Peterborough, I was told that a vehicle that is powered by compressed natural gas gives off about a third of the engine noise of one that is conventionally powered by diesel.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): Has the Minister heard of the company in Marseilles that claims to have manufactured the world's first zero emission vehicle? If not, will he ask his officials to obtain information on that important development in French technology so that all hon. Members can be informed about it?

Mr. Jamieson: I shall certainly look into that. Perhaps my hon. Friend has some details and would like to point me towards them. I shall talk briefly about zero emission vehicles later. I suspect that other hon. Members may do the same, having experienced such a vehicle this week.

Road transport is responsible for a significant proportion of emissions of some of the air pollutants that are of most concern, especially oxides of nitrogen. Reducing emissions of those pollutants from road transport will play a key role in helping the United Kingdom to meet its air quality strategy objectives as well as to comply with legally binding European Union limit values for such pollutants.

The strategy presents other opportunities beyond those of improving the environment, including building competitive advantage for UK industry. Low-carbon road transport will need to come to the UK if we are to meet our Kyoto targets and air quality objectives, but we want it to come from the UK as well. We cannot afford simply to import solutions. Manufacturing, research and development—which we are very good at in this country—are a vital part of that future, and the automotive sector is key to that development.

So we must look to the future—to tomorrow's global market demand for clean low-carbon transport. We must ensure that the United Kingdom is the location of choice for the design and manufacture of tomorrow's vehicles. That means that we must research and develop new solutions, creating new knowledge-based supply chains, making world-class value-added products for environmentally aware customers across the globe and ensuring that the UK is a good home market in which to sell clean low-carbon vehicles.

The Government are taking immediate action to drive the UK forward to low-carbon transport. The strategy commits us to an important target: that within the next

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decade, one in 10 new cars sold in the UK will be low-carbon vehicles, emitting 100 g of carbon dioxide or less per kilometre. One in 10 means up to 0.25 million cars a year. Low-carbon means fuel-efficient—100 g of CO_2 per kilometre is the equivalent of about 70 miles per gallon, compared with today's new car average of 178 g of CO_2 per kilometre and an average of about 40 mpg. We are also setting a target for buses: that by 2012, 20 per cent. of new buses coming into operation every year will be low carbon.

We have been bold in setting targets for the introduction of low-carbon vehicles. Those targets will serve to drive the strategy forward and send out a signal that we are serious about developing low-carbon transport and seizing the competitive advantages from it. However, targets on their own are not enough. We need the engagement of industry and of stakeholders if we are to make this work. That is why the Government fully support the establishment of the low-carbon vehicles partnership. The partnership will operate as an independent forum to maximise the potential for UK business to gain the competitive advantage from the powering future vehicles strategy. It will work with industries to engage proactively in the move to low-carbon vehicles and provide a forum in which stakeholders can work together in overcoming market barrier issues affecting the shift to new vehicles and fuels.

The partnership will be publicly launched on 16 January next year. A high-level board has already been recruited, including the chairman and director-level executives in the auto industry, the chairman of the RAC foundation and senior people from non-governmental organisations and local government. The board will meet for the first time in January to set the strategic direction for the partnership and establish a first-year work plan. An awareness of the partnership is rising. The website is now live and potential members are invited to make expressions of interest.

Delivering the strategy requires action from Government as well as other stakeholders. That involves more than just one part of Government, which is why the strategy is being issued jointly by the four key Departments: the Department of Transport, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury. That is why the Prime Minister has made four Ministers jointly responsible for overseeing its implementation. Such a joined-up approach means that we can use all the tools at our disposal to drive the shift to low-carbon transport, including taxation measures.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The strategy talks about the establishment of a joint ministerial low-carbon group. Will the Minister tell us how many times that group has met and what it has resolved?

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman must have been too busy writing his notes to hear what I said. I shall repeat it: the group will meet next month. It has not actually resolved anything yet because it has only just been formed. It will meet after the launch on 16 January.

Mr. Chope: The Minister has misunderstood me. He was talking about the low-carbon vehicles partnership, and the Government are involved in that, but I thought that there was a separate, joint ministerial low-carbon group comprising of four Ministers. That group was supposed to meet and produce an annual report, which was an aspiration more than a year ago. I wondered what had happened since.

Mr. Jamieson: Perhaps I have not made myself entirely clear, but I will have another go. The two groups will be launched next month. The ministerial group has not met formally. The four Departments have had several meetings in the lead up to the powering future vehicles strategy, but the formation of the group will be next month and we will take the agenda forward in 2003.

We are the first major country to base its mainstream vehicle taxation system—company car tax and vehicle excise duty—on carbon emissions. Those tax changes are already having an impact on automotive manufacturers and motorists, which we can see by looking at the way advertisements for vehicles now concentrate on the carbon dioxide ratings. We have also introduced duty incentives for cleaner fuels, including biofuels and road fuel gases—liquid petroleum gas and compressed natural gas.

Taking biofuels as an example, we know that they can provide significant life cycle reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Bioethanol and biodiesel from virgin crops can reduce CO_2 by about a half compared with conventional fuels. In the case of biodiesel from waste vegetable oil, the life cycle benefits can be even higher. They can go into conventional diesel and petrol as a blend that is safe, clean and of high quality and which meets the manufacturers' warranties.

Mr. Chaytor: On bioethanol and biodiesel, whilst recognising the important progress that is being made, does the Minister accept that there is a remaining contradiction in taxation policy because biofuels have a higher level of taxation than LPG, which is of course a fossil fuel?

Mr. Jamieson: Yes, we recognise that. My hon. Friend will know that a great deal has been said about that and much lobbying has taken place. He will also know that the duty levied on biodiesel was reduced by 20p a litre. Next year, the levy on bioethanol will be reduced. That has been due to the lobbying that has taken place, and a reflection on the contribution that those fuels can make to a cleaner environment. However, biodiesel and bioethanol still emit a considerable amount of air pollutant at the tailpipe. We have to take that into consideration.

Another issue about liquid petroleum gas that we were very mindful of was the need to give an incentive to set up the refuelling network, which was very costly. I am pleased that the oil industry has responded extremely well. I believe that we are all surprised that we now have a comprehensive network of about 1,200 LPG filling stations. Some 10 per cent. of filling stations now supply liquid petroleum gas, so the fuel is available throughout the country. However, the incentive had to be given in the first instance.

My hon. Friend knows that compressed natural gas offers considerable advantages. Unfortunately, the network of filling infrastructure has not grown in the

same way that it has for LPG. The thrust of my hon. Friend's question was whether we are constantly reviewing and rethinking the fiscal incentives. The answer is yes. Evidence of that has come in the Chancellor's statement. We have been able to respond very quickly to points that have been made to us and we have put in place fiscal incentives on fuels that emit lower CO_2 and result in better air quality.

It always gives me a considerable amount of pleasure when I travel beyond the borders of this country for discussions about the issue to learn that many other countries have a great interest in what we are doing and want to replicate some of our fiscal measures. We probably lead the world, including some Scandinavian countries which generally have a very good record on such issues.

A biodiesel duty cut of 20p per litre below that of ultra low sulphur diesel has been in place since July. Although it is early days for the biodiesel industry, the latest provisional figures paint a very encouraging picture. The amount of dutied biodiesel has risen sixfold to more than 400,000 litres a month since the introduction of the duty cut. Several companies have plans to expand the number of retail sites dispensing the fuel and we expect the numbers to keep rising. From information provided by the industry, we expect more than 80 filling stations to be dispensing biodiesel blends by the end of the year.

The green fuels challenge built on the change in the pre-Budget report with a similar 20p per litre cut for bioethanol. The Government have announced that they will consult with stakeholders to establish the optimum timing for the introduction of the duty cut. Government support and industry initiative will create a sustainable biofuels industry with a long-term future.

The Government are supporting cleaner vehicles as well as cleaner fuels. The PowerShift programme, which is sponsored by my Department and administered by the energy saving trust, is aimed at developing a sustainable market for alternative-fuel vehicles in the UK. PowerShift grants are available to assist with the additional costs of buying hybrid, gas and electric vehicles while the market for such vehicles is small. PowerShift's sister programme, the new vehicle technology fund, supports the demonstration of innovative low-carbon technologies, such as hybrid and fuel cell vehicles.

Mr. Chope: Does the Minister accept that many customers are concerned that there is no long-term guarantee of the duty differential on LPG and that at the end of 2004 the differential will disappear unless the Government make an announcement? An investment in a vehicle needs a return over a period longer than two years.

Mr. Jamieson: The differential will not disappear, but we will have to review carefully all the fiscal incentives over a period of time to reflect the changing market and the changing competitive edge of one fuel over another. The fuel duty rebate for LPG came in about five years ago, when the gap between emissions from LPG and from petrol and diesel was actually very large. What has happened recently probably was not anticipated at the time. Emissions, particularly from petrol, have been considerably reduced and the gap between LPG and petrol has closed, but the gap between petrol and/or diesel and compressed natural gas is still very large. As I was saying to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), those fiscal incentives will not disappear, but we will have to review them and look at them very sensibly. We need to look at them in a way in which a disincentive is not provided for taking them forward. We have to weigh up a number of very important issues. If the hon. Gentleman has some ideas and his party wants to make a contribution to the process, we will be pleased to hear from him.

Mr. Chaytor: On the PowerShift programme, I want to endorse the point raised by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr Chope) about the need for certainty before an increased number of people are likely to take advantage of the regime. Has my hon. Friend the Minister recently studied the PowerShift register on its website, which I do from time to time? I have mentioned this to him before. Of all the vehicles listed on the register, my recollection is that the vast majority are not yet eligible for grants simply because their emissions are deemed to be not yet proven. That is a disincentive to those people who are interested in converting their vehicles from petrol to LPG. Will the Minister review the register to see what can be done to make grant available for a wider range of vehicles? Some manufacturers have no vehicles that are eligible for grant because their emissions have not yet been proven.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend would agree that we must make the grant available only where there is a tangible improvement in emissions. We have been having many discussions with the manufacturers to get them to put their vehicles on the register and to make the proper assessment to allow them to do so. I am pleased to say that the register has grown substantially over the past 18 months—that does not just coincide with the time in which I have been doing this job.

On Monday, I was pleased to visit MG Rover. By February next year, all its vehicles, which it produces at Longbridge, Birmingham, will have the option of having the LPG kit fitted to them. That includes the large 2.5 litre engine, for which some manufacturers have baulked at providing the equipment because of the small market that exists for those vehicles. Some of the larger and more polluting vehicles will, therefore, have the potential to be converted. However, we are mindful of my hon. Friend's point. Some manufacturers, which are not taking up the opportunity of getting themselves on that register, might be missing a trick in terms of marketing their vehicles. The public, who increasingly make choices on environmental, as well as plain economic, grounds, are ever more sensitive, and people may look to certain manufacturers rather than others. That is, however, a matter for the manufacturers. We certainly hope that cars manufactured in Britain, which provide for our economy, benefit from the register.

Powering future vehicles is a United Kingdom strategy, which looks outwards and recognises the need to work with our international partners. It includes the highly successful European vehicle emissions and fuel standards, which are commonly known as the Euro standards. The progressive tightening of the Euro

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standards has helped to reduce emissions from particulates, oxides and nitrogen from road transport by about 50 per cent. over the past decade. Even tighter regulatory standards have been put in place for vehicles entering the market from 2006, which is one of the many benefits accruing from our membership of the European Union. We often say that no country can achieve cleaner fuel or air on its own.

The European Union contains one quarter of the world's economy, which gives us an enormous amount of leverage with both vehicle manufacturers and oil companies. Given that Japan and Korea also want to work to our environmental standards, there is agreement among about 40 per cent. of the world's economy. As such, manufacturers and fuel refiners have to listen to what we want if they want to sell their vehicles in Europe. The European Union voluntary agreement of vehicle manufacturers is a good example of this point in action. It has been a key driver in the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions. The target is to reduce the average fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions of new cars to 140 g per km by 2008. We know that this is a demanding target that will take levels down by about 25 per cent. compared with the 1995 average of 187 g.

So what will low-carbon future vehicles look like? In the foreword to the strategy, the Prime Minister stated:

"Beyond 2010, we will accelerate the shift towards technologies such as hydrogen fuel cells, with zero tailpipe emissions."

The Government intend to develop a 2020 target for sales of ultra low-carbon vehicles and we expect that a significant proportion of those cars will offer zero tailpipe emissions. That would include hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

The Government are providing support for road trials of hydrogen buses. In 2003, Transport for London will take delivery of three fuel cell buses for trial on the roads. My Department is supporting that initiative through the PowerShift programme and the new vehicle technology fund. The fund is also being used to support the piloting of hydrogen buses in Cambridge in 2004. Buses typically run in urban areas in which air quality is of the greatest concern. Fuel cell buses, which can operate with zero tailpipe emissions, offer real environmental benefits in such areas.

Most experts think that the cost of fuel cell cars is not likely to reach a viable mass-market level much before 2010 to 2015. The application of the technology to road vehicles is very new and there are considerable further technical and economic hurdles, in terms of raising the performance of fuel cell stacks, maintaining sustained performance and bringing down the current very large manufacturing costs.

In the meantime, hybrid vehicle technologies will help us to move towards a low-carbon economy and towards a more sustainable transport system, in terms of carbon dioxide, air quality and noise. Hybrid technology involves a combination of the internal combustion engine and the electric motor, which drives the vehicle and collects electricity from the braking. Hybrid technology will probably have a life that stretches through the current internal combustion engine way into the time when cars may or may not be powered by fuel cells and hydrogen.

The hybrid technology that is available today offers about twice the fuel efficiency of a conventional vehicle, with only half of the carbon dioxide emissions. The benefits are obvious and the Government actively support the development and application of hybrid technology. That includes support for development of a hybrid bus.

The Government are not backing one particular technology or fuel. Instead, we are backing a low-carbon future. That means a future with an improved environment, a better quality of life in our towns and cities and a flourishing United Kingdom automotive industry.

2.58 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I, too, welcome the debate and I am grateful to the Minister for having made it one by allowing us to intervene and discuss issues.

I share the aspirations of the Government, and probably all people, in relation to this issue. I look forward to a time when we can have zero-emission vehicles. However, that is on the horizon—it is a long-term prospect. Most of my remarks will be geared to more immediate issues. The Government could do more in the short to medium term to improve the environmental quality of vehicles.

The Minister began by saying that targets were not good enough on their own. On 3 December 2001, when the Government first announced that they would produce a draft of the powering future vehicles strategy, a press release stated that the final strategy would be published in the spring. Of course it was not; it was published late in July. When it was published, we were told that there would be a joint ministerial low-carbon group, but the Minister, in his usual candid way, has explained that that group has yet to meet officially, although its terms of reference were clearly set out on page 17 of section 3 of the Government strategy published in July.

Why has that group not met? It is to produce and publish an annual report. If it is going to start work only in the new year, I suppose that we shall not get its first annual report until this time next year. Such delays seem to be totally unnecessary and suggest that the Government are perhaps paying lip service to the issue, but not putting their shoulder to the wheel to get things moving as fast as they could. A year ago the Government thought that they could produce the strategy document in the spring, but it was not produced until July. Why did it take twice as long as they expected? I suspect that that was because the document had a lower priority than most participants in the debate would have wished.

However, we must start from where we are now: with a policy that has been announced and that we are debating. My party welcomes its contents, but thinks that, on LPG in particular, there is much more scope for extending the use of LPG, which would benefit the environment through reduced CO_2 and noxious emissions, especially in urban areas. The hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) said in his intervention that he accepts that there is a problem with the Government having set the LPG subsidy to continue only until the end of 2004. That subsidy is what drives people to convert to LPG.

The strategy document recognises the importance of fiscal incentives. We do not yet live in a world where everybody will switch to an LPG vehicle purely for altruistic and environmental reasons. If we accept the need for fiscal incentives and recognise that we do not have anything like as many LPG vehicles in our vehicle park as we could have, why do the Government not declare now that the LPG fiscal incentive will continue beyond 2004? Perhaps it could continue until 2006, the date on which our parliamentary passes expire. If we can have a parliamentary pass that continues until 2006, why cannot the motoring public and the people considering investing in a dual use or LPG vehicle be assured that the present fiscal incentive will continue until then?

What the Minister has said today in response to interventions and what the Economic Secretary to the Treasury said during debates on this subject in the Finance Bill Committee earlier this year—in which I was privileged to be able to participate—causes much concern. When I raised the road fuel gas differential continuing beyond 2004 in that Committee, the Economic Secretary responded:

"First, he accused me and other Ministers of refusing to say anything about that matter, but that is not the case. He asked why we should not commit ourselves to continuing the differential beyond 2004. The answer is simple: the environmental case for maintaining that fuel duty differential beyond 2004 for road fuel gases, such as LPG, has not yet been proved, so the Chancellor and the Government will consider it on a Budget-by-Budget basis."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 11 June 2002; c. 262.]

Does the Minister think that the environmental case for extending the LPG differential beyond 2004 has been made? Most people who follow this debate think that it has. Some of the Government's other actions suggest that they accept that case. On 15 November this year, the Energy Minister announced in a press release that the Department of Trade and Industry would give £1 million to rural motorists to increase the uptake of liquefied petroleum gas in remote areas because LPG has good environmental benefits. That was a joined-up Government press release and it is worth looking at the notes to editors annexed to it, which remind us that:

"Compared to diesel, LPG emits around 90% less NOX, 1/50th the amount of particulates and only 1/500th the amount of ultra fine particles. The main air quality pollutants of concern in the UK are particulates and NOX. In Central London road traffic causes 93% of all particulate emissions and 58% of all NOX emissions. Department of Health statistics show that particulates are responsible for several thousand advanced deaths each year and many thousands of instances of illness and reduced activity.

Owing to its environmental benefits, the duty on LPG was reduced by 29% in the 1999 Budget and 40% in the 2001 Budget . . . This has resulted in a retail price on the forecourt of around half that for petrol and diesel.

More than 5 million drivers worldwide use LPG and in the UK numbers are increasing as more motorists learn of the benefits. In the UK, from a small start of 3,500 at the end of 1998 some 65,000 vehicles were on our roads by the end of 2001 and, with the Government fiscal incentives continuing, it is forecast that numbers will increase to around 250,000 by the end of 2005."

That is what one of the Ministers who is a member of the joint ministerial low-carbon group, which has yet to meet, said in his press release, yet that is not consistent with what the Minister said today or what the Economic Secretary said during the Finance Bill. The Government must make an immediate announcement that they intend to extend for a significantly longer period the fiscal incentive for LPG because it is a good thing, as the Energy Minister acknowledged. Unless there is that continuation and an assurance of a continuing fiscal incentive, we may find that the take-up of LPG is nothing like as great as it otherwise would be and nothing like as comparable to what is happening elsewhere in the world.

I hope that when the Minister attends the joint ministerial group, he will take up the cudgels on behalf of the motor industry and LPG industry and on behalf of the people who suffer the ill effects of polluting vehicles to ensure that we get more LPG-powered vehicles on British roads.

The next issue to which I want to refer and which is not far away on the time horizon is whether we are doing enough with a fiscal incentive on biodiesel. The Minister is aware that the National Farmers Union issued a press release recently saying that it wanted a 30p per litre differential on liquid biofuels because that was required to ensure the necessary investment in that new form of fuel for motor vehicles. That incentive of 30p per litre sounds big, but the fuel must be diluted by 20 parts before it can be used, so the incentive is not so great. At the moment, it is probably more expensive to fill a tank with biodiesel than with ordinary diesel because the 2p per litre difference is insignificant and there is an additional cost because it is not so fuel efficient.

There is a potential market for biodiesel, but the Government are not doing enough on that front. A Department for Transport press release on 14 November was headed:

"Government gives a 100 per cent. boost to biodiesel in buses".

It went on to say that:

"Local bus operators will be eligible for a 100 per cent. fuel duty rebate on biodiesel".

If the operators are to be given that incentive, why can the incentive not be extended to a wider group of motorists?

Mr. Jamieson: Before we move on from that point, will the hon. Gentleman better inform our discussion? Has he a figure in mind of the duty rebate that he would offer on biodiesel or bioethanol?

Mr. Chope: At the moment—and this is something that I regret every night and day—we are not in government and so do not control what is happening. The Minister is asking me to make a commitment on what a Conservative Government will do when they are returned in, say, 2005. Obviously, I cannot make such a commitment, as it will depend on the situation. If the Minister is not prepared to commit the Government beyond 2004 in relation to the duty differential for liquid petroleum gas, it is unreasonable of him to expect me to commit a future Conservative Government. He may hope that such a Government will not appear until well beyond 2004, but I hope that they will appear very shortly after 2004.

I hope that this is the sort of issue that will be discussed in the ministerial group. If the Minister wants to invite me along as an honorary member, I shall be happy to attend. If I did, I would point out that, in Germany, they have been much more robust and radical than we have been, which is producing dividends for them.

[Mr. Chope]

You were a chairman, Mr. Benton, during the Finance Bill proceedings, although I am not sure whether you were chairing on the particular day when we had an excellent debate on these issues. My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) is something of an expert on biodiesel and he quoted an environmental information note that he had obtained from the university of Aberdeen, which was published as long ago as 13 September 1999:

"'Sales of bio-diesel, a renewable fuel from oilseed rape, increased to 100,000 tonnes in 1998. 800 German petrol stations now sell that green fuel. Sales have doubled since 1996 when motorists purchased 50,000 tonnes, available from 500 outlets.'"

My right hon. Friend added:

"Biodiesel comprises 1 per cent. of German diesel sales."—[*Official Report, Standing Committee F*, 14 May 2002; c. 54-55.]

Having heard the Minister's aspirations, I do not think that we will get anywhere near where the Germans are now—and remember that the figures that I have just given were from September 1999. The Germans have been able to make such progress in promoting biodiesel because biodiesel is not subject to duty. That environmentally friendly form of diesel, therefore, has an outright price advantage. The Government would do well to consider what is happening elsewhere and the benefits that may flow from taking a more radical approach.

The Conservative party acknowledges that the Government's heart is probably in the right place. We are delighted that the Government's vendetta against the motorist seems to be waning. We admire the British motor industry and recognise its importance. The Minister referred to it in passing, but it is our largest manufacturing industry. It produces output of about £1 billion every week and it is probably responsible for about 800,000 jobs in this country. I am sure that the industry will wish to invest in new technology and will do its best to ensure that we remain world leaders in this field.

The Government acknowledge the importance of fiscal incentives. I hope that they will not be timid in using them to the full to ensure that we fulfil our potential and can produce a car park with vehicles that emit much less noxious gas.

I congratulate the Government and the motor manufacturing and sales industry on achieving a record number of new car sales in each of the past two years. That was not one of the Government's obvious manifesto commitments when they came to power in 1997, but I congratulate them on that, in case they wish to take a share of the credit. As the Minister now recognises, it is important that we face up to the reality that there will be more vehicles on our roads. We have to ensure that all vehicles are less polluting than they used to be, thereby ensuring an overall improvement in the quality of our environment.

I hope that the powering future vehicles strategy will extend to the issue of where those vehicles should be parked. Government policy seems very short-sighted. The Government suggest that underground car parks and off-street car parking will somehow damage the environment. If there are to be a lot more vehicles in our country, it is important that we find places, preferably secure places—where they can be parked out of harm's way. Certainly, they should not congest the highways as they do at the moment. There is so much on-street car parking, even though new developments could incorporate a lot more off-street car parking. That is one of my particular hobby-horses.

It is disappointing that more people are not present for the debate, but that may well be because there is, as the Minister said, quite a lot of consensus on the subject. There has been a series of illuminating and well informed meetings in the House recently, one of which was on the role of hydrogen fuel cells, and another—organised by the Country Land and Business Association—that was on promoting the role of biodiesel. At the moment, a debate is taking place in the Chamber that I am sure will partly cover those points.

I am grateful to the Minister for having ensured that we had the debate and I wish him well in vigorously fighting his corner on the joint ministerial low-carbon group to ensure that the fiscal incentives—and all the benefits that flow from them—are brought forward.

3.17 pm

Mr. Fabian Hamilton (Leeds, North-East): Before I start, I should declare an interest. On 10 and 11 September I was a guest of General Motors in Monaco, where I test-drove a hydrogen fuel celled vehicle.

As the Minister was not able to congratulate himself, I congratulate him on securing the debate. As the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and the Minister said, the debate is timely, but it is also timely for another reason: almost exactly three years ago—on 14 December 1999—I introduced a debate on alternative fuels in Westminster Hall. I shall consider some of the points that I raised then and say what has happened on those issues. I hope that that will be helpful to the Minister.

My first point was that 1999 was an opportune time for the debate. I said that transport and alternative fuel policy was a question of joined-up thinking, which required cross-departmental working, as the Minister pointed out. It still requires just that. I also quoted from the Government's transport White Paper, "A New Deal for Transport: Better for Everyone", which was published in July 1999. It says:

"We will continue to encourage the use of more environmentally friendly fuels."

I hope that I can answer some of the issues that the hon. Gentleman raised in some of the points that I shall make.

Much has been said about liquefied petroleum gas. That is significant to me because I have just returned my contract hire vehicle—a Vauxhall Vectra dual fuel that I had for three years—to Vauxhall Master Hire. I have seen the development of LPG as a consumer and I have seen the rapid expansion of fuel stations that sell LPG throughout the country. I think that there are about 1,200 now. In 1999, only about 8,000 vehicles were powered by LPG. That figure has multiplied tenfold, according to Calor Gas, to some 80,000 vehicles. Calor Gas, like many of us, aims for up to 500,000 vehicles to be powered by LPG within the next couple of years. The point about extending the differential in duty beyond 2004 is valid.

I congratulate the Government on every initiative that they have taken and, especially, on kick-starting the LPG industry and ensuring that we have the number of filling stations and the infrastructure that we need. I said in 1999 that we had a bit of a Catch-22 situation. Joseph Heller, the author of "Catch-22", died a few days before that debate. His novel points out the sort of problem that we were facing. No one would buy an LPG vehicle because it could not be refuelled. Of course, the companies that funded the infrastructure, such as Calor Gas, Shell and British Petroleum, would not put the infrastructure in place until a critical mass of vehicles was on the road. We have gone beyond that point and are seeing at last the take-up and number of vehicles on the road that we want.

Our problem is whether the duty differential will continue beyond 2004. The public are cynical. I received a lot of publicity as the first Member of Parliament to purchase a dual fuel vehicle in 1999, and my constituents said, "Yes, that's all very well, but as soon as it becomes popular, even your Chancellor will put masses of tax on it." Thankfully, that has not happened yet.

However, the Minister's point about the environmental case for extending the LPG duty differential and the points made by the hon. Member for Christchurch about the debate on the Finance Bill require careful examination. There is no doubt that even since my debate three years ago, the environmental impact of petrol-driven and diesel vehicles has been dramatically reduced. In 1999 I quoted Ian McAllister, the then chairman and chief executive of Ford UK. He was fond of saying that if 30 passengers were taken off a London bus and put into brand new Ford cars, there would be far fewer exhaust gas pollutants than those produced by the bus—that was three years ago. I welcome the initiatives that the Minister mentioned to reduce bus tailpipe emissions.

I am a keen cyclist as well as a keen motorist. Most mornings, when the weather is less appalling than this, I have the dubious pleasure of cycling from north-west London down the Edgware road. Anyone who has done that without a mask will know how filthy some of our London buses are. That is not only true of London buses. The bus emissions in my city of Leeds are quite repulsive, although there are far fewer cyclists to soak them up. It is important to encourage the conversion of our buses and our cars—especially our buses—to compressed natural gas, which is a very good fuel for buses, as well as LPG and other types of fuel for propulsion.

I shall talk about hydrogen at some length in a few minutes, but I want to say something about diesel because many people have said to me, "Well, you've returned your LPG vehicle, which you really enjoyed driving." I was not too sure about the contract hire arrangements because I was allowed only a limited mileage. Everyone exceeds the limit, and that means that a large penalty must be paid. However, I am now temporarily driving a diesel vehicle and cycling as much as possible. Diesel vehicles have improved dramatically. Mine was manufactured at about the time of my debate in 1999 and it does about 40 to 50 miles per gallon. It is a Peugeot and that is fantastic because it makes very good use of the limited fuel available in the world.

We have also mentioned biodiesel. Robin Woolcock, the chief executive officer of Volkswagen UK mentioned to me at a Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders event that he would also like a tax reduction on biodiesel. After all, it is far better in terms of carbon emissions and is a renewable fuel. Diesel has undergone a lot of development recently. In my debate in 1999, we discussed some of the particulates—the PM10s and PM2.5s. PM10s advance 8,100 deaths a year, so it is welcome to see the developments taking place in green diesel engines.

Back in March, a seminar was held in 1 Parliament street with Delphi Auto, a French company that now owns the Lucas-TVS group, which has been involved in the development of green diesel. Monsieur Jean Botti, the research director, told us that he could now reduce tailpipe emissions, including particulates, to zero. My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) also mentioned this: Monsieur Botti has a Peugeot 106 in his workshop in Paris. He would like me to lie underneath it when I visit him to see the vehicle. I should breathe in the tailpipe emissions, because the air that I will be breathing will be cleaner than the air in central Paris. I am not sure that I want to do that but the point is well made.

We may soon be able to produce diesel engines that consume approximately 70-80 miles per gallon, thus stretching out the fossil fuels that are left, and that emit a minimum amount of carbon dioxide to meet emissions targets such as 100 g of carbon dioxide per kilometre—a good target to aim for. It would be well worth trying to achieve that before fuel cell technology and the infrastructure needed to support it is readily available. The infrastructure is extremely important to its development, just as it has been with LPG. I hope to visit Paris shortly to see for myself whether the claims made by Delphi Auto are true.

On the holy grail of hydrogen fuel cells, before I went to Monaco two days ago, I was slightly sceptical about that technology, which is supposed to solve all the problems of carbon emissions. *The Sun*'s motoring correspondent, Ken Gibson, was in Monaco last week. He writes:

"I have just driven the car of the future...and it's out of this world . . . It is easy to be sceptical about Hy-Wire"—

the experimental General Motors hydrogen fuel cell car with a drive-by-wire system—

"until you drive it and see how well it works. Especially when you realise hydrogen is also the most plentiful natural fuel supply in the world."

He concludes the article, "Beam me up Scotty". Perhaps we will not need to be beamed up if we all have hydrogen fuel cell vehicles.

What is the wonderful holy grail of hydrogen fuel cells? As anyone with O-level chemistry will know, if hydrogen is burned, water is the tailpipe emission. The BMW group has been working on that process and earlier in the year in Berlin—unfortunately, I was unable to attend—it tested a series 7 BMW using hydrogen as an internal combustion engine fuel. That may not be the most efficient way of burning hydrogen, but it considerably reduces emissions of all sorts.

Fuel cells, however, are slightly different. Luckily for me and my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Mr. Miller), who was with me in Monaco,

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some of the top scientists in the General Motors group came to explain to us exactly how they work. I have a basic knowledge up to O-level of chemistry, physics and so forth so it stretched my knowledge to understand what they tried to show me. Even I managed to understand it.

The principal basis for fuel cells is as follows: as every schoolboy knows, if one puts two electrodes in water and passes an electric current through them, the water will electrolyse into its constituent components of hydrogen and oxygen. I did not realise that if one then tries to recombine those elements, one generates electricity. That is basic physics and chemistry. One passes the hydrogen through a catalytic process, which is being developed to try to speed up the chemical reaction. One passes the air through and combines the two, and one volt of electricity is generated.

Conveniently, that can be generated in as much as a 2 sq mm space. Therefore, with regard to the fuel stacks that the Minister mentioned, if one combines 200 or so of those tiny 2 sq mm squares, one generates not one volt but 200 volts. That is enough to drive quite a hefty electric motor, which runs on alternative current. Using the computer control system, one can alternate the current and thus produce a very powerful electric motor.

To demonstrate the power of that motor, GM installed such a fuel stack and electric motor into the current vehicle—a Vauxhall Zafira, which is called an Opel on the European continent. The Zafira is an Astra-based multi-purpose vehicle or MPV. The first thing that one notices when one gets into that car is that there is no gearbox; there is only a switch that goes forwards and backwards. The second thing one notices is that when one puts the key in the ignition and starts the engine, it clicks and nothing happens. There is a little screen and lots of graphs and figures flash in front of one's eyes. That meant nothing to me, but my co-driver said that it meant that the fuel cell was beginning to warm up—the hydrogen was coming through and generating electricity. Then one puts one's feet on the footbrake and the accelerator, one presses the forward button and the vehicle accelerates away.

It is amazing. It drives like a very quiet, gearless, automatic vehicle. There is no engine noise, but there is plenty of power. We drove the vehicle straight up a hill and round the Monte Carlo circuit, which was fun, although I did not manage to achieve a speed of 100 miles per hour. When it was competing with the other traffic on the roads, it was like driving an ordinary vehicle—there was plenty of power.

The scientists tell me that the amount of fuel cannot be measured in miles per gallon or litres per hundred kilometres or whatever: the amount of energy that is used for the distance covered has to be measured in kilojoules or megajoules. In lay person's language, one will get twice the amount of miles per gallon from hydrogen that one gets from the equivalent amount of petrol.

Mr. Chope: It is interesting to hear what is happening in Monaco. Did the hon. Gentleman have the chance to talk to the experts there about the incident that was reported in *The Times* on 17 October? Ford's £1.7 million Focus fuel cell vehicle came to a sudden halt while it was being driven in the Cornish rain and the world's top fuel cell engineers were unable to fix it.

Mr. Hamilton: One would not expect GM's engineers to comment on Ford's failures. All I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that GM's vehicles had no problem with driving in the warmer rain of Monaco or in our London rain. It had five vehicles on the roads; it has been driving them for two weeks in various weather conditions and there have not been any faults or hitches. We will rely on Ford's engineers to put their technologies right. However, the point is well made that this technology is still in an experimental and developmental stage. I have witnessed it at first hand: it is excellent and it works.

GM estimates that within two years it will have sufficient numbers of vehicles available for fleets—that is return-to-base fleets, so that the hydrogen refuelling can take place at those bases—and that it will be possible to buy them from a showroom within the next seven or eight years, by around 2010. That is sooner than we thought. However, that remains to be seen. The fact is that, in a conventional vehicle, the new technology seems to work well. Clearly, the tests were an attempt to ensure that opinion formers, Members of Parliament and others, especially journalists such as Mr. Gibson from *The Sun,* were publicising and pushing forward what GM is doing.

It is not only General Motors that has taken such action. Ford has developed its experimental car, the Focus Daimler-Chrysler, and is pushing ahead with fuel cells. About 70 per cent. of the world's manufacturing capacity—four major vehicle manufacturers—are moving ahead on fuel cell technology. What will happen remains to be seen, but we should encourage the development of hydrogen as a viable fuel. It is the most plentiful element in the universe.

I hope that the Minister did not mind my explaining how such matters work, but I felt that it was relevant to do so. Several major influential bodies in the United Kingdom have also been pushing ahead on low-carbon vehicle use. We have heard that 22 per cent. of carbon emissions are the result of automotive private vehicle emissions.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the German experience whereby diesel has zero duty. When I was listening to his well-made point, I was thinking that that is perhaps down to Volkswagon's preference for developing diesel and biodiesel fuels rather than for taking the hydrogen fuel cell route. That could have influenced the German policy on taxation.

As has been said, it is vital that the United Kingdom leads the world in developments, certainly the policy on low-carbon vehicles. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders said that the Government's short-term policies must provide adequate synergy with longer-term, more strategic approaches, such as fuel cell development; that policy initiatives must provide targeted support to assist in the development of new technologies throughout the full life cycle of a product, bearing it in mind that development production and market acceptance of a product can take up to 20 years; that European Union emission standards should form the basis of co-ordinated incentive programmes in the

United Kingdom marketplace; and that the Government should only incentivise fuels for which there are fuel standards. Those incentives must consider a fuel from well to wheel—a term that will be heard a lot more in the future.

Planning policy guidance should be reviewed to support the development of an adequate refuelling structure for alternative fuel vehicles. That brings me back to hydrogen. It is a great fuel, but how do we manufacture it? We all know roughly how we get hold of petrol and diesel. Such fuel comes from oil wells, is pumped into tankers, goes on to refineries and eventually is shipped to our petrol stations in big tankers and stored underground ready for us to use to refuel our vehicles.

What about hydrogen? There are two main methods of producing it, one is, as I already stated in my elementary chemistry lesson, to electrolise water. That requires electricity, which is generated mainly from non-renewable sources in this country, from gas-turbine power stations, coal-fired power stations, oil-fired power stations and nuclear power stations. Very little is generated from hydroelectric or wind power, although there are plenty of wind turbines in west Yorkshire.

Recently, I read in *The Times* that the Government are encouraging the development of wind-turbine generating electricity some 25 miles into the coastal waters offshore from the United Kingdom. A study has shown that it would be possible to generate 100 per cent. of our energy needs from offshore wind power within the next 25 to 30 years with sufficient investment. Let us consider that fact and relate it to the production of hydrogen. If we could generate our hydrogen from electricity that is derived entirely from renewable resources, we would achieve the aim of completely reducing CO_2 emissions and other dangerous gases. That is well worth aiming for, because the alternatives are to take hydrocarbons and use reformers. A reformer is a system that is designed to extract the hydrogen from fossil fuels and use it in a fuel cell or in internal combustion. That does not solve the problem.

I am not a supporter of nuclear electricity, but I am a strong supporter of wind power, wave power and hydroelectric power. If it is true that 100 per cent. of our electricity needs can be provided from such renewable sources, combined with photovoltaic cells in new houses and anything that we can do individually in our own homes to generate electricity and put the excess back into the grid, we will have a sustainable form of energy production for domestic use, public buildings and our automotive requirements. I hope that the Minister is listening and that the Government will be encouraged to move in that direction. They have already made great strides, but if we could achieve that, we would lead the world in low, or zero, carbon emissions within the time scale that we have talked about in relation to the rest of the world.

With those few comments I encourage the Government to do more of the same and I congratulate them on the steps that they have taken so far. With these developments and with the kind of investment that is being made, I am optimistic about the future. I hope that all of us will play our part and reduce our own emissions and thereby encourage the development of the technologies that will save our planet.

3.41 pm

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): It is a pleasure to follow, and to listen to, such an enthusiast for the subject as the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton).

The Liberal Democrats welcome the publication of the strategy. We think that it is well merited and that its content leads substantially in the right direction, so as to take the country forward appropriately. I welcome the debate, which is of a high quality although the Chamber is not exactly crowded. I also welcome the Minister's intention to seek approval across the whole House and to take the matter forward in a non-partisan way. I am sure that some of the decisions that need to be taken will have to stick not just for five or 10 years, but for 15, 20, or 25 years. If such decisions are to be sustainable, cross-party consensus is required.

There is an urgent and important need to reduce carbon and greenhouse gas emissions. We also need, particularly as far as the transport fleet is concerned, to ensure that we cut further the emission of particulates and pollutants. Hon. Members have already spoken about the position in central London. It is the same in many urban areas, in which the most significant air polluters are road transport vehicles. The other main necessity, apart from reducing gases and pollutants, is to reduce the number of vehicle and traffic movements, because of the congestion that they cause and the economic cost. If this country is to succeed in doing that, we must employ a combination of measures.

The report is primarily about the introduction of new technologies, which we certainly need. However, we also need a new culture—fiscal and regulatory measures will have a part to play in creating that—and a modal shift in the way in which people transport themselves and their goods around the country. From that point of view, it is timely that today's debate should be held in the same week as the transport statement.

Travelling by train from London to my constituency in Stockport, I generate some 8 kg of carbon emissions. If I travelled in a reasonably efficient motor vehicle, it would generate 28 kg of carbon emissions. The emissions generated by road travel are three or four times worse than travel by train. Widening the M6 while denying investment to the west coast main line cuts across some of the Minister's objectives.

Mr. Chope: Surely emissions depend on how many people travel by train, which is why the transport Green Paper states very clearly that a bus, for example, with very few passengers on board is more polluting than a car.

Mr. Stunell: The hon. Gentleman makes a sensible point. I took my figures from a parliamentary answer, which related to journeys from London to Newcastle, given to my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on 20 November. The figures relate to average occupancy rates, which are, of course, important.

Mr. Jamieson: I cannot allow the moment to pass: I thought that I heard the hon. Gentleman say that the Government are "denying investment to the west coast main line". The work, which costs many billions of

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pounds, on the west coast main line is probably the greatest investment in our railway system for 100 years. To say that we are denying investment to the west coast main line is frankly nonsense.

Mr. Stunell: We have livened up the debate, which is good. I am well aware of the current investment in the west coast main line, which will produce a line on which trains travel at 120 mph while the operator has bought trains that can travel at 140 mph. If the Minister were to underwrite the necessary improvements to raise track speeds to 140 mph, I would be delighted.

Mr. Jamieson: I am interested in pursuing the issue. The hon. Gentleman suggests that we should spend more money on the west coast main line, but he was probably not present in other Westminster Hall debates in which Liberal Democrat transport spokesmen were asked how much more they would contribute to the transport budget. They said that they would contribute no extra money because the 1p that they would put on tax would be for education. I have heard what the hon. Gentleman has said and I do not disagree with him, but he needs to check whether the Liberal Democrat Treasury spokesman has cleared his calls for extra funding.

Mr. Stunell: The question is not whether we take money from education, but whether we take it from the M6 and spend it on the west coast main line. That could be the subject of another debate in which I should be happy to take part.

Mr. Chope: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that his party's policy is to take money away from the M6 and put it into the west coast main line?

Mr. Stunell: I am making a point in the context of reducing carbon emissions in our transport system. If the Government were joining up their policies in the areas covered by today's debate and this week's transport statement, they would have announced a decision to upgrade the west coast main line, which would reduce carbon emissions by a greater extent than their investment in the M6. It is a matter of joining up the policies pursued by different Government Departments, which is an issue to which I shall return.

Issues relating to technology form the core of the strategy paper. The Liberal Democrats see the issue in terms of three distinct steps. First, there is a clear necessity to produce more improvements in the efficiency of our existing petrol and diesel-fuelled vehicles. There is no doubt that it is possible to build a petrol-fuelled vehicle that runs at about 90 to 95 miles per gallon. We need to ensure that the European voluntary code is demanding of, and imposes increasingly tight requirements on, manufacturers and that we move towards a far more progressive and efficient conventional vehicle fleet. It will probably require changes to the fiscal regime relating to excise duty and other matters, and to the regulatory regime, too.

Secondly, we need a transfer to alternative fuels; the Minister and the Conservative spokesman have extensively referred to biofuels. We need to consider how fuel duty rebate works in the public transport industry in particular, because it gives an artificial incentive to people to use diesel as their fuel, which surely counters the impact that the Government want to achieve.

Thirdly, we must move to the next generation of fuels and vehicles, and talk about the introduction of renewable fuels. We heard a most learned exposition of hydrogen fuels from the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East, on which I shall not attempt to improve. He touched on a matter that is of great importance when we talk about novel fuels for the future: we must consider the whole picture—not just the cleanliness and availability of fuel, but where it comes from and how it is generated. Again, I hope that the Government will be able to join up not just their own thinking but the thinking of the wider industry.

The pressures to develop renewable energy generation for electricity and to find clean fuel for a transport fleet can be brought together in an efficient and effective way when one uses the peaks of generation of renewable electricity to produce the hydrogen used in our vehicle fleet. In that way, hydrogen provides the storage reservoir or battery that can act as the cushion between the intermittency of some of our renewable generation sources and the requirements for electricity on the electrical grid and of power in the transport network. There is work to be done in bringing together innovative and separated thinking in those two areas, from which both public policy and private profit can gain.

I shall now look at the draft strategy in a little detail and pick out one or two points on which I would be interested to hear comments from the Minister. I entirely agree with his underlying point that it is not the Government's job to pick a winning technology. The history of investment in science and industry in this country during the past 50 years is littered with white elephants and lame ducks in which Governments who thought they knew better, but did not, invested. It is appropriate for the Government to invest widely, and plant in many different fields to see which plants flourish and grow. They will then be providing the environment in which the new technologies can be substituted for existing ones.

I regard the draft strategy paper as a welcome addition to the jigsaw of policy required to take us to an ultimately sustainable transport system. It has to be capable of delivering both prosperity and quality of life, which leads to an interesting mixture of private investment, public policy and a matching of environmental and economic measures. However, there are one or two gaps on which I want to test the Minister. I hope that he will feel able to answer my points—if not now, later. The paper includes a reference to allowing those who run buses and commercial vehicles to join the UK carbon trading scheme. That seems to be a desirable objective, but in the past week we have seen an entirely different European Union carbon trading scheme emerge.

Some serious difficulties are expected in integrating the UK and EU schemes. Does the Minister think that integrating bus and commercial vehicle emissions into a carbon trading scheme is best done through the UK scheme—which has a comparatively short time frame, going through to about 2008—or through joining the EU trading scheme, which starts at about the same time

but on a much more comprehensive Europe-wide basis? The strategy refers to co-operating with Europe, working with it on the design of vehicle fleets and creating a common market for the sale of new technologies on a level playing field. Therefore, the Government may well feel that it is better to aim for the EU scheme.

My next point is on the phrase:

"Making fullest use of new vehicles and fuels in the Government's own vehicle fleets",

which I link to the point made in the strategy's summary:

"Encouraging consumer take-up of new vehicles and fuels".

I note that, in fact, the average engine size in the Government's ministerial vehicle fleet increased between 2001 and 2002 by 2.2 per cent. The number of ministerial cars has increased by 10.7 per cent. from 187 to 207. The budget for ministerial cars rose from £10 million in 1998 to £14 million in 2001—a 40 per cent. increase. I should be interested to hear from the Minister how many of those cars take account of this strategy. Why are there bigger engines and more cars? Are they all low-emission vehicles? Let us have some background on that.

I use that point to draw the Minister's attention to the fact that, in many public sector leasing schemes and private finance initiative schemes, the purchasing of vehicles is on a least-cost basis and does not take sufficient account of vehicles' efficiency or public policy on emissions. An example has been drawn to my attention this week, although it does not relate to transport, of a school built under the PFI where, under questioning from the school governors, the designers admitted that they had kept the building to the very minimum requirement of building regulations relating to energy efficiency because they were required to achieve the lowest possible cost. I would like assurance that this document contains not merely aims and aspirations, but something that will produce a real difference—not just in other people's behaviour, but in the Government's.

My next point is about ensuring effective links between Government Departments. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) made some points on that. I do not want to criticise the Minister for not having convened a meeting yet—everything must start sometime. There must be a first meeting on one date or another, and it just happens to be in January. That is fine, but when one looks at the document and sees who sits on the panel, and some of the issues that are still to be sorted out, it is clear that there must be much better links between the Department of Trade and Industry with its "Foresight" programme and the Department for Transport with its "PowerShift" programme.

An underlying problem in attempting to fulfil our environmental commitments is still that there is such a division of responsibility between Government Departments, and such a fragmentation of functions, that it is more and more difficult to see how co-ordination can be achieved. Sometimes it seems difficult enough to get co-ordination within one Department; to get it among four or five is a challenging task, and I should like the Minister to tell us how he will ensure that this topic gets the comprehensive push that it needs on all fronts.

The document contains some excellent aims and poses some challenging questions. I shall attempt to answer a couple of those. First, should there be long-term targets for the number of low-carbon vehicles in future years? As the Minister said, there is a target of 10 per cent. by 2010 for low-emission cars and a 20 per cent. target for buses and public service vehicles. That is obviously good and desirable. My answer to the question is that there should be progressive long-term targets, not only because targets are nice to have, but because that is the best foundation for investment by the private sector, which will know for certain that there will be a market and a demand for its products, and the best signal that one can give to consumers that they are making the right choice in going to the market for a low-emission vehicle. To that extent, I join the hon. Member for Christchurch in his comments about the need to provide longer-term certainty about fuel duty rates, excise duty and other taxation measures, so that those who are making a purchase—which is, after all, an investment—can have some understanding of whether their investment will pay off.

Secondly, the document asks what is an adequate definition of low-carbon emissions. Liberal Democrat Members believe that it must be what the hon. Member for Leeds, North-East described as a "well to wheels" calculation. In other words, one must consider the total amount of carbon emissions generated in getting the car on the road and the total amount of emissions that it will produce when it is on the road. Not only the use, but the construction of the vehicle must be calculated and understood. In reality, a vehicle often requires more energy and produces more carbon emissions while it is being built than it will ever burn as fuel. Efficient construction using renewable energy and recyclable materials is as important as the fuel that is subsequently burned and the efficiency with which it is burned.

My colleagues and I welcome the strategy document, and look forward to contributing ideas and evidence as the strategy develops. I personally wish the Minister well in achieving objectives that I think that everybody shares.

4.2 pm

Mr. Jamieson: I should like to respond to some of the points that have been made in this short, but high-quality debate. I am glad that the Government's strategy is generally welcomed. Rightly, questions have been raised about certain aspects. We welcome constructive criticism and thoughts on what we are doing—we certainly do not think that we have a monopoly on good ideas. One of our reasons for establishing the partnership group was so that we could draw in ideas from much wider sources.

I think that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) was welcoming the strategy. Even if he was not, I shall assume that he was. He said that the Government are not doing quite enough on this issue. I do not want to bring party politics into this, but I gently suggest to him that we may be doing rather more than any other Government have ever done before. That includes Governments of all parties, including some of our own in the past. He mentioned an annual report on the powering future vehicles initiative. We launched the idea in December 2001. That was followed by a three-month consultation period, then a period of

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deliberation on its results, which had brought in many views from a wide range of people, and we published the document in July this year. Since then, we have been setting up the partnership group and drawing in industry, local government representatives and other people. It has taken time to contact the people who are interested and to get the right people involved.

The partnership group will be launched and will meet on, I believe, 16 January. It will inform some of the discussions of the ministerial group, which will consider its deliberations. We will produce an annual report once a full year has passed. We have not yet issued an annual report because we have not met and because a year has not passed since publication of the document.

I thought that the hon. Member for Christchurch was a bit churlish about the Government's approach to liquid petroleum gas. He questioned whether our heart was in this. If it were not, why would we have given fiscal incentives in the first place? The Government provided fiscal incentives for LPG because the environmental case has been made about CO_2 and the other emissions that he mentioned, such as fine particulates from diesel engines, which are particularly damaging to children. It is because the case has been made that the Government gave fiscal incentives.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether we were doing enough. There has been a considerable increase in the take-up of LPG and the number of stations that have opened, so it appears that our strategy is right. He rightly asked about future incentives for LPG. We realise that a decision must be made fairly soon about the 2004 date. As I said in reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), there has been a change during the past few years in the difference between the benefits to be derived from LPG and those to be derived from petrol. We are giving the matter careful thought. Indeed, I was at a meeting this morning to discuss the issue. We want to continue to use fiscal incentives to ensure that we create demand for cleaner fuels and vehicles, but any fiscal incentive must reflect the true emission benefits of those fuels and vehicles.

Mr. Chope: The Minister says that a decision will be made fairly soon. Will it be made before the next Budget?

Mr. Jamieson: Such decisions are in the gift of the Chancellor, of course, but we can see reasons for making a decision fairly soon. We want to ensure that we continue to provide an incentive.

However, the decision must be properly informed. Such matters must be carefully thought through and weighed. We want to take into account what the motor and the oil industries and consumers have to say. In recent years, the Treasury has taken a sensitive approach to such matters. We have worked very well with the Treasury. It has listened carefully to what we have said—and we have had to listen to what it has said. It has responded sensitively to some of the matters that the hon. Gentleman raised, not least company car tax, which we have not talked about much today. Company cars make up about half of all cars purchased. The company car tax now provides benefits that have led fleet buyers to consider vehicles that are more carbon dioxide-friendly.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman's comments about biodiesel. It has given enormous potential for improvement. Since we introduced the biodiesel incentive in July, there has been a six fold increase in sales, which is welcome. Some 400,000 litres were sold during November. We are moving forward, but more needs to be done. We need to see how the biodiesel industry will respond to that incentive. The hon. Member for Christchurch was right to point out that biodiesel tends to be part of a mix, and is a proportion of the total fuel.

At the moment, most vehicles can satisfactorily run on ordinary diesel containing about 5 per cent. biodiesel. That 5 per cent. is CO_2 neutral, which also has the benefit of making the old diesel burn a little cleaner. There are benefits, and we need to look at how the 20p levy is performing to see whether it needs to be adjusted.

The Conservative party may be deliberating about its transport policy, and may form a view as to what the incentive level should be. I appreciate that it will be in opposition for a long time and may not have to face that problem, but if the hon. Member for Christchurch has a view on the matter, we would be interested to hear it.

Mr. Chope: It would be sensible for us to give a long-term policy commitment on the issue as we approach the general election. People will be making investment decisions and will want to know what the position will be when there is a change of Government. We shall seek to meet that challenge.

Mr. Jamieson: I look forward with great eagerness to seeing those documents; I look forward with equal eagerness to the outcome of the general election.

The hon. Gentleman said that one of the benefits of a new Labour Government is that more new cars are being sold. That is because the country is more prosperous than it was five years ago. There are now 1.5 million more people in work, some of whom travel to work by car. They have more money to spend, more leisure time and more work to do, but unfortunately that has created some problems: economic prosperity brings congestion and pollution problems. That is very much in our thoughts.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North unfortunately could not stay with us, but he asked about a zero emission vehicle. I think that he may have been referring to a vehicle powered by compressed air, which would mean zero emissions from the tailpipe. I saw a little article about that very interesting idea. The only thing I would say—we probably covered this in the discussion about hydrogen—is that compressed air needs to be compressed by something, which would usually be electricity. If the electricity is generated by fuels that create carbon dioxide, the car would not seem to have many carbon dioxide benefits. Of course, it may have benefits in lowering emissions in town and city centres.

My hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-East (Mr. Hamilton) made a very good contribution to the debate. He is clearly knowledgeable, and made many considered remarks. He referred to the debate that we had a few years ago, and looked at the test that he set to see how we were getting on. I am glad to say that I was mentally ticking off many of the points as he went

through them. It seems that much of what he was asking for has been done, or is now under way. We shall be interested in taking forward some of the ideas that have not been adopted. I hope that he enjoyed the journey in the hydrogen car that he took the other day.

My hon. Friend also made an important point about buses and pollution. Unfortunately, we are—for obvious reasons—encouraging people to use buses, and we have to ensure that the emissions from those buses do not cause yet another problem: pollution. In some cities, buses are now the major polluters. We want to ensure that that is not the case, because we are trying to encourage people to use buses more than they have done.

Mr. Fabian Hamilton: I am delighted that my hon. Friend is looking at buses. London is obviously the key place, and he referred to experimental fuel cell buses. The congestion charging that is being introduced by the Mayor of London includes an exception for LPG vehicles and, presumably, hydrogen-powered vehicles, if there are any.

Mr. Jamieson: I am pleased that congestion charging is about not just congestion but air quality. I believe that one of the Mayor's concessions is that cleaner vehicles, including electric vehicles, will be exempt from the charge. Manufacturers who are on their toes could use that as a marketing device for some of their vehicles: if congestion charging occurs in other cities, that device could be a further incentive for people to buy their vehicles.

My hon. Friend gave an interesting integrated science lesson today with a little chemistry and a little physics. He gave an account of electrolysis—my O-levels from the 1960s just about encompassed the science involved. He said, rightly, that one way of producing hydrogen is through electrolysis using electricity. That has enormous benefits because the power lines of which we have an abundance in this country are channels through which the hydrogen is sent by proxy to the communities where it is needed. That obviates the need for transporter lorries carrying fuel from one place to another with an effect not just on pollution and environmental damage, but on safety. It is a safer way of conducting energy through a pipeline or wire. The emissions from the tailpipe are not zero, but a bit of water will not hurt us—we seem to have had plenty of water in the streets in the past few days—and it is the only by-product.

The hon. Members for Christchurch and for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) both said that unless the electricity is produced by sustainable means, there is no carbon dioxide benefit. We get the emissions benefit on the streets, but we do not get the carbon dioxide benefit. Another issue is that producing hydrogen for transport and incentivising it is probably one of the more expensive ways of reducing energy use. It is cheaper to incentivise energy reduction in homes and factories than in transport. There will be some earlier hits in energy and CO_2 reduction by other means. Transport will play its part later, which is why it is so important to lay the foundation stones now and to get ourselves ready to face the future.

I thank the hon. Member for Hazel Grove for his welcome for the powering future vehicles strategy, which he dealt with in a non-partisan way. I hope he did not feel that I introduced too much of a partisan element, but I have discovered in this job that we must often consider priorities and weigh up their value. I note what he said about the M6. It is possible to move money from one budget account to another, but I wonder whether he has asked his constituents in the Hazel Grove and Stockport areas whether the M6 should have improvements made to them. If he carried out a survey among his constituents, he might find that they have a view about the M6, just as they would have a view about the west coast main line. It is our job to find a balance. The issue is not either/or; it is a matter of finding a balance.

Mr. Stunell: The Minister is right to say that the issue concerns priorities. If I were ploughing a solely constituency interest today, I would say that the metro tram to Stockport is also important. We all have schemes that we would like to see implemented, but I was trying to make a specific point about the relative value of investment in reducing carbon emissions in the transport system, as exemplified by this week's statement. I appreciate that there are choices to be made, but the environmental imperative does not seem to have been at the heart of the decision.

Mr. Jamieson: I think it was. The slow-moving traffic on the M6 and the M1 is a major contributor to pollution. Under a certain level, the slower that vehicles go, the more pollution they cause. Stop-starting is the most polluting part of a vehicle's cycle, so there are environmental benefits to getting traffic moving.

Obviously, the Government are considering environmental benefits, such as cleaner air. We want to get as much freight and as many passengers as possible away from the roads and on to the railways. Nevertheless, there must be a balance. There will still be a need for road transport. The hon. Gentleman's constituents will still want to travel on motorways and have their goods brought to the shops in that way, if no other means are possible. I am sure that he appreciates that we have to facilitate that.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned hydrogen being produced from off-peak electricity. That is certainly one of the benefits of using hydrogen as a fuel. A hydrogen battery is a far better way of storing energy than pumping water up and down a hill, which is the way in which it was stored at Dinorwic. That method was useful in its time, but may have limited value compared with the way in which hydrogen can be stored.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the United Kingdom and European Union carbon trading schemes. It is true that there is an EU scheme as well as a UK scheme. However, the details of the EU scheme are still being finalised. We shall work to resolve or minimise potential conflicts between the two schemes.

The hon. Gentleman rightly said that it is not for the Government to pick winners. In the document, we said that the winner is the low-carbon future, rather than a particular technology. We did not plump for one technology because we felt that there were dangers in doing so—the hon. Gentleman articulated those dangers very well. The Government do not have complete wisdom in relation to such matters. Sometimes, the market drives things forward and

[Mr. Jamieson]

greater brains from outside come up with brilliant solutions. As a democratic Government, we want cleaner air, better engines, quieter vehicles and continuity of energy supply. However, it is up to scientists and technologists to come up with the solutions, because generally they know best.

The hon. Gentleman asked some questions about Government vehicles. The Government dispatch service uses compressed natural gas vehicles. A large number of ministerial cars run on liquefied petroleum gas. The one that I use occasionally is LPG powered. There is pressure to look to hybrid vehicles. We are torn between choosing cleaner vehicles and choosing vehicles that have the Union flag on the back. Other pressures are placed on us, and we have to resolve such things. Generally, there is a move towards getting cleaner vehicles in the fleet. If the hon. Gentleman wants me, or the Minister responsible for that area, to set things out in more detail, that can be arranged.

The hon. Gentleman also made a point about the Government group. A group of Ministers has been meeting through the Cabinet committee that has been discussing this matter. There has been a great deal of accord and we shall continue to meet. We jointly attended the launch and interdepartmental work will be done on other launches. We will work together. It is difficult if people in government all work in their silos, but on this issue we are working together to resolve what are very important matters.

The hon. Gentleman made some good points about getting long-term certainty in fiscal incentives. He is absolutely right. However, as I said, there must be balance and occasional review to ensure that the fiscal incentives are giving us what we want and delivering a cleaner environment.

Mr. Stunell: I thank the Minister for his response. Obviously, we must check and audit to ensure that we are getting the right result. Does the Minister think that formal revisiting of the targets will form part of the strategy? Will there be a five-year or 10-year look? That would help us to understand the Minister's thinking.

Mr. Jamieson: We are committed to reviewing the targets, because it is sensible to do so. We have reviewed several targets that we set ourselves. We want to ensure that the targets are realistic. For example, had we set targets a few years ago for the number of LPG stations that we wanted, we would have well surpassed them by now—we would not have set as high a target as the 1,200 stations that are open. Had we set a target for the number of LPG vehicles that we want on the road, it would have been somewhat higher than the number that is on the road now. We want more such vehicles.

The hon. Member for Christchurch made a point about LPG. It is important that good-quality conversions that give true benefits are made to vehicles. About 80 per cent. of conversions are being done in under-the-arches garages. Although they are not necessarily bad conversions—some will be very good—about 80 per cent. of vehicles are not benefiting from the PowerShift grant. A proportion of the conversions are done with customers being misled that they can claim the grant retrospectively—of course, they cannot. Also, some conversions are poor or even dangerous, because the proper equipment is not fitted to protect against a blow-back or a leak of fuel that is not attended to. We do not want that, because some poorly fitted conversions might not give an emissions benefit. Such conversions give a fiscal benefit to car owners through fuel purchases, but we want to ensure that fiscal benefits improve air quality. The poor conversions that might be dangerous, in rare cases, do not successfully promote LPG. The same thing would happen with petrol vehicles if petrol tanks were fitted dangerously. Petrol tanks are very dangerous pieces of equipment.

Mr. Chope: The Minister makes a good point. Will he consider whether the MOT test should cover such conversions? I understand that there is no requirement for conversions to be tested. There is a further issue of additional insurance costs and the invalidation of a vehicle's warranty if an unauthorised conversion is carried out.

Mr. Jamieson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that good point. We did not anticipate the large number of people who would set up businesses to do conversions on an ad hoc basis, which shows how difficult these things are. We thought that the vast majority of people would try to get the PowerShift grant, which may represent up to 60 per cent. of the substantial conversion cost. We have concerns about that and are examining the best ways of tackling it. The avenue that the hon. Gentleman mentioned might be one way of doing that, or we could use a certification system that would be required for a vehicle to receive other benefits, such as those for vehicle excise duty and company car tax.

We have had a short debate but it has been of a high quality. We have covered a wide range of issues and found much cross-party accord, which is rare in both Westminster Hall and the Chamber. I thank hon. Members who participated in the debate and I hope that we shall have further opportunities to debate the issues as our policy unfolds. In the end, we have a great interest in having a transport system that serves our economy and delivers goods and people, but that must be done in a way that reflects environmental concerns, both globally and in our cities.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Four o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Tuesday 17 December 2002

[SIR MICHAEL LORD *in the Chair*]

Zimbabwe

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Caplin.]*

9.30 am

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): I start by saying gently to the Minister that it is disappointing that we have to have a debate on Zimbabwe in Westminster Hall. You will recall, Sir Michael, that many of us have called regularly on the Leader of the House to arrange for the Foreign Secretary to give a regular statement on the Floor of the House on the deteriorating situation in Zimbabwe. I believe that the Foreign Secretary gave us such an undertaking six or nine months ago, but sadly it has not been fulfilled. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that and point out to the Foreign Secretary when he next speaks to him, as no doubt he will later today, that it would be helpful if the whole House could cross-examine him on the Floor of the House on the situation in Zimbabwe.

I intend to stress three separate points—the current position in Zimbabwe, the response to that position, and, most important, where we go from here. The situation in Zimbabwe is dire. During the year, there have been two dreadfully flawed elections: the general election in March, and local elections on 28 and 29 September, which were so deeply flawed that it was clear that thugs from ZANU-PF were telling local tribal leaders that there would be no food if they did not ensure that ZANU-PF's canvas won in their areas. There has rarely been an occasion in a so-called democracy when food has been used as an electoral weapon. That is disgraceful, and should be placed on the record.

You will also recall, Sir Michael, that Zimbabwe was formerly the most successful country in Africa. It is no longer so, due to a systematic destruction of its economy and institutions. The currency is completely debauched, and the only way in which many people survive is by obtaining hard currency from relatives abroad.

It is worth pointing out that real problems have arisen during the past week that will continue until Christmas as relatives return, especially from Botswana and South Africa. They are being treated most brutally at the border; their hard currency is being taken from them and, no doubt, is corruptly going into the hands of officials and Ministers. For many of those people, that money was the only way their families were going to survive.

There is a desperate food shortage, which cannot be excused solely on the grounds of the drought. There have been droughts before and there will be droughts again in sub-Saharan Africa. Until now, the commercial farms have coped extraordinarily well with droughts, as have the grain distributors. In other words, grain has been put away in good times to see the country through the droughts and the difficulties. However, that is not happening now. Indeed, no proper farming is going on. Grain has been sold on the black market to the obvious benefit of Government officials, although a large part of the country is starving, and the World Food Programme has recently said that it does not believe that it will be able to cope with feeding the population.

The tragic figure, which unfortunately is true, is that 75 per cent. of the population of Zimbabwe now lives in poverty. That would be an extraordinarily high level anywhere in the world, but for a country that was once prosperous, successful and a food exporter, it is shocking and disgraceful.

The international response can best be summed up as too much bark and too little bite. We and other western countries have talked a good war, but have done precious little. Some critics would say that the bark has been counter-productive in Africa and the lack of bite has been counter-productive in bringing ZANU-PF to heel. However, if that has been our response, the lack of response within Africa has been devastating. That has damaged perceptions of southern Africa and weakened the promising but embryonic New Partnership for Africa's Development—NEPAD—and the African Union, which I believe everyone in this Chamber supports. The lack of response also has an adverse effect on investment, not only in Zimbabwe but throughout southern Africa.

I hope that leaders elsewhere in sub-Saharan Africa, perhaps particularly in South Africa, will reflect on this debate and the fact that the continuing deterioration of the situation in Zimbabwe and the lack of regional action are harming not only the people of Zimbabwe but the whole of southern Africa. We, and to a greater extent they, will have to live with the consequences.

Enough of the current situation and the inadequate responses to date. Let us now try to be positive and see what we can do to help. Our prime objective must be to isolate ZANU-PF in every possible way and make life so uncomfortable for that party that its evil regime will be unable to function in future. It is a regime, not one man, although it is easy to demonise Robert Mugabe—he is bad; he is evil. As my hon. Friend the Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) said on the Floor of the House last week, he is comparable with Milosevic and other dictators who abuse human rights.

However, the corruption has spread much wider. The whole ZANU-PF apparatus is corrupt. The senior civil service is corrupt. Much of the commercial world that remains in Zimbabwe is corrupt. Above all, the army is not only brutal but extremely corrupt, as we saw with the recent rape of the Congo, which was hugely to the financial benefit of senior army officers, who pillaged diamonds and other reserves. So what do we do about that? The most important thing is to enforce existing sanctions more rigorously and ensure that they are renewed in February.

Travel is a sensitive issue, as the sanctions include a restriction on ZANU-PF leaders travelling. It causes great hurt in and outside Zimbabwe that senior Ministers and other thugs attend meetings in Europe and elsewhere. We are told that that is because of international law, as they are attending United Nations-sponsored conferences, for example. I am not satisfied with that, and we should pursue it further. However, when these wretched people attend a conference they

[Mr. Andrew Mackay]

should be completely restricted to it. The moment that they step outside the conference, except when returning to the airport, they should be deported. They should not be allowed to use attendance at a conference as an excuse to wander up Oxford street and Jermyn street to buy all they want with their looted proceeds, and they should not be able to visit friends and family. To put it bluntly, they should be harassed from the moment they arrive to the moment they leave.

I call for an expansion of the list of those targeted to cover the commercial supporters of the regime in Zimbabwe, who so far seem to have got off completely—the bankers and those who front ZANU-PF's economic interests, including safari operators. Many of those people are white and they benefit hugely from the regime. I hope that when the sanctions are reviewed their travel will be restricted. We know what type they are. Who was the most prominent supporter in this country of the Mugabe regime? None other than Mr. Nicholas van Hoogstraten, one of the most dangerous, vicious crooks that this country has seen, an evil man who is now behind bars and will be for a long time. That is the quality of the backers and supporters of the Mugabe regime.

The sanctions should be further expanded to include another layer of politicians and civil servants, including ZANU-PF Members of Parliament and senior civil servants, who must be subject to the same restrictions as Ministers and Army leaders. I encourage the Minister also to ban their immediate families from travelling, including children and relatives who are being educated in the west. Some will say, "Ah, if we educate these people they will see that western democracy works, so they should be excluded from such a ban," but I do not believe that that will happen. I am convinced that money looted from Zimbabwe, which should go into state education in that country, is instead going into private education in the United Kingdom, America and elsewhere, and that is morally wrong. We should make it absolutely clear that no members of the family of anyone on the sanction list, including the commercial backers, will be allowed any form of education in this country.

I single out one person about whom I would appreciate a response from the Minister. Like me, he will have read a recent article in *The Sunday Times* about an evil thug called Chris Pasipamire. It is wrong that he came to this country as a student and his deportation, if it is not already under way, should take place very shortly indeed.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Has the hon. Gentleman considered the question of sporting sanctions? Does he support a call to the England cricket authorities for England not to play its world cup matches in Zimbabwe next year, as do many Labour Members?

Mr. Mackay: That is my next point, and I do not believe that the hon. Gentleman will be disappointed by what I have to say.

It is important to extend sanctions a stage further, so that whenever anyone who has been involved in human rights abuses and torture enters the jurisdiction of the civilised world, they are arrested under the international convention against torture. Incidentally, in the obscene league table of human rights abuses around the world, Zimbabwe is near the top of the premier division. I am disappointed that we have not yet seen any arrests. As the Minister will be aware, under that convention, people can be tried outside Zimbabwe. In other words, we arrest, we detain, and, if the person is found guilty, we imprison them for a long time.

I have files, as no doubt the Minister does, containing detailed cases of torture of anyone in Zimbabwe who holds an independent view, particularly members of the Movement for Democratic Change. Those cases are horrific to read. It is essential that there are arrests, prosecutions and convictions under the international convention soon.

I will make a final point about sanctions. I hope that the Minister and the Prime Minister will mount a campaign to expose the extent of stolen assets from Zimbabwe in countries that have declined to participate in an asset freeze. Let us start embarrassing the many countries that are happy to make a quick buck by taking that tainted, dirty money. I also suggest to the Minister that the United States has performed well below the standards that we have come to expect from the world's leading democracy. The bureaucracy in the USA has been so inept that it has still not imposed an asset freeze on any of the funds from Zimbabwe that are there. I find that inconceivable. The USA, with the European Union, should be taking the lead, rather than being a laggard. I hope that pressure can be put on our US allies and friends.

There are two other areas in which I believe that we should take action. The first is the dire food shortage in Zimbabwe. People are dying in huge numbers, and the situation is worsened by the AIDS epidemic, which is weakening people and making them more susceptible to the food shortage.

As the Minister will readily acknowledge, food is being given only to supporters of the regime. The areas that backed the Movement for Democratic Change in this year's election are being starved, and the non-governmental organisations cannot always get through to those areas. The Zimbabwean Government systematically try to stop any food getting through. I urge the Minister to arrange, with our allies and partners, an international airlift of food to the isolated regions that voted for the MDC, which are facing a real humanitarian crisis. That is a matter of urgency.

My final suggestion follows from what the hon. Member for Harrow, West (Mr. Thomas) just mentioned. In general terms, I have always opposed mixing politics with sport. It is not healthy or positive and it is in nobody's best interests. However, there are always exceptions. I very much back the motion tabled by my right hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram), which is on today's Order Paper calling for the International Cricket Council to think again about moving the world cup from South Africa to Zimbabwe. As the hon. Member for Harrow, West pointed out, this is a bipartisan issue. I should like to single out one other person for praise. The MEP

Glenys Kinnock has organised an excellent campaign within the European Parliament to ensure that pressure is put on the ICC.

If the world cup goes ahead it will legitimise an evil regime. Mugabe is the president of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union. I have no doubt that the sportsmen, officials and sports journalists who attend a world cup in Zimbabwe will be extremely well treated and well fed. They will see no problems or demonstrations and good cricket will be played, if that is possible with our present England team. That is not enough. It will do huge damage to cricket's reputation. It will condone evil. I hope that the Government are putting every possible private pressure on the ICC.

If the ICC does not agree to move the world cup from Zimbabwe to somewhere else—there are plenty of other places that would host it, or it could stay in South Africa—I hope that pressure will be put on our cricket team not to go. If that does not happen, it will send out a bleak message that cricket is more important than human rights, more important than torture and more important than starving your enemies to death, and that we live in a happy little complacent world where we can play cricket and all is well. It will do the great sport of cricket immense harm. I hope at the very least that our team will withdraw.

We need to do more. Many of us were disappointed yesterday when we listened to the Prime Minister in the Chamber giving what was, rightly, a very positive statement on the Copenhagen summit. It was an historic occasion with so many central European countries, free of the Soviet yoke, coming into the European Union. It was a great day. But there was no mention of Zimbabwe. There was no suggestion that high on the agenda in Copenhagen was a debate about what further action should to be taken by way of sanctions or other means against the Zimbabwe regime.

Many of us cannot help but feel that there is boredom and fatigue among western Governments. There is the crisis in the middle east. There is the war on international terrorism. There is the issue of Iraq. Therefore, Zimbabwe drops down the agenda. We will be judged very badly if we let black Africa down in the way that we would not have dreamed of letting the white Balkans down, where there was positive intervention against a similar evil and corrupt regime. I urge the Minister and the Government, their partners in the EU, their American allies and others to do more and to do it quickly; otherwise, we shall have even more blood on our hands.

9.54 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) on securing this morning's debate. He has done us all a service by once again drawing to the attention of the House the plight of Zimbabwe and the suffering that so many people will have to endure throughout Christmas and beyond. I apologise, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to you and other hon. Members for being unable, as a result of other parliamentary engagements, to be here for the summing-up speeches. However, I will in tomorrow's *Hansard* read with interest the contributions that I have missed.

The International Development Committee, of which I am a member, is holding an inquiry into the food crisis facing southern Africa. As part of that, we have examined the appalling humanitarian emergency that has developed in Zimbabwe. It is important for hon. Members and the public to appreciate that the ongoing problems of Zimbabwe have had repercussions extending far beyond its own borders.

Zimbabwe was once described as the bread basket of Africa and has traditionally been a net food exporter to its neighbour countries. However, many changes have arisen and the country now has the highest food aid requirement of any country in southern Africa. At the peak of the crisis, more than 6 million of its people—almost half the population—were in need of food. Up to next March, the country requires some 705,000 tonnes of food aid. That is a disturbing and tragic turnaround for Zimbabwe, and it has rightly caught the attention of the international community.

I accept that not all of the blame for Zimbabwe's food shortage can be attributed to Robert Mugabe and his regime. This year the country faced one of its worst droughts for 20 years. However, the political turmoil and land reform over which Mugabe has presided have served only to make an already appalling problem even worse. By removing so many white commercial farmers, he has contributed to the reduction of his country's maize production to a quarter of its customary level. Without food exports from Zimbabwe, more people in countries such as Malawi and Mozambique are now also starving.

My recent discussions with the Zimbabwean high commissioner confirmed what had previously been reported—abandoned farms are now owned by friends of Mr. Mugabe, and local people are unable to run them effectively because they lack expertise and, following years of employment at bread-line wages, capital.

The famine is now being exacerbated by the stranglehold of HIV/AIDS—a disease that has a grip on the whole region. According to Oxfam and Save the Children, 33 per cent. of adults in Zimbabwe are now HIV-positive, the third highest figure in the world. The stigmatisation of those living with the disease has left many in Zimbabwe refusing to be tested. A recent report suggested that as many as 90 per cent. do not even know that they are infected. With levels of detection so low, the true level of infection must be much higher. How can the war against HIV/AIDS be won when we do not know where the enemy is?

I am not belittling the money—according to answers to my parliamentary questions, some £7 million—that the Department for International Development has contributed towards the funding of the voluntary counselling and testing centres. I know that the Minister and the Secretary of State share my passion to tackle HIV/AIDS. However, I hope that the Minister will acknowledge that we have a long way to go before we can say that the fight is being won.

Part of the blame for the scale of the HIV/AIDS problem in Zimbabwe can also be attributed to the policies of President Mugabe and his regime. His fast-track land reform policy resulted in a huge movement of people, forcing changes to family units. As many NGOs have reported, such population mobility has only added to people's vulnerability and potential for acquiring

[John Barrett]

HIV. Mugabe has done nothing to tackle the marginalisation of people suffering from the disease. As if that were not enough, evidence suggests that people infected with HIV/AIDS find it even more difficult to access food aid because of stigma, impaired mobility and ostracism.

The AIDS profile research undertaken by the AIDS policy research centre at the university of California recently produced a report that described how HIV is seen in Zimbabwe as the disease of shame. People who suffer from HIV there are often treated with contempt and described as immoral, leaving them unable to access decent care and treatment services.

The politicisation of aid distribution, which has already been mentioned by the right hon. Member for Bracknell, is well documented. The channelling of food aid away from HIV sufferers urgently needs addressing. HIV has left a scar on Zimbabwe that is likely to take many years to heal.

As a result of the AIDS-related deaths of parents, it is now commonplace for grandparents, or even young children, to be looking after households of 10 children. Those deaths mean that knowledge and skills are not being passed from one generation to the next, leaving orphans to head households and to farm with minimal experience of agriculture. The impact of that on Zimbabwe's ability to fulfil its future security needs is considerable, and has created a long-term problem for which a long-term strategy is required.

The tale of Zimbabwe is tragic. A great deal of excellent work is being undertaken by the Department for International Development, and by NGOs on the ground. I pay tribute to their efforts, especially during the coming months. President Mugabe has created a broken country and has left the international community to pick up the pieces. Little or no hope exists for the future of many citizens of Zimbabwe, and they look to the international community to provide some. We, here, can and must respond to that challenge.

10.1 am

Tony Cunningham (Workington): I did not intend to speak in the debate; I intended merely to listen to what was said. I give credit to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) for giving me this opportunity to speak. I have an interest in the subject because the high commissioner in Zimbabwe is one of my constituents. I begin by paying tribute to him and all the staff in the high commission in Harare for the tremendous work that they continue to do in difficult circumstances.

I might differ from the right hon. Gentleman on the tactics that could be used and actions that could be taken, but I hope that all Members share an absolute abhorrence of what can only be described as a barbaric regime.

This man Mugabe is a dictator. He did not win the election, at least not freely, and it is difficult to deal with a situation in which it appears that the prime objective of a country's ruler is to destroy his country. It is difficult to put in place sanctions. With a normal, responsible leader—even a normal, responsible human being—pressure can be applied by saying that unless they behave themselves, we will do this or that. However, Mugabe wants the destruction of his country so it is difficult to put pressure on him to do otherwise.

Mugabe keeps going on about the need for land reform. I should like to put it on record that successive British Governments have supported land reform. We have tried to go down a legal route to give people—the Africans in Zimbabwe—an opportunity to own their own land. We must pursue a legal route, not a route that includes the barbaric treatment that many farmers are having to suffer in Zimbabwe.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell talked about positive action and made a comparison with the situation in the Balkans. I should like to think that this Government are doing a great deal in terms of positive action. I should not like to think that it is suggested that military action should be taken against Zimbabwe.

Mr. Mackay *indicated assent.*

Tony Cunningham: The right hon. Gentleman is nodding. I should not want those outside to get the impression that there will be military action. We need to do everything that we can to bring down the dictator. He is there illegally, he cheated in the election and he is creating a huge amount of suffering not only in his own country but around the rest of southern Africa.

I hope that the British Government are doing everything that they can to freeze assets and to impose sanctions. I should like to see more action from other southern African countries. It is important that we get a consensus across Africa because it is in the interests of all African countries to make sure that such an abhorrent dictator does not succeed. His reign should be brought to an end as quickly as possible and Zimbabwe should have a truly democratic Government, which would mean that we could start to deal with problems such as AIDS and food aid.

10.5 am

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay). He made a thoughtful speech, and I shall be interested to hear the Minister's responses to some of his comments. The contribution from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) was also opportune, given his Select Committee experience.

I shall amplify my intervention on the right hon. Member for Bracknell, and I want to use the debate to put a little more pressure on the English cricket authorities and the International Cricket Council over their continuing plans to play part of the cricket world cup in Zimbabwe next year. I am at a loss to understand how anybody could contemplate playing international sport in that country at a time when such destruction is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) said, being wreaked on the people of Zimbabwe by their own Government. My hon. Friend was right to say that successive British Governments, and in particular this Government, have supported land reform and have offered to help finance it, only for those efforts to be rebuffed by the leadership in Zimbabwe.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell was right to say that in general politics and sport should not be mixed, but it is difficult to stand aside and pretend that cricket

can be played at a time of such damage when so many people in Zimbabwe are being deliberately starved and being made to pay a price for taking part in democratic elections.

Tony Cunningham: Does my hon. Friend draw a distinction between the England cricket team going to Zimbabwe and Zimbabweans going to international competitions in other parts of the world? For example, we welcomed the Zimbabwe team to the Commonwealth games in Manchester.

Mr. Thomas: I understand that a distinction can be drawn, and it is probably true to say that most Zimbabwean sportsmen and sportswomen have no truck with the regime in their country. We have reached a point, however, at which we have to contemplate Zimbabwe's sporting isolation. I was not entirely comfortable with the participation of Zimbabwean sportsmen and women in the Commonwealth games in Manchester, although on balance it was right that they participated.

I felt very uncomfortable when the England cricket team toured Zimbabwe two years ago; I thought that it was wrong at the time and I said so. It would be entirely unjustified for England to go ahead with matches in Zimbabwe. If the ICC is not prepared to move the games scheduled to take place at Harare and elsewhere, the English cricket authorities should show some leadership and refuse to play in the area.

It is right to say that we work with other southern African Governments to put pressure on the leadership in Zimbabwe, and to ascertain how we can freeze assets. There are more important ways than through sport alone in which to put pressure on Zimbabwe and ZANU-PF, but those of us with an interest in sport believe that it can add its voice to that pressure. I hope that we shall see leadership by the English cricket authorities and the ICC and that world cup matches will not be played in Zimbabwe next year.

10.10 am

Mr. Michael Moore (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale): This has been an important debate, which rightly focuses our attention on one of the continuing disgraces in Africa and elsewhere. I add my congratulations to the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) on securing the debate. I endorse the point that he made at the outset that it is shame that we are forced to discuss Zimbabwe in Westminster Hall instead of having the opportunity to discuss it in Government time in the main Chamber. Perhaps the Minister will give some consideration to that and the various pleas that have been made to the Leader of the House for a debate in the House when it returns in the new year.

We have heard a range of contributions, which have rightly focused on the chronic situation in Zimbabwe. There is a consensus that all of us need to focus on a proper response. The economy is dire with inflation of well over 100 per cent., according to some reports; unemployment is more than 60 per cent.; starvation is rife; and the situation is exacerbated by a fuel crisis that is bringing the country to a halt, with the latest negotiations between it and its fuel supplier, Libya, apparently running into problems.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): I wonder what conclusion the hon. Gentleman draws from the latest reports from Zimbabwe that Mugabe is considering sequestration of the assets of some western oil companies in that country, and what implications that will have for the long-term future of Zimbabwe's economy.

Mr. Moore: The reports, which I have also read, are alarming and show the truly desperate situation that Mugabe has put himself into. It is a downward spiral in a country which, over a short period, has gone from being one of Africa's beacons and one of its wealthiest countries to a position in which almost anything of any good has been thrown away. I do not believe that Mugabe will solve his problems by nationalising foreign oil assets.

The state of the famine must be the focus of our humanitarian concern. When organisations such as the World Food Programme are forced to withdraw from their work in the south of the country, when there is widespread abuse of the aid that arrives in the country because it is being channelled by Mugabe only to his supporters and when almost 50 per cent. of the country's population are suffering starvation, that regime must at some point recognise its responsibilities. We are not arguing that the situation is solely Mugabe's fault, but the measures taken by him and his regime over a period of years, most notably in the past year, have undoubtedly exacerbated a dreadful situation and made the prospect of Zimbabwe finding its own way out of this particular mess very unlikely.

The famine has been made worse by the suffering that HIV/AIDS has caused many people, as my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said. That has happened in a wider situation that Mugabe has largely foisted on to his own country by his decisions. All observers outside the country and many inside believe that he cheated in the presidential election earlier this year. The most recent regional elections, too, are deemed to have been unfair and corrupted. The leader of the opposition party is under arrest for treason because he dared to provide opposition to the President, as he calls himself. The latest twist is the delaying of that treason trial into the new year. The regime is characterised by brutality and repression and, with every passing month, marches further beyond the acceptable limits of international states and their standards.

We learn today that, after months of negotiation and many false dawns—I hope that this is not another one—peace has been declared in the Congo, where Zimbabwean forces and commercial and other interests have played a major role. There is now the prospect of unpaid and undernourished armed forces returning to Zimbabwe, further complicating the situation there. The prospects are not good and it looks as if the downward spiral can get only worse.

In response, there has been much international wringing of hands and concern about what should be done. I hope that the Minister's reply will focus on some

[Mr. Moore]

of the issues for which Britain has a particular responsibility. Recent reports that existing arms embargoes have been flouted by the supplying of spare parts for the Hawk jets used by the Zimbabwean air force are especially alarming, and we need to know the extent of government investigation into that, and the action that is to be taken.

Further afield, we had many months of difficulty in persuading all Commonwealth nations that Zimbabwe should be expelled or suspended from councils in the short term. That was achieved in March, but recent discussions by the troika of Australia, Nigeria and South Africa have demonstrated that there is no consensus about how progress should be made. The hard-fought victory earlier this year, which the British Government played a part in achieving, is now in danger of being lost, and all the political advantage gained from the March suspension with it.

Other hon. Members have commented on the existing travel bans. I agree with the right hon. Member for Bracknell that it is a shame that the United States of America has not been more robust and focused on the imposition of smart sanctions. Likewise, we have seen in the European Union the casual flouting of travel bans by other members of the regime. Protection under international law for attendance at United Nations and other meetings must be respected but, as the right hon. Gentleman said, we must ensure that such attendances in Europe are properly regulated and monitored, not abused—which would give rather inelegant signals to the international community.

The United States has suggested coping with the famine in Zimbabwe through intrusive measures. It would be helpful if the Minister explained what the US might have in mind, and what our Government believe is appropriate. During operation Lifeline Sudan, air drops were used to deliver aid to key parts of the country that could not be reached by other means. Are the Government now considering that type of measure for the current crisis in Zimbabwe?

The international community in its various guises has a major responsibility to focus on Zimbabwe. Perhaps the most important focus should come from southern African countries. In the past year, we have seen the New Partnership for Africa's Development brought forward, and hailed as a great step change in the way that Africa looks after its economic development and its political governance. Africa has given itself the tools that it needs to tackle many of its problems. Although that has been hailed as a qualitative change, the most recent meeting between the Southern African Development Community and the European Union failed to agree on the procedures that NEPAD should follow.

South Africa, the key player in the region, has continued to support Zimbabwe to an extent that is hard for those us of outside the region to understand. Without its help, Zimbabwe would be in a truly awful state—even worse than at present. South Africa, along with Nigeria and Australia, was the key to the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth earlier this year. At the time, the Canadian high commissioner hailed that as NEPAD passing its first test. It would appear that it is in danger of flunking the second. After the most recent meeting of southern African and Zimbabwean foreign Ministers, the South African Minister said:

> "Even if Zimbabwe has made a mistake, the point is that we need to move to the future".

African media comment was rightly harsh, criticising that Minister for ignoring the ugliness of what has happened in Zimbabwe.

The country cannot shake off its responsibilities. It has to lift its own veil; other countries in the region will then perhaps play their part. It is argued that there is an honourable tradition that countries in Africa do not meddle in each other's affairs. That might be realpolitik if the problem existed only within Zimbabwean borders, but the contagion is spreading economically and politically. Not only are the southern African countries suffering from the withdrawal of current investment and further concerns about future investment, but they seem to have no prospect of being accepted for additional positive treatment from the international community in the years ahead unless they tackle the problem.

African media comment on the current state of NEPAD has been just as harsh as its observations on the activities of South Africa concerning Zimbabwe. One commentator stated that the NEPAD project

> "is doomed to fail because it is nothing more than wishful thinking".

That would be a disaster for southern Africa, and specifically for Zimbabwe. The United Kingdom has long links with Zimbabwe and the region as a whole, and we are rightly concerned about what goes on in that great country. The despot who is in charge of it and is determined to ruin his country should be under no illusions about what the international community regards as right and proper. We have slightly lost pace during the past few months. I hope that the Government will show us that that pace is about to pick up again.

10.24 am

Mr. Michael Ancram (Devizes): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) on securing the debate and on introducing it in such a measured yet forceful manner.

The debate addresses some of the most vicious violations of human and civil rights in the world today. I join my right hon. Friend in regretting that the debate is not taking place in Government time on the Floor of the House of Commons. Once again, an Opposition Member has had to raise the topic. My right hon. Friend said that he chided the Government gently. If I may, I shall be a little more blunt. For months, we have had nothing but silence and inaction from the Government. I say that in a spirit not of anger but of frustration. For months, I have pressed the Government not only to say more but to do more. There was silence at the G8 in June and at the Earth summit in August. When pressed to raise the subject at the Earth summit, the Prime Minister said that he did not wish it to be hijacked by Zimbabwe, but it was hijacked by Zimbabwe—by President Mugabe—and by the President of Namibia. There was silence in November when the EU Southern African Development Community conference was moved from Copenhagen to Maputo to allow banned Zimbabweans to attend. There has been inaction in the face of ethnic

cleansing and politically manipulated starvation, and inaction as people are forcibly and illegally dispossessed and politically destroyed.

It is no wonder that the people of Zimbabwe feel abandoned by the British Government. I was there in July, and they told me so. They do not understand the reason for that. They know that they are not inhabitants of some distant country of which we know little. We know a lot about Zimbabwe and Zimbabwe knows a lot about us. We can have debates like this at a distance, but when one is in Zimbabwe—as I was for a short period in July—and sees the situation on the ground, it is difficult not to become frustrated. I saw the displaced black farm workers in the woods outside Harare. They were starving, they had been thrown out of their homes without any possessions or any hope of future employment, and they were being harassed by the authorities. I saw the food queues in Harare, alongside the fields outside Harare that were unplanted and unsown, with the rotting vegetation from last year's harvest still there. I met the brave young civil rights lawyers who are, at great risk to themselves, collecting evidence on human rights abuses—rape camps, murders and tortures. I met Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of the opposition—a very brave man facing a charge of treason.

Tony Cunningham: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Ancram: I will give way. If I sound a little emotional, it is because I sometimes feel that we do not understand with sufficient emotion what is happening in Zimbabwe.

Tony Cunningham: I want to reinforce the point that the right hon. Gentleman is making. In some sections of the media, the situation is seen as an attack by a black African Government on white farmers, but the people who are suffering most are not white farmers but tens of thousands of black people who have also been forced from their homes and workplaces.

Mr. Ancram: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, apd I am glad that he reinforces my point.

I sometimes wonder whether the reason for the Government's inactivity is, as the Foreign Secretary suggested in his recent article in the *New Statesman*, that they are ashamed of our history and fearful of being accused of being neo-colonialist. I have talked to black people in Zimbabwe and they do not see it in that way at all. They see us as having a responsibility that they are waiting for us to fulfil. Rightly, the Government never hesitated to protect the oppressed people of Kosovo from violation and destruction, but they appear to standing passively by as even worse things happen in Zimbabwe. We must never let a situation arise whereby the millions of Zimbabweans who look to us for help appear less important than the peoples of the Balkans and of Afghanistan.

Zimbabwe is facing catastrophe. Hon. Members have outlined many of the ways in which that is happening. Of the 15.5 million people facing starvation in southern Africa, 6.5 million are in Zimbabwe. One in three adults in Zimbabwe is HIV-positive. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) rightly made a point about that. HIV and malnutrition are perfect partners. I learned when I visited Zimbabwe and South Africa that HIV combined with malnutrition provides the quickest way for HIV to turn into full-blown AIDS. In 2000, the average life expectancy in Zimbabwe was 60 years. In two years, it has fallen to 37 years.

As the hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) pointed out, inflation is running at more than 100 per cent. It was 144 per cent. at the latest count, and the International Monetary Fund predicts that it will soon be more than 500 per cent. The economy is expected to shrink by more than 10 per cent. this year. The economy of Zimbabwe is in meltdown, yet we are told that the targeted sanctions—isolating Mugabe and his thugs from the international community—are effective. However, my constituents and I see Mugabe and his lieutenants waltzing around Europe unimpeded. His police chief has twice gone to France on Interpol business. People do not understand how that can happen if we are serious about sanctions that ban travel.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell raised a particular case, which I wish also to discuss. What is the truth about the vice-chairman of the ZANU-PF Harare executive, Chris Pasipamire? He is a well-known, brutal activist in farm evictions in Zimbabwe. Is it true that he has been granted a visa to come to this country to study—ironically—land reform? If so, I can say only that that is outrageous. Baroness Amos in the other place last week was unclear about that. I hope that we can get the full facts today, because they are owed to us.

Whatever else, the sanctions are not working, but what is working is the use of starvation as a political weapon. ZANU-PF's organising secretary, Didymus Mutasa, said in August:

> "We would be better off with only six million people, with our own people who support the liberation struggle. We don't want all these extra people."

The extra people happen to be the 7 million other Zimbabweans who are now being starved, harried and ethnically cleansed, not least the 5 million proud Matabele. According to the United Nations World Food Programme, 6.7 million Zimbabweans need food aid. Increasingly, they can get it only from Mugabe in return for votes.

Food is a valuable political weapon for Mugabe. In Chimanimani, illiterate and hungry voters were rewarded with maize once they had been assisted to vote for ZANU-PF in the September rural district council elections. The World Food Programme had to suspend food aid distribution in Insiza in October, following the seizure of food by ruling ZANU-PF activists. In that part of the country, which very much supports the Movement for Democratic Change, Mugabe used food for political blackmail. That safe MDC seat was won by ZANU-PF in a recent by-election in return for food.

The control of food in Mugabe's hands is, in a sense, a weapon of mass destruction. He has created the shortages. His illegal farm seizure policy has destroyed Zimbabwe's self-sufficiency. The national cereal deficit is a staggering 1.5 million tonnes. The hon. Member for Edinburgh, West mentioned a drought. I saw no drought when I was in Zimbabwe in July—the

[Mr. Ancram]

reservoirs were brimming. Water is not the problem; the problem is that because nothing has been planted there is nothing to harvest. That is Mugabe's legacy. A country that used to feed its neighbours has now become the beggar of Africa.

Mugabe still has in his sights constitutional gerrymandering to preserve his dictatorship. He needs a two-thirds majority in Parliament for a change. In November, he was six MPs short of that. After the Insiza by-election, he was five short and, after the suspicious death of MDC MP Learnmore Jongwe, he is down to four. To put it simply, he is terrorising and bribing, if not murdering, his way to the destruction of democracy.

Then there are the attacks on justice and press freedom. There is now no justice to speak of and no protection to which people can turn. The Insiza by-election showed that graphically. An MDC official was shot in a police station in front of police by the ZANU-PF candidate, Andrew Langa. The victim and 11 MDC associates were subsequently charged with inciting violence against themselves, and the aggressor walked free. On 29 August, one of the two independent radio stations in Zimbabwe, the Voice of the People, was destroyed in a midnight bomb explosion. Since July, a total of 18 journalists have been arrested and charged under Mugabe's Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. ZANU-PF supporters and war veterans continue to attack vendors selling copies of the fiercely independent *Daily News*.

Yet, astonishingly, in the face of all that, the International Cricket Council still looks likely to hold part of the coming world cup in Zimbabwe. Inevitably, the patron of the Zimbabwe Cricket Union, Robert Mugabe, will be there and will parade himself as a great leader on an international stage. I found an extraordinary quotation from Robert Mugabe that dates back to 1984. He said:

> "Cricket civilises people and creates good gentlemen. I want everyone to play cricket in Zimbabwe; I want ours to be a nation of gentlemen."

How hollow that must ring in today's Zimbabwe. To use a cricketing analogy: if Mugabe is really keen on cricket, he should learn that when one is given out one does not glue the bails to the stumps and say, "I have not been given out," as he did in the election earlier this year.

To give Mugabe a stage is to ignore his fascist brutality, to turn a blind eye to his genocidal behaviour and to spit in the faces of the millions of Zimbabweans who are enduring poverty, oppression and death at the hands of this vile dictator. The people of Zimbabwe love cricket, but not at the cost of buttressing Mugabe and his henchmen. I call again for the ICC to relocate the Zimbabwean part of the world cup. This is not about sport, it is about a murderous dictatorship. No one can deal with Mugabe and not be soiled by it.

How much of the estimated $10 million revenues accrued from media coverage and match sponsorship will end up in the coffers of Mugabe and his cronies? The Government have been strangely silent on the matter.

Mr. Swire: Will my right hon. Friend join me in regretting the Government's seeming lack of determination to pursue the millions that Mugabe and his henchmen have sequestered around the world?

Mr. Ancram: I very much agree with my hon. Friend. I will come to his point in a moment.

I hope that the Government will take this opportunity to join me and others in urging the ICC to move the world cup from Zimbabwe. None of us can stand aside from what is happening. We cannot do nothing and hope that death, destruction and implosion will bring their own answer. The human cost is too horrific to contemplate. Last week, to my surprise, the Secretary of State for International Development said:

> "I really fear that there will be a disaster such as we have never seen in our lifetime, with the lack of food, the political situation and HIV all playing into each other. I expect that that will bring an end to that awful regime."—[*Official Report*, 11 December 2002; Vol. 396, c. 243.]

It must not be the Government's policy simply to let famine, genocide and corruption decide the future of Zimbabwe's people.

Of course, as the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) said, there is no easy solution. There are a number of steps that must urgently be taken. In many cases, the previous measures that we called for—travel bans, the freezing of assets, suspension from the Commonwealth—came too late. Sanctions must be tightened and made to bite. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Bracknell rightly suggested, the travel ban and the assets freeze must be extended to cover families, including children, of members of the regime and also those international business men who bankroll the regime. He mentioned Mr. van Hoogstraten. I mention Mr. John Bredenkamp. I hope that the Government will investigate carefully what his involvement in Zimbabwe has been.

The Government must work with the United States of America to monitor food distribution on the ground in order to destroy Mugabe's ability to use food as an instrument of oppression. They should persuade the United Nations Security Council immediately to place UN personnel on the ground in Zimbabwe in order to monitor not just food distribution but human rights abuses. We have to work with the United States State Department to bring new pressures to bear on South Africa to get Mugabe to hold fresh elections. There is a genuine and growing concern about the potentially devastating economic impact of the situation in Zimbabwe on the South African economy.

I have always welcomed NEPAD and think that it is a worthwhile initiative, not least because of the quasi-contractual nature of the plan: financial investment is offered in return for good governance. The agreement was that good governance is for African Governments to assess at peer-group level. A test of that assessment must be whether those African Governments condemn the clear misgovernance of Zimbabwe. If they do not, they should not receive the NEPAD money. In arguing for that legitimate leverage, I have frequently been accused of seeking to damage black African interests beyond Zimbabwe. Of course it would cause wider pain, but nothing like the pain being experienced by the people of Zimbabwe today. There is no painless

solution, but a solution must be found. South Africa must be persuaded that it is in its best interests to bring this disaster to a swift close. South Africa holds the key. It has the power and the means to do that, and it will suffer immense damage if it does not.

Why are the British Government so shy of bringing friendly pressure to bear on South Africa? Why is the Prime Minister so loth to ensure that NEPAD works as it was designed to work—genuinely to promote good governance for all of Africa? Why are the Government so resolute in the face of human rights abuses elsewhere, yet so silent in the face of Mugabe?

I hope that the Minister will be brave. He should stop being frightened of his post-colonial shadow, restore this country's credibility and fulfil the promise that his Prime Minister made at the conference a year and a half ago that the Government had a moral duty to act. The Minister must tell us today what the Government will do to end this nightmare. History will not easily forgive the Government who walked by on the other side, and nor will the people of Zimbabwe.

10.40 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I begin by congratulating the right hon. Member for Bracknell (Mr. Mackay) on securing the debate. I welcome this opportunity to consider the critical situation in Zimbabwe. It is tragic that half the population of that country, which was once referred to as the bread basket of Africa, now depends on food aid. The tragedy is all the greater because, although southern Africa is affected by drought, the policies of ZANU-PF have turned a situation that could have been managed into a humanitarian crisis.

Evidence of ZANU-PF's mismanagement can be found everywhere: inflation at 140 per cent., unemployment at more than 60 per cent. and a currency trading at more than 20 times its official rate. Zimbabwe's economy will shrink by about 12 per cent. this year, at a time when most of Africa is seeing growth, and it has already shrunk by 23 per cent. in the last two years. It is the fastest imploding economy in the world.

That incompetent economic performance is coupled with a collapse in the rule of law and high levels of political violence. More than 140 people have been killed since 2000, the great majority of them opposition supporters. The majority of the victims are black, as are the many thousands of former farm workers who are now homeless—displaced in their own country in the name of the fast-track land resettlement policy.

Zimbabwe's problems are the result not of a black versus white conflict or a conflict between Zimbabwe and Britain, but of poor Government policies. The main victims of the regime's policies are the poor black people of Zimbabwe. For that reason, we continue to help Zimbabwe with humanitarian assistance. Since September 2001, we have contributed £43 million—taxpayers' money—and we will continue to do so. That money is disbursed through the World Food Programme and non-governmental organisations, not the Zimbabwean Government.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell asked why we could not do more. Well, Britain has done a lot. Indeed, we invested substantial resources under a Conservative Government in helping to bring Zimbabwe to independence. Those resources were extended after independence in the form of £500 million in bilateral assistance. However, independence means just that. Zimbabwe's regime is responsible for its actions; it cannot pass the buck to others, whether in Britain, Europe or anywhere else. Zimbabwe's regime needs to accept responsibility for its actions, which are damaging the Zimbabwean people.

The right hon. Member for Devizes (Mr. Ancram) gave what he described as an emotional speech. He referred to the UK Government standing passively by and urged us to respond as we did in Kosovo. I suspect that there is a loss of perspective here. It almost seems as if he thinks some form of gunboat diplomacy is the way forward. It is not. My hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) and the right hon. Member for Bracknell were right to say that some form of military intervention was a bad idea. It would carry huge political costs and is practically impossible. Zimbabwe needs peace, not more conflict. The MDC does not want it. In any case, the region would not co-operate. The UN Security Council's role is international peace and security. The region would need to support any action. That is not the way forward.

I agree with the right hon. Member for Devizes that we need to put more pressure on the Zimbabwean Government. We have had co-operation from both the European Union and the Commonwealth. Zimbabwe was suspended from the councils of the Commonwealth in March. The Commonwealth troika remains engaged. Australian Prime Minister Howard, South African President Mbeki and Nigerian President Obasanjo met in Abuja on 23 September. Mugabe was invited, but did not attend. The troika will review the situation in March, at which point it has said that stronger measures might need to be considered. We welcome that clear signal of a continuing Commonwealth engagement and regret that Zimbabwe has not responded.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell asked why the Prime Minister did not mention Zimbabwe in the Copenhagen statement yesterday. Zimbabwe was not on the agenda at Copenhagen, but was discussed at the previous week's EU General Affairs Council. It will be raised again in January. Zimbabwe is raised regularly by the United Kingdom in EU forums and will continue to be raised regularly. I accept that it is an enormously important issue. The Government intend to ensure that it remains high on the EU's agenda.

EU sanctions were introduced in February 2002. We will work to ensure their rollover or extension next year. Some 79 people are now on the banned list; 28 accounts in the United Kingdom containing funds totalling over £500,000 have been frozen. We expect more to follow. That is the sort of well targeted pressure that hits the individuals responsible for Zimbabwe's situation.

Mr. Mackay: Will the Minister confirm that we plan to extend and deepen the sanctions to include financial backers, middle-rank officials and/or Members of Parliament, as I suggested in my speech?

Mr. O'Brien: I shall come to that. We ought to consider the right hon. Gentleman's proposals. I will certainly look at an extension and see whether there are ways in which we can tighten the grip and pressure on Zimbabwe. We would obviously need to talk to our European partners and the United States. They have a longer list of banned people, but they are not applying the freezing of assets as we would prefer. We need to increase the pressure on Zimbabwe by working with both our European partners and the United States.

Mr. Swire: The Opposition have asked repeatedly about the freezing of assets of all those involved with Mugabe and his regime, particularly those assets that are held overseas. Can the Minister tell us what action has been taken by the Government since we started asking those questions?

Mr. O'Brien: As I have just said, we have frozen 28 accounts in the UK. Obviously, it is for other countries to freeze accounts in their territories. We want to see the freezing of accounts and the extension of pressures, restrictions and bans on individuals who are responsible for Zimbabwe's condition.

Since April, people on the banned list have been denied access to the European Union on six occasions. As recently as November, others have been obliged to cancel their plans to travel in the EU. That shows that EU sanctions are having an effect. Norway, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, New Zealand and Australia have also imposed targeted sanctions, and the International Monetary Fund adopted a declaration of non-co-operation with Zimbabwe because of its refusal to co-operate with it on policy, and its arrears. On 11 September, the board began procedures to suspend Zimbabwe's voting rights, which in effect expelled Zimbabwe. It is clear that Mugabe is imposing his own economic sanctions on Zimbabwe.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell made a point about the visa for Chris Pasipamire. All visa applications are carefully assessed in accordance with immigration rules. I understand that the gentleman in question has a visit visa, not a student visa, so he cannot study in the United Kingdom at this point. He is not on the EU banned list, and I understand that he has told a newspaper and others that he wants to look for a course. However, if he does so and finds one, he cannot go on it. If he wants a student visa, he will have to reapply. I will ensure that Home Office Ministers are aware of the concern expressed in the debate about his case.

Mr. Ancram: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. O'Brien: I said that I would not give way again, but I will give way if the right hon. Gentleman is very brief. Before he intervenes, however, I must tell him and other hon. Members that I cannot prejudge the view of a Home Office Minister and officials about a particular visa case. I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will understand that, given his experience in government.

Mr. Ancram: Why was Chris Pasipamire allowed to come here, given that we have a ban against people who are active in the regime in Zimbabwe? Why is he not on the banned list?

Mr. O'Brien: He is not on the banned list. [HON. MEMBERS: "He should be."] Several hon. Members are now saying from a sedentary position that he should be. However, he was not on that list when he applied for his visa, so he was granted a visa. He will have to apply again if he finds a course and wants to go on it. I will ensure that the concerns expressed in this House are brought to the attention of Home Office Ministers, who will be able to do what is appropriate in the circumstances and within the law.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell expressed concern about extending the various bans. I will consider that, and will write to him on that point. He also said that we should consider the possibility of extending the bans to civil servants and some of their families, as well as to bankers. That is a useful point, and I will consider the feasibility of doing that and how it would work. Again, I will write to the right hon. Gentleman.

The right hon. Gentleman also said that he wanted to see arrests. Again, if it is possible to do so—if people are in this country and there is evidence of offences—I am sure that the police will respond appropriately. He rightly said that there was a lack of response from some parts of Africa to the situation in Zimbabwe, and that countries next to Zimbabwe needed to respond much more firmly to ensure that the reputation of Africa, which in many ways is at stake, was not damaged by the likes of President Mugabe. The British Government are talking to other African countries, and President Mbeki, the president of southern Africa's most major country—South Africa—will visit the UK at the start of next year. The Prime Minister will raise those issues with the president, who is engaged in trying to move them forward.

The EU-Africa summit in Lisbon on 3 and 4 April was mentioned. The EU troika will discuss it at the meeting in January; our view is that the visa ban on ZANU-PF elite should not be waived for that event.

The right hon. Member for Bracknell was concerned about the continuing violence against MDC media and trade unions. We condemn that violence and ZANU-PF's continued use of intimidation, especially against the MDC. It was clearly seen at the by-election in Insiza district on 26 and 27 October, as was ZANU-PF's blatant manipulation of food aid. The World Food Programme was forced to suspend distribution in Insiza during that period.

We strongly condemn the disgraceful and groundless arrest of Wellington Chibebe of the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, and of eight other trade union leaders. The right hon. Gentleman said that people were threatened that if they did not vote ZANU-PF they would not get food, but the situation is worse than that. In some instances, people who do not carry a ZANU-PF membership card do not get Government food. Donor food is dealt with in a different way, but it shows the extent of the regime. A leading ZANU-PF MP, Didymus Mutasa, was reported as saying that he did not mind if 6 million Zimbabweans died as long as the remaining 6 million were loyal to ZANU-PF. When one is dealing with someone with that turn of mind, what can one say to convince them that they have to behave in a different way?

We are doing all that we can, putting in substantial resources to help the victims of Zimbabwe's humanitarian crisis, the scale of which is great. DFID has committed £43 million of UK taxpayers' money since September 2001; British aid is distributed by the UN World Food Programme and internationally respected NGOs on the basis of need alone. Some of that support will also go towards agricultural inputs for planting next season. We are worried that next year might be worse than this year, but there is nothing that we can do about the food that the regime has bought, which is being distributed based on people's membership of, or loyalty to, ZANU-PF. We strongly condemn that. The United Kingdom has committed £56 million in response to the latest humanitarian appeal for Zimbabwe, Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Lesotho and Swaziland.

The right hon. Members for Bracknell and for Devizes raised the issue of sport. Like the right hon. Member for Bracknell, I think that we should be cautious about importing politics into sport. However, we should recognise that there are exceptions. The right hon. Gentleman said that the world cup should not go to Zimbabwe. The Government's position is that the decision whether to play the six world cup matches in Zimbabwe can be taken only by the International Cricket Council, of which the England and Wales Cricket Board is part.

Mr. Swire: That is obvious.

Mr. O'Brien: I will come to that in a minute. The decision should be taken in the light of what is happening in Zimbabwe and in recognition of the fact that the political, economic and humanitarian situation could deteriorate in the next few months. We briefed the England and Wales Cricket Board with our travel advice, as we would other British organisations and individuals considering travelling to Zimbabwe, and we have agreed to keep in touch. Decisions whether to travel to Zimbabwe have to be taken by the individuals or organisations themselves, based on all the information available to them. The Government's position is to ask the ICC and the ECB to look at the matter. We will not issue orders to them; however, speaking personally, I hope that they will listen to the strong views expressed in the debate. My view is that it would be better if the team did not go.

The hon. Member for Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale (Mr. Moore) raised the issue of the arms embargo. As the time available is short, I shall write to the hon. Gentleman.

Our objectives for Zimbabwe are clear. We want a prosperous, stable and democratic Zimbabwe. The ruler of Zimbabwe is preventing the country's people from having such a future. We condemn the way in which he is running the country, we are determined to take action to deal with him, and we will work through international institutions to achieve that. With the help of the Zimbabwean people and the international community, we will ensure that we create a Zimbabwe in the long term that works in the interests of all the people of Zimbabwe and is prepared to deal with all the critical issues facing the country.

Urban Deprivation

11 am

Ms Karen Buck (Regent's Park and Kensington, North): I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to introduce today's debate. When the angels ask me to recall the thrill of my parliamentary contributions, I will have to reveal that they have focused disproportionately on such issues as tax credits, housing benefit, the implementation of the social fund and local government finance. I suspect that even St. Peter would be stunned into torpor to listen to them, but, at the risk of sounding pompous, I should say that such issues are the meat and drink of people's experience of government, particularly the experience of the poor.

My comments today will touch on important aspects of the quality of services that people receive from central Government through local agencies. I have three main points. First, I shall discuss the distribution of local authority grants in the light of the recent grant review and settlement. Secondly, I shall focus on the index of multiple deprivation—the means by which the Government distribute resources for special projects aimed at deprived areas. Thirdly, I shall talk about the census and what it can tell us about the measurement of people's needs in urban communities.

The vast majority of resources distributed to areas of deprivation are mainstreamed through the resources made available to local government, health authorities, regional development agencies and so forth. The mainstreaming grants are the most important.

Last week saw the results of the review of local government finance and the distribution of grants to local authorities across England. The review process was controversial because it went back to basics in examining the measurements of need and the allocation of resources. Much disquiet was caused, especially in London and in urban authorities in other parts of the country, about how the indicators were determined and the different weightings across the country. The review was, rightly, seen as influencing the amount of resources available to local government for social services, education and other vital services.

London local authorities across the board did better than had been feared. Some—Brent, Tower Hamlets and Newham, which have high levels of deprivation—did well, and I am delighted that they received a generous settlement. Nevertheless, it is clear—analysis continues in town halls throughout the country—that next year some local authorities, particularly those on the floor, will face a tough year as a result of their budget settlements. Welcome though the floor is, and however much better it might be than what was expected earlier in the year, I fear that exceptional costs and needs pressures in London and other urban authorities have not been fully recognised. The debate will continue—the recent review has not fully settled the issue.

Population mobility and turnover are a concern for urban authorities throughout the United Kingdom, particularly those in London. High population turnover in the cities places particular pressure on schools, social services and environmental services, but the Government have not yet recognised the extent of that pressure. I had hoped that this year the Government would decide in favour of a special grant to help

[Ms Karen Buck]

authorities with high population turnover, especially of pupils in schools, but they have given no indication that they will and no such decision emerged from the recent settlement. Will the Minister tell us today, or at a later stage, whether the debate on meeting the needs of communities with high population turnover is continuing? That population trend appears to be accelerating in urban communities, and it will need further discussion.

The main issue that I will address this morning is the index of multiple deprivation. Many London local authorities are ranked lower in the 2000 index of multiple deprivation than in its 1998 predecessor. Of the seven authorities nationally that dropped out of the 50 most deprived across all the domains, four were London authorities. Most large metropolitan authorities are ranked as less deprived in the 2000 index and, in general, non-urban shire authorities are ranked as more deprived compared with 1998.

Those changes in ranking affected the funding allocated to London boroughs. A rough estimate shows that if the previous index had been in force, London would have benefited from £125 million more in neighbourhood renewal funding and £125 million of housing funding through the general housing needs index. The Minister will be aware that housing pressures are the single most acute issue facing central London and probably London as a whole.

The current review should be taken as an opportunity to ensure that the resources intended to tackle deprivation are focused on areas where need is greatest and where investment will do the most good. There are three areas in which I hope that the Minister will be able to accept my representations and those of other Members of Parliament and organisations such as the Association of London Government and the Greater London Authority. I am sure that many of those organisations will make formal submissions to the review.

The first such area comprises crime, social order and the physical environment. It is essential that issues of crime and social order are included in any future index. The Association of London Government is confident that we now have the means to compare ward-based crime rates, taking account of population numbers and characteristics, and risk levels. There can be no question that the quality of life enjoyed by residents in a particular neighbourhood is closely related to their experience of crime and antisocial behaviour. I therefore urge the Government to use such an indicator in the review.

Similarly, perceptions of physical danger or squalor in a neighbourhood powerfully influence its desirability and, therefore, the potential for ensuring a healthy and viable social mix in that area in future. I urge the Government to incorporate indicators on road traffic accidents—which are, as we know, closely correlated with poverty—and levels of air pollution. Those indicators are easy to measure and would be recognised as meaningful.

The second issue—I know that other hon. Members want to address this in more detail, so I will skirt over it—is the measurement of access to services other than in a strictly geographical way. In recent years, one of the IMD indicators that have caused most concern to representatives of urban authorities in the distribution of local government resources is the scarcity indicator. I grew up in a village, and the last bus home left town at 6.25 pm, so I am conscious of the fact that rural isolation can also be equated with poverty and deprivation. That issue needs to be tackled.

There are, however, perverse consequences of using scarcity indicators, which may count a long and sweeping driveway as a measure of deprivation. Families growing up in 18 and 20-storey tower blocks may be seen to be relatively less deprived as a consequence of the range in the scarcity and density indicator.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The hon. Lady makes a thoughtful speech about the indicators. One can have as many indicators as one wants, but at the end of the day, there must be the political will to make sure things actually happen. It seems to me that there is stagnation in London caused by the Mayor: he has produced a huge spatial plan, but it seems that very little has happened since. Would the hon. Lady care to comment on what has been positively done for her constituency, or for London as a whole, since the Mayor produced that plan?

Ms Buck: Thanks to the Mayor's commitment to increasing the provision of affordable housing in private sector housing developments, my constituents and those in the borough of Westminster have benefited considerably compared with the previous efforts of the council in securing affordable housing units or putting additional investment into the affordable housing fund. In that way alone the work that the Mayor has done has been of considerable value on a measure that is dearer to the hearts of my constituents than almost any other.

The London plan is the most ambitious and comprehensive review of the needs of London for generations. Of course, the consultation is taking time—many people have an opinion about it, and I am not going to sign up to every dot and comma. It covers such a wide range of issues that a debate is right and proper, but at least we have a sweeping and panoramic vision of how we want the future of London to develop. It would be most unwise of the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) to dismiss it.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): Addressing that point, I agree that there is great vision in the London plan. It has to be said, however, that Mr. Livingstone is not a man with the capacity to deliver on that vision. We all know that, as does anyone sensible in politics.

The main problem with the suggestion about affordable housing is that private developers will be dissuaded from carrying out any development at all. That is one our concerns. We all want to see more key workers housed in central London, which is a policy of the two Conservative authorities based in the hon. Lady's constituency. There is no question about that, but the real concern is that developers would be

dissuaded by such a hard and fast set rule. At the end of the day, the most vulnerable in society would lose out if such policies were put in place without flexibility.

Ms Buck: The most vulnerable people in society have lost out by the thousand on housing opportunities as a consequence of the planning and housing policies adopted by Westminster city council over the years. One only has to look at the borough represented most ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) to know what a local authority can do when it negotiates hard with developers.

Hammersmith and Fulham council has an excellent record of achieving affordable housing in its development and we have had no indication that private sector developers are refusing to enter into any form of negotiation with that council. Westminster council in particular has failed to make use of its opportunities over the years: it is sitting on some of the highest value land in Britain, and people in housing need have been the losers. I am sympathetic with much of what the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) says—I know that he is concerned for his constituents—but I am afraid that that is absolute nonsense.

On measurement of access to services, I ask the Minister to review again the issue of scarcity versus density, and to accept the fact that road distance is of very limited value as a deprivation measure. We need to incorporate other barriers to access to services, of which the use of minority languages would be a very good measure. Where 170 different languages are spoken—as in London—and there is little recognition of the additional cost pressures that that places on services outside education, it is essential that we take such indicators into consideration.

The third issue is housing costs and affordability. That affects the index of multiple deprivation and the allocation of Government resources to local authorities. I am concerned about the possibility that the new index will use working families tax credit as an indicator of urban poverty. That measure discriminates against London, and its use may already have cost us between £15 million and £18 million in grant allocation. London as a region has a relatively low take-up of working families tax credit, due largely to the high cost barriers to entering work—child care and housing costs—and a skills mismatch.

Housing costs have a massive impact on disposable income. Any measures that exclude property issues will fail to reflect poverty levels. One option in the review is to use households that claim working families tax credit and that have incomes below 60 per cent. of the median before housing costs, but that will seriously distort comparisons between regions. In many cases, households in London appear above the median solely because of differences in housing benefit, yet that tells us nothing at all about their disposable income or quality of life.

I also ask the Minister to reject proposals to exclude lone parents from the employment domain. New research from the Greater London Authority shows that 90 per cent. of lone parents interviewed expressed a desire to work, with more than half citing lack of affordable or suitable child care as the barrier. There is no case for excluding such lone parents on the grounds that they may not wish to be available for work. London has the highest percentage in England of children living in households that are dependent on income support, and what that means must be properly recognised.

I ask the Minister to take time to study the recent report "London Divided". It shows that despite the progress that has been made and the excellent and innovative schemes that are in place to reduce poverty—from sure start to the children's fund, from the new deal to youth inclusion programmes—poverty in inner London remains staggeringly high. One quarter of London children are held to be living in poverty before housing costs are taken into account, rising to 41 per cent. if such costs are taken into account. Thank God for the working families tax credit. It is an important and valuable tool, but to use it as an indicator of poverty would be to do an injustice to urban authorities and to London in particular.

Finally, let me mention the census. On the back of last year's census, and more generally, concern is increasing about the accuracy of data sources relating to numbers and needs in an increasingly mobile, multi-ethnic population. At the risk of being accused of special pleading, I must say that I am completely confident that the census has not given us a complete picture of the population in central London, whether its final figures show a plus or a minus compared with previous estimates. The same is likely to be true of several other urban areas. Inner-city populations are becoming harder to track and count, and that has massive implications, not only for head counts and capitation-based allocations, but for the measurement of deprivation. The Office for National Statistics may be doing a brilliant job in 96 per cent. of the country, but it would be unwise of anyone to be too confident about the accuracy of its figures on the inner city. The time is ripe for an overhaul of the processes by which we measure numbers and needs in an urban context. I ask the Minister to consider that point.

Sources of funding available to my constituency under the index of urban deprivation have been immensely valuable. We have benefited from the urban renewal fund, the neighbourhood nurseries initiative and neighbourhood warden schemes. Many projects have made a distinct contribution to improving the quality of life for my residents, but I am very concerned that, as a result of a combination of the census and possible changes to the indicators in the review, urban communities in Paddington and north Kensington, across London and in other urban authorities will not continue to benefit from such sources of funding. We must choose the right package of indicators to reflect most accurately the reality of urban poverty and urban deprivation.

As London's needs become more intensely concentrated, complex and turbulent, resources available through the index of multiple deprivation become more important than ever. I hope that the Government will listen to representations and address the concerns so that we can do still more to tackle the pressures that bear down on our cities, and on London in particular.

11.18 am

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster): I congratulate the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing this important debate. As one or two colleagues may have gathered, notwithstanding the little spat we had a moment or two ago, we work well together—at least that is my side of the story—on several Westminster-related issues.

I believe that we are both glad to see that in the comprehensive performance assessments not only Westminster but also Kensington and Chelsea were rated excellent councils. A neighbouring borough, Hammersmith and Fulham, had an excellent rating as well. It says much for the dedication of councillors and many council officers and employees in central London that we are able to achieve such excellence, particularly in social services, which is always a most difficult side of things, in the difficult circumstances to which the hon. Lady alluded.

One of the first things that I did when I entered Parliament about 18 months ago was to visit the two local hospitals in my patch: Barts in the City of London and St. Mary's in Paddington. When I asked about the bed-blocking problems that I had heard of from so many other parliamentary colleagues, the hospital officials said that they did not have such problems. That is very much a tribute to the work that is done for the most vulnerable in our society.

My constituency, like the hon. Lady's, is diverse. If people walk through the leafy streets of St. John's Wood in her constituency, or through the more deprived parts of Bayswater and Pimlico, they would not necessarily assume that they were in, respectively, a constituency that was a relatively safe Labour seat, and one that was a relatively safe Conservative seat. That is true throughout London. The Minister represents Hornsey and Wood Green, which includes lush bits of Fortis Green and Muswell Hill that do not appear to be deprived but, around almost every corner, great problems exist. That applies to suburban areas as well to inner London.

I shall say a few words about the local government finance settlement, touch on the census, which was mentioned by the hon. Lady, and wind up with a few thoughts on deprivation.

There is no doubt that there is abject poverty in central London. Even in my constituency, more than 75 per cent. of housing is social housing in several wards. There are also the many problems that arise from having a large number of asylum seekers and other immigration issues. As the hon. Lady said, a factor that is taken far too little into account is mobility. The most recent figures for 2000 showed that turnover in Cities of London and Westminster was the largest single turnover in any seat—23 per cent. It is probably the same 23 per cent. who move year on year; the entire population does not change over a four-year period. None the less, that puts major pressures on schools, hospitals and social services.

It was therefore disappointing that, in the financial settlement, the social services of several inner London authorities saw a slash in finances that will have an impact if the 3.5 per cent. floor in increases are lifted next year, or at any point in the near future, without considering financing. The settlement runs the risk of penalising excellent, well run councils, and I am not making a narrow party political point, because that is as true for Labour councils as for Conservative ones.

Ms Buck: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that perhaps the entire reason why Kensington and Chelsea and Westminster are at the floor—we have yet to complete analysis on that—is because of the problem with population measurement and the census, rather than with using indicators that have been chosen, as he implied, to penalise these authorities?

Mr. Field: That is fair. In a moment, I shall move on to the environmental, protective and cultural services HEPCSH basket because that has a strong impact, particularly in southern Westminster.

It would be wrong to defend the old standard spending assessment system; it was arcane to put it mildly. However, there is a worry that we are replacing it with another grant distribution system that is equally perverse and lacks transparency. Local government finance is not easy at the best of times so we need either a relatively clear process or a recognition that clarity will not be achieved. To call the new system transparent, when it has arcane rules, is not helpful.

On EPCS, strong arguments exist for treating several central London authorities as sui generis. The business rate for Westminster alone amounts to about £860 million annually, which goes into Government funds and from which Westminster is able to call on about £72.5 million. I appreciate that that may not be a fair comparison, but it suggests that Westminster should be treated differently.

On the cost of street cleansing, the most recent contract that has been signed for Westminster amounts to a 60 per cent. increase on the previous contract. The rate of inflation for cleansing contracts is clearly greater than the average rate of inflation. Westminster does a good job in that area—a number of colleagues say that when they walk across the road they feel that there is a greater risk of a Westminster city council cleansing van knocking them down than of cars or cyclists doing so. Westminster makes an important contribution to the UK as a whole. Central London is a showcase to overseas investors and visitors, and there are vast numbers of non-residents. We need to ensure that the quality of our streets is sufficiently high.

As has been mentioned, the performance of social services in central London is high. However, the budget is at risk, and I hope that central Government will think about ring-fencing it. Many people assume that the City of London, which is part of my constituency, must be a wealthy area because of the riverside developments of recent years and the Barbican, which was not a wealthy area when it was built. The Barbican originally contained much social housing, although the right to buy means that relatively little of it remains. In my patch, there is also Petticoat square and the Mansell street estate, which is more like Tower Hamlets than the City of London. It is important that we do not assume that relatively wealthy areas are taken care of, because the most vulnerable will fall through the hole if they are not catered for.

It has been estimated that 60,000 people were "lost" in the Westminster census. I moved into Westminster in April 2000, and on three occasions I tried to obtain a

census form, but I could not manage to do so. I have never completed a census form, and I know that many people who live near me in Belgravia have experienced the same difficulty. I reiterate the concern of the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North that we need to give that matter some serious thought. That point applies not only to Westminster but to several other inner London boroughs, and at last week's Prime Minister's Question Time, the hon. Member for Manchester, Blackley (Mr. Stringer) also expressed similar concerns. I hope that the Government will examine the matter. If the census figures are not right an important knock-on effect, which will affect funding for the most vulnerable in the years ahead, will clearly come into play.

The Office for National Statistics seems to totter from one disaster to another. It overvalued pension funds in February, double-counted contributions in October, and now faces concerns about the census. It is high time that it was subject to an independent investigation, and I hope that the Minister can provide some pointers to such an investigation when she replies.

I shall say a few words about asylum seekers in central London. I do so with a slightly heavy heart because, like the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North, I have foreign blood in my veins. My mother had sought asylum twice by the age of 15. She was born in a part of Germany that is now in Poland, and fled with her family in the immediate aftermath of the second world war and then again in 1954. I do not therefore have a hard-and-fast view on asylum seekers, although I personally believe that we should encourage more economic migrants into this country.

We should welcome people who want to abide by our laws and make a contribution to our society by integrating with it and assimilating into it. On the issue of assimilation and the indigenous population, the population is not static and the common norms of today will be different from those that will exist in 20 or 30 years' time, and there is no doubt that waves of immigrants will play a part in that. Members who represent central London constituencies are weighed down by the amount of work that we have to do on behalf of asylum seekers or people requiring immigration advice. Many of them are not constituents in the sense that they do not count towards the, say, 73,000 people on our electoral rolls, but none the less they require significant assistance.

I have been concerned by events in Sangatte. In essence, the French Government blackmailed us into allowing the Sangatte refugees to come in. Although many of them have work permits, there is a fear that they have been dumped in central London. Three of four tranches of them have come into my constituency in the past 10 days. The matter, which has not been well thought through, is a further hammer blow to central London after the local government financial settlement, and I hope that the Minister will assure us—I appreciate that the asylum issue is not entirely in her hands—that the costs will be fully underwritten. In so far as central London authorities have to pay the bill for arrivals from Sangatte, who are going to play a part in our society and be living in hostels for the homeless or bed and breakfasts for a time, the costs should be properly underwritten and taken into account in the consideration of future financial settlements.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The issue of immigrants, asylum seekers and those who are justified in coming here on work permits, visas and so forth is a difficult one that we do not discuss enough. Does my hon. Friend agree that whatever the rights or wrongs of the situation, there should be a proper system of measuring what is going on so that resources can be allocated properly to deal with the problem?

Mr. Field: That is the nub of my point. My personal view—not my party's—is that we should pull out of most of the conventions of which we are members and look to take more economic refugees or migrants. Many of our so-called European partners have taken a parochial and nationalistic approach that has not assisted us in any way. My hon. Friend is right to say that proper measurement is required, not least because the most vulnerable among the indigenous population will suffer most if resources do not trickle down to those areas that have a disproportionate burden in dealing with asylum seekers.

Ms Buck: Although I am convinced that the census was inaccurate—the hon. Gentleman kindly told us that he did not complete his census form—we would be on dangerous ground if we equated that entirely with asylum seeking and migration, as he and others have attempted to do. When I raised the issue last year, my local authorities told me that there was a greater likelihood of non-participation in the census in the more prosperous multi-occupancy in the south of the borough than in the deprived and multi-ethnic north.

Mr. Field *rose—*

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I deplore over-long interventions, but as it is the hon. Lady's debate I have showed discretion.

Mr. Field: Many of us deplore over-long speeches, Sir Nicholas.

I am sorry if I was in any way misconstrued. I was simply making a narrow point about deprivation in relation to the asylum issue, not trying to link it with the census. I suspect that there are not many asylum seekers in the vicinity of Belgravia who did not fill in their census forms for that reason.

11.32 am

Paul Flynn (Newport, West): I warmly congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate, which is an extremely rare one on the subject of urban deprivation. If the title of the debate had been "Rural Deprivation", the Chamber would be full of Members making heart-rending cries about problems in rural areas—as they are of course entitled to do, as there are difficulties in those areas. Speaking, like many hon. Members, for a constituency that is partly rural and partly urban, I know about those difficulties.

[Paul Flynn]

Policies in the Welsh Assembly and in this Parliament have been hopelessly distorted by the vigorous hallelujah chorus of complaints from rural areas. That has resulted in policies that irrationally devote money to rural areas at the great expense of urban areas. I shall give a simple example. My constituency has three of the most deprived wards in the top 50 in Wales. Although we are in that position, we do not get a single penny of objective 1 money, whereas two areas, Ceredigion and Conwy, which do not have a single ward in the top 100 most deprived wards in Wales, get full objective 1 funding. The reason for that is rurality and the exaggerated picture that has been presented by the campaign led partly by the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who is not known as an advocate for exposing urban deprivation.

I speak with a little more force today, having yesterday evening run the gauntlet of a blocked Westminster bridge between the serried ranks of police vehicles and mounted police and the lines of rural rabble who were threatening, violent and abusive. They were, I understand, organised by the Countryside Alliance. It is a great tribute to the police in London that, after I quoted Sessional Orders to them, they got me through the lines of protestors who were, I understand, trying to persuade me and others to vote their way at the end of the debate. Nothing could be more counterproductive.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. The hon. Gentleman is an experienced parliamentarian, but his comments are not relevant to the debate. I should be obliged if he would direct his comments to urban deprivation.

Paul Flynn: Indeed I will, Sir Nicholas. The reason for the lack of cash going to urban areas is the excessive amounts that are being given to rural areas. I shall give an example from my constituency, which has suffered very badly from job losses during the past 12 months. For the first time since 1789, no iron will be manufactured in Gwent. An area of urban life has gone; it is dead and finished for ever. It is not only the jobs that have gone, but the skills that have existed there for more than two centuries. There was no letter from Mr. Angry of Highgrove to the Prime Minister complaining that a precious, unique way of life has died. The businesses that have been affected by the loss of steel jobs receive no compensation and some small businesses have gone to the wall. Extraordinarily, businesses that were affected by the foot and mouth outbreak—there are a number in my constituency because they do business in rural areas although they are located in an urban area—received generous compensation amounting sometimes to tens of thousands of pounds, because they made a loss.

Urban areas have been deprived and discriminated against, but all the arguments, including the one advanced last week by the Countryside Agency—there is no urban agency—tell us that one in five country dwellers lives below the poverty line. That is regrettable, but one in four urban dwellers lives below the poverty line. The Government have just announced a policy for spending more than £500 million to keep rural post offices open and more than £100 million to close down urban post offices. My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North mentioned a deprived person living in a remote area down a drive a mile long. I agree with her entirely that there is urban isolation for people who live at the top of multi-storey blocks of flats. There is deprivation of community if the local post office on a council estate closes down and people do not see or have contact with their neighbours. Those losses are at least as damaging as those suffered in rural areas.

I have a list of statistics with which I shall not burden the Chamber, but in every example between urban and rural areas the priorities are wrong. The most deprived areas and those with the highest crime rate and the poorest schools, in which life expectation and every other factor that can be applied is poorest, are in urban areas. Yet for the past 50 years Governments have shelled out huge sums of money to compensate rural areas, and that money often comes at the expense of urban areas.

During a debate last week the Government announced an extra £500 million to implement the Currie report. It was not received with any enthusiasm by the Opposition, including the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown), who is speaking for the Opposition, and one hon. Member who complained about the lack of excitement and leadership. I would dearly like the Government to give £500 million to the steel, aluminium or other industries that have suffered grievously with resulting job losses. We put up with the fact that there was no excitement in the announcement or leadership, but that distortion in policies is continuing. That is partly due to the extraordinary propaganda exercise that is being mounted from Buckingham palace down to the various alliances and countryside agencies, many of which are funded by Government money. As a result of their constant, unrelenting complaints, our urban areas are being deprived, with obvious results for all to see.

Although almost unlimited sums have been given to urban areas for their problems, particularly during the past year, we must remember that every urban-dwelling family, often living in very poor conditions, is contributing £16 per week to one rural industry. There is a lack of funding in all urban areas, and poor priorities that are based not on reality but on the power of propaganda.

It is understandable that there is distortion in the reporting in the popular press: I do not know of any newspaper editor who does not live in a rural area, and I do not think that any would live in a deprived urban area.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: On a point of order, Sir Nicholas. Is it in order for an hon. Member to impugn Her Majesty and the Prince of Wales in the way that the hon. Gentleman has done in a debate on urban deprivation? It seems to me that he is straying a long way from the subject.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I have listened with some concern to the remarks of the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn). I did not intervene, in the hope that he would not continue with such remarks.

I hope that he has heard the point of order that has been raised and understands my discomfort, in the Chair, at some of his remarks.

Paul Flynn: The people to whom I have referred are victims of their own environment, as rural billionaires, and I do not lay any criticism—

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): Order. I ask the hon. Gentleman, because of his experience in the House and the respect that I have for him, not to continue with the remarks that he is making. As I have said, I think that the House could be placed in an awkward position.

Paul Flynn: I shall respect what you say, Sir Nicholas.

To reinforce my remarks, I point out that every calculation and every comparison between urban and rural areas shows rural areas to be better off. About 41 per cent. of rural households have two or more cars, compared with 26 per cent. in urban areas. Rural business growth is currently higher than urban business growth. The Government have allocated an additional £30 million to rural policing when, on every comparison of crime between urban and rural areas, it is urban areas that should have that extra policing. The standardised mortality ratio is 92.5 in rural areas and 99.7 in urban areas. About 45 per cent. of starting jobs gained under the new deal are in rural areas, compared with only 43 per cent. in urban areas. About 4 per cent. of households in rural areas have been burgled, compared with 10 per cent. in inner city areas. I believe that part of that distortion is evidenced in this House, where urban deprivation is not regarded as an issue of any importance, although it is a problem of gigantic proportions.

11.43 am

Mr. Iain Coleman (Hammersmith and Fulham): I shall be brief, because I am aware that other hon. Members wish to catch your eye, Sir Nicholas.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing today's important debate. I am grateful for this opportunity to discuss the index of local deprivation, especially now that the contract to review the 2000 index of deprivation has been let by the neighbourhood renewal unit.

When the 2000 index of deprivation was published, it was seen that my local authority, the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, had fallen from being the 18th most deprived borough in the country to 68th in the list. That has had a very serious impact both on the amount of regeneration funds available to the borough and on mainstream funding in general, especially the amount of capital funding that the authority has been granted. Given that effect, the financial position of the council will be seriously affected by the outcome of the review and therefore that review is extremely important to my borough.

The allocation of the neighbourhood renewal funds transitional protection, which has been provided for the last three years to those localities that were in the top 50 in the 1998 index but dropped out, has also seriously affected my authority—although I am grateful for the transitional protection. Under the arrangement, the seven boroughs that benefit from transitional protection, which include Hammersmith and Fulham, still qualify for neighbourhood renewal funding. However, that funding is calculated using a standard amount per head of population in those wards in the authority that are among the most deprived 10 per cent. of all wards nationally. In the 1998 index for local deprivation—I am talking about the previous arrangement—Hammersmith and Fulham had 13 wards in the poorest 10 per cent. nationally. By 2000, the number had fallen to two wards. The practical effect of that has been that the borough was allocated £2.3 million for next year, whereas if the previous index of local deprivation still applied, the council would have been allocated more than £13 million.

Hammersmith and Fulham has received £17 million less in housing capital, despite the transitional relief, as a result of the changes made to the index. In 2004, that transitional relief will end and the impact of ID 2000—the indices of deprivation published in 2000—will inevitably worsen. The borough's situation is very serious and I am pleased that the Government have now acted to review the 2000 index.

I will focus on the geographical access to services domain and the potential impact of a crime domain. There is no justification at all for the use of the geographical access to services domain. The researchers responsible for the calculation of the index claim that the majority of authorities support the domain in practice, but the reality is that the authorities that support the domain are predominantly rural and have very small populations. As far as I am aware, no such measure has ever been used anywhere else in the world to measure deprivation—in fact, there is evidence of the opposite measure being used. For example, I am told that in the calculation of the European Union 50 cities audit, high population density was used as a measure of deprivation.

The indicator measures the distance to key services for those persons and households living on income support. The number of people affected seems to be irrelevant. I am advised that in Chenies in the Chilterns, one of the most deprived wards on the domain, there are fewer than five people on income support, and it is possible that there is only one person on income support. It seems nonsensical to suggest that Chenies is more deprived than other wards because the one person who is on income support has to travel further to the post office. Compare Chenies with a ward in Birmingham, Sparkbrook that has 4,655 households on income support. Of the 10 most deprived wards on the domain, only two have more than 30 families living on income support.

The indicator measures the distance to key services as the crow flies—that is the only measure of access to services that is calculated as part of the domain. No consideration is given to waiting times, the quality of the service or any other factor that may be important in determining access to services.

At the time that the index was published in 2000, the academics who produced it said that the domain made very little difference to the overall result, yet they have consistently refused to support that view. I call on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to publish the data.

[Mr. Iain Coleman]

Like other hon. Members, I would like to see what the index would look like without the domain included—then, we could all see what effect it has had.

The Minister with responsibility for local government at the time of the publication of the index, my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Durham (Ms Armstrong), recognised that there was a clear gap because there was no crime domain. I believe that all the experts working in the field recognise that a crime domain is essential to any meaningful measure of deprivation. The absence of a crime domain fundamentally undermines the credibility of the index, so I am pleased that the basic crime data are now available for the whole country. I congratulate the Association of London Government and Greater London Enterprise Ltd., because they worked closely with two recognised experts in the field at the universities of Manchester and of Liverpool to identify robust methods of modelling that extend down to ward level. I very much hope that the Minister will confirm today that a crime domain will be included as an integral part of the review of the 2000 index.

There is no doubt that the index has a substantial effect on the funding of local authorities, particularly in London and other metropolitan and urban areas. I understand that the first report of the research team that carried out the work has just been published for consultation. I am advised that the deadline for comments is 15 January 2003. I hope that the review of the index, when published, will accept that anomalies inadvertently crept into the index that was published in 2000, and that appropriate changes will be made, so that the index can once again stand as a genuine and proper measure of deprivation.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (in the Chair): I thank the hon. Gentleman for his succinct speech.

11.51 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on securing the debate. She may not be aware that back in 1983, after encouragement from the then Prime Minister, I cut my political teeth in her constituency. At that time it clearly contained both affluence and very high levels of deprivation, and I doubt that it has changed much since. As a councillor in Hackney in the late 1980s, I had first-hand experience of similar levels of deprivation.

I have much sympathy with many of the points that the hon. Lady made. For example, she touched on the index of multiple deprivation and the ways in which, when being updated, as is happening now, it could be modified to include factors such as crime. I could add poor physical environment, to which I think she referred, and concerns about accessibility.

I shall echo one of the points, and not necessarily the whole range, made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), who spoke of the concern about post office closures in urban areas. Like other hon. Members, I have had difficulty identifying precisely what those proposals mean to each of our constituencies. That information has not been forthcoming and I have no idea which, if any, of the post offices in my constituency might be on the hit list, if such a thing exists.

Mr. Field: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that one difficulty with the reinvention programme that is being put into place is that urban post offices have been systematically closed in the last three or four years? It is not clear whether those closures will count towards the reinvention programme or whether it will be a reinvention programme involving 3,000 losses as of the beginning of next year.

Tom Brake: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that important intervention. Clearly, we need to know what the baseline is so that we know the overall number of closures that we face.

Other hon. Members gave statistics relating to London in particular, but it is worth reeling off a few more. London paid at least £10 billion and possibly as much as £20 billion more in tax than it received in public spending. We all know that London is a city of extremes, with the highest percentages of both high disposable income households and low disposable income households. Hon. Members referred to the level of deprivation in individual wards. London has two thirds of the most deprived local authority housing estates and three of the five most deprived boroughs in England. A series of other statistics confirm the level of deprivation in London.

I shall consider three or four key points relating to funding, the first of which is whether funding is sufficient to make a difference. The obvious answer is that we do not know whether it is, because, historically, the take-up of available grants has been limited.

I hope that the Minister will explain how the Government intend to ensure a much higher take-up in future. If she replies that take-up is 100 per cent., we are clearly still failing to deal with fundamental issues such as homelessness in London, which in the third quarter of this year stood at 49,850—a 3.4 per cent. increase on the previous quarter. So far as I can tell, it is the highest figure since 1986, perhaps the highest since records were started. We know that it has a heavy knock-on impact on other services, such as the NHS. It is estimated that homeless people using accident and emergency departments as their GP surgery costs the NHS an extra £1 million a year.

Hon. Members will know that there are about 750,000 empty homes and 200,000 homeless households in England and Wales. Each region has sufficient empty homes to meet the demand. It is not true that all the properties are up in the north and all the demand in the south—the north does have relatively more empty properties, but there are enough in the south to accommodate the homeless households. One has to assume that funding remains insufficient because major problems such as homelessness are still a problem. London should not rule out extra funding to improve its deprived urban areas. I am sure that the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North supports London's Olympic bid as a means of bringing in an extra £1 billion of private investment, which would be targeted at the more deprived areas of east London.

Having examined whether funding is sufficient, we should move on to examine whether it is reaching the parts that other resources cannot reach. I apologise for using a local constituency example, but I know most about the northern wards in the London borough of Sutton—St. Helier, Wandle Valley and The Wrythe—which are comparable to the 20 per cent. worst wards nationally. The local authority estimates that Durand close, an estate in the Wrythe ward, requires about £30 million to regenerate. Various activities go on around the estate—neighbourhood wardens and nursery facilities, for example, and Learndirect has recently set up an outpost close by—but because it exists at the sub-ward level, it is not picked up by any of the usual indices. I have drawn attention to that problem before, so will the Minister say what progress has been made on producing statistics that recognise the sub-ward level? I have provided one example, but I suspect that every Member here today could identify many similar pockets of deprivation in their constituencies, which should appear on the Government's radar.

Another crucial issue is how easy it is to access the available funding. I am aware of long-standing complaints about the complexity of too many funding streams, which require significant management time to deal with. The Government have started to examine rationalisation, but I hope that the Minister can tell us more about their plans to make it easier for local authorities to access available funds. If there were enough funding and people could access it, would that be sufficient to regenerate our deprived areas? The Government need to consider other areas, such as the urban task force's identification of the need for a single remediation permit. Such a permit would facilitate the regeneration of brownfield sites by co-ordinating pollution prevention and control and tying in everything that needs to be done to deal with water pollution and contaminated land.

There is another area where more work is needed, even with sufficient funding. I am sure that the Minister has seen the latest news from Urban Forum, which has identified the need for the much greater involvement of community and voluntary groups to make the best use of available funding. The main recommendation of its latest report is that the Government need to invest in community and voluntary groups with as much passion and belief as they invest in business support and public services.

How do we make private funding available for business? I am sure that the Minister is familiar with the community development finance institutions that were set up specifically to lend in deprived areas and under-served markets, especially in ethnic minority communities, where it is difficult to get access to mainstream finance. Will the Minister set out what support the Government can give that sector?

Unfortunately, I do not have time to touch on issues such as policing and the resources for policing, the role that public transport can play in regenerating areas, or the role that the tram could play in regenerating the St. Helier estate in my constituency by extending to Tooting.

This has been a well informed and non-partisan debate. There is clearly much regeneration in London, as in other cities such as Manchester and Birmingham. That is welcome, but extremes of wealth and poverty are still visible. The real test of the Government and their funding strategy will be whether they can provide funding for much smaller pockets of deprivation in our constituencies, as well as regenerating the larger and more visible areas of deprivation.

12.2 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): I am grateful to you for allowing me to catch your eye, Mr. O'Hara.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on choosing a subject that is not debated enough in the House, and on making a constructive and worthwhile contribution. The hon. Lady's complex speech may, perhaps, be summed up in one sentence: poverty in London remains staggeringly high. I believe that that is the case. It is an indictment of us all in the House, and we need to stiffen our political resolve to do better to solve the problems of our inner cities. To deal with a point made by the hon. Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn), that means treating the problem as an holistic whole. It does not mean setting the countryside against the cities; it means trying to produce a constructive solution for the whole country.

I am pleased to see the Minister in her place. I had very satisfactory meetings with her in her previous guise as the Minister with responsibilities for immigration. She was extremely helpful on several occasions.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) touched on a key point. Other hon. Members touched on the Government's new index and how, paradoxically, the new measurements are making some of our most deprived areas, especially in London, worse off than they would have been under the old system. That is clearly unacceptable. I am sure that the Minister has listened carefully to what hon. Members had to say about that. Representations must be made by 15 January 2003, and I am sure that the Government must be thinking carefully about the matter to ensure that the transitional arrangements up to 2004 are satisfactory. We will put in place a robust system to deal with the situation after 2004.

If we are to solve the problems of inner cities, we need to treat them holistically and to plan on a much longer-term basis than at present. At the moment, we seem to be operating almost on a fire-brigade basis; we deal with desperate problems as they come along instead of having more strategic planning for the future. Although I was critical of the Mayor's spatial plan, it is a good initiative, but only if we start to make progress on implementing it. I should have preferred such a huge document to contain a progress schedule of what the Mayor would expect to have achieved by each year end, so that his expectations could be measured against the reality.

My hon. Friend has an interesting point: how do we measure accurately what is going on in inner cities, especially one that is as complex as London? The homeless charity Crisis, which used to be called Crisis at Christmas, has estimated that there are up to 400,000 hidden homeless in this country. If that is so, there are more homeless people than ever before, but we simply do not know whether it is so.

[Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown]

I asked Lord Falconer, when he was a Minister with housing responsibilities, to introduce a system that would come up with some robust numbers and information. If the debate achieves nothing else—this is not a political matter—I hope that it will lead to the adoption of such a system if we think that the census, of which there is increasing criticism, is unreliable. I do not necessarily blame the Office for National Statistics, as it is difficult to get people to complete forms, especially if they do not want to be seen to be living where they are. There are a number of reasons why people—not least my hon. Friend—adopt that attitude. I do not know his reasons for not filling in his census form; perhaps he will tell us. This is a serious problem because we cannot devote resources to problems if we do not have accurate figures. My most serious point for the Minister is to ask whether a system can be put in place accurately to measure the extent of the problem.

With the exception of London, there is a flight from major cities—such as Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester. There is a flight into London, especially during the working day, but the more we improve transport systems, which we desperately need to do, the more people will commute longer and longer distances in order to work in London. We must try to overcome that problem by planning, which has a huge part to play in urban regeneration. We shall address the problem in more detail when considering the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill this afternoon.

We must start thinking out of the box in relation to our planning problems and try to secure developments so that people can live closer to where they work and to where they send their children to school. If we started thinking in such ways, we could solve many problems, including that of traffic congestion. In many parts of London, from 8 am until 9.30 am, and again at 3.30 pm until 4.30 pm, the roads are completely clogged by cars containing one parent taking one child to one school. If there were a system to ensure that the streets were safe so that people could walk their children to school, we could start to solve some of the problems of traffic congestion. If we started to use all the money that the Government have in an integrated way, we could begin to solve some of our problems.

My second most important point is about various Government budgets. I do not mean just the inner-city regeneration budgets—the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) is absolutely right; the regeneration budgets are far too fragmented. People do not know what they are for, and they are underspent at the year end. We are not getting the money from Europe that we should because we are too timid at claiming it, going outside the box and taking a risk. Surely it is better to try to get the funding, even if it is disallowed at the end of the day and the Government have to make it up. We should be pushing the barriers in Europe to get as much funding for our inner cities as we possibly can.

The Government could do far better for inner cities by employing joined-up thinking. They should use all their budgets in a joined-up, holistic way because there are many overlaps. The social services budget overlaps with the health budget, which overlaps with the education budget, which overlaps with the crime and Home Office budgets. Too many civil servants are locked in their Departments and will not think outside the box because they deal only with their own Departments. Somehow we must get a system to improve co-ordinated thinking throughout the Government. If the Cabinet Office is the vehicle for that, it is not working; we must to do better.

There are many problems that we could begin to solve. Many people have said to me, "What is the hon. Member for Cotswold doing talking about urban regeneration?" I have been the party spokesman on the subject for three years, and during that time I have taken a great interest in the subject, which has taken me to some of the most deprived areas in the country. I have visited deprived areas in Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Newcastle, Birmingham and Coventry. I have begun carefully to learn from some of the experts to whom I have listened, and I have begun to see some of the problems and some of the solutions.

The former hon. Member for Henley, Lord Heseltine, is not flavour of the month in my party, but during the 1980s the Conservative party carried out some of the most imaginative inner-city regeneration that has ever been seen in this country. He encouraged the public, private and voluntary sectors to work together and to think in innovative ways about how problems in our inner cities could be overcome; we should encourage more of that. We should encourage innovation, and the people with the energy to innovate, through Government funding and the bidding system.

I came across a very interesting quote from the former hon. Member for Henley:

> "I accepted that it was possible to prop up these communities by increasing the flow of public money, but that didn't address the fundamental issue of concentrated poverty. We needed to attack the root causes of the problem. The teenagers with the skills, the young would-be homeowners, the aspiring entrepreneurs, the strong, all those with the resources to choose, had to be persuaded to stay".

As I said earlier, we must persuade people to stay in our big cities. If they leave, areas become run-down and the entire system starts to fall down. People must be encouraged to stay by making their areas vibrant places in which to live, where people will want to stay.

The former hon. Member for Henley continued:

> "even to come back, live and invest—close to the areas of deprivation."

If we do not get all sectors investing in our inner cities, we shall never solve our severe problems. He added:

> "It was necessary to tackle the infrastructure's problems, to improve dramatically the quality of the public services and to create an environment to persuade people that it was in their own interests to live and work there. In other words, one had to enable these communities to compete for their place in the sun."

Everybody must be involved. People need to be imaginative in bidding for Government money, coming up with community schemes and working together rather than arguing with one another.

I pledge that the Opposition will, if we can, help the Government to improve urban regeneration. It is unacceptable that we have some of the worst problems in Europe, but are one of the most prosperous countries in Europe. We must come up with more imaginative solutions: I have begun to open the box this morning; I ask the Minister to do the same. Let us get Ministers, the Government and civil servants all thinking more imaginatively, and surely together we can all come up with solutions to some dreadful problems.

12.14 pm

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I start by congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck) on her choice of subject and on the thoughtful way in which she introduced the debate. I have enjoyed the debate, which has been of a high standard, featuring excellent contributions by hon. Members on both sides of the House. I thank the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) for his kind remarks. Whatever disagreements we may have on the detail of policy, nobody could doubt his passion and commitment to the agenda. Equally, nobody could doubt the passion and commitment shown by my hon. Friend in her work over the years, during which she has tirelessly raised the subject time and again. I shall try to deal with the important points that were raised during the debate.

Far too many people who live in our deprived urban areas suffer a double blow in that not only do they live in such areas, but the highest standards of public services are not available to them. The Government's programme of regeneration is about not only the new deal for communities, vital though that is, and other programmes such as neighbourhood management—on which my hon. Friend is keen—and neighbourhood wardens, but about how we use, or bend, mainstream programmes to ensure that services deliver for people. That is why one of my key objectives is to ensure that other Departments deliver on their floor targets. That may be one of the most bureaucratic official phrases ever invented, but it is an exciting concept. Floor targets are the social equivalent of the minimum wage. They set a minimum level below which standards should not be able to drop. That is every bit as important as all the programmes that we have. I point out to the hon. Member for Cotswold that it provides the joined-up approach to the mainstreaming of those programmes.

My hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North painted an accurate portrait of London as a place of absolute contrasts. The hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr. Field) spoke about affluent areas sitting side by side with much poorer areas, mentioning my constituency of Hornsey and Wood Green. As I am sure that he would agree, the picture is even more complex than that. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Coleman) talked about pockets of deprivation at sub-ward level. I could point to places in the most affluent areas of my constituency where a couple of extremely affluent houses will be next to a house in multiple occupation with acute levels of deprivation. That is what creates an acute situation in London. Of course, it is not confined to London, but is found in other areas as well.

Over several decades, successive Governments have failed too many communities, leaving a legacy of decline and despair in parts of our urban areas, and we know that we have a huge amount to do to turn matters round. In January, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will announce his plan for sustainable communities, aiming to create and maintain thriving communities in the long term.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Will the Minister comment on one of today's most intractable problems? She mentioned mixed estates. Does she agree that mixed estates are better than the current trend of sending those who fall below the norms of acceptable behaviour—antisocial people—back to the same estates, which will then become the new sink estates? We must think carefully about that problem.

Mrs. Roche: Some recent housing developments show encouraging trends in the other direction. I visited a housing development in the Thames gateway not long ago and was interested to see that it was a complete mixture of owner-occupied housing, rented housing and shared accommodation, side by side. I accept that we need to get away from the ghetto approach that was sometimes seen in the past. People are not designed to live in neat boxes, and planners and others should not categorise them as if they were.

As I was saying, we know how poverty and prosperity can live side by side. Areas in my hon. Friend's constituency have severe pockets of poverty. Golborne ward in north Kensington is in the most deprived 10 per cent. of English wards, whereas Hamilton Terrace ward in St John's Wood is in the least deprived 25 per cent. Such differences create huge issues for us all to deal with.

There has rightly been much concentration on the index of deprivation. I am extremely glad that we have had such a good debate on that, so soon after the publication of the first stage of consultation. We are consulting on options for updating the indices of deprivation 2000, to ensure that they remain a robust and up-to-date instrument for identifying deprived areas. We hope that that will meet the commitment made when the index was published in 2000, and we will look to update and revise it as substantial new data on small areas come on stream. We have also taken the opportunity to consider issues and debates that have emerged since publishing the indices, and whether refinements to the methodology are required.

A key task will be to assess whether we can develop indices for areas smaller than wards so that we are better able to identify pockets of deprivation. Several hon. Members have mentioned that, including my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). Other issues under consideration are revisiting previous attempts to include indicators on crime and physical environment and taking advantage of better data in existing domains. Reference has been made to those.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way a second time. I shall try not to ask her to do so again.

The Minister has touched on a serious problem, which other hon. Members also mentioned. If, increasingly, we cannot rely on census data because people have not completed the forms, and we simply do not know how many people there are in an area, how will the index of deprivation be measured? I am very concerned about that, because if we cannot measure such things properly, we cannot divert the resources that are necessary to deal with them.

Mrs. Roche: I understand the remarks that have been made about census data. My hon. Friend the Member

[Mrs. Roche]

for Regent's Park and Kensington, North dealt with the matter in some detail. She also mentioned the implications of population turnover. Given my experience in my own borough and constituency, I listened to her on that with heartfelt sympathy. We want to hear more about that matter from my hon. Friend, who has considerable expertise there, and all other hon. Members, and I hope that we will be able to have robust consultation on it.

The updating project is divided into three stages with extensive periods of consultation. The stage 1 report is already out for consultation. It sets out preliminary proposals for updating the indices, and deals with some points that have been raised during the debate. Stage 2 will result in a blueprint of our proposals for updating the indices; that will be subject to further consultation, lasting until early May 2003. The index will then be updated and published in summer 2003. We are therefore giving considerable time to dealing with updating. I am convinced that we must get it right, and I want to hear from the widest possible number of colleagues, as well as from those outside the House.

I shall deal briefly with the points that have been raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham asked me about publication material. Throughout the process, I shall endeavour to publish as much material and data as I can. My hon. Friend the Member for Newport, West (Paul Flynn) raised the question of urban post offices. An announcement about the post office fund for urban areas will shortly be made. I hope that it will bring comfort to my hon. Friend.

The hon. Members for Carshalton and Wallington and for Cotswold, as well as others, referred to homelessness. It is a subject dear to my heart, but difficult to go into it at length now. If we are to eradicate poverty and deprivation in London and other urban areas, we must tackle homelessness and, in particular, the problem of families with children living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation. That is why we have set ourselves challenging targets, and why I announced a couple of weeks ago that I would be consulting in the new year to ascertain how we can give the targets statutory bite.

Last week, we announced additional money for the country—£7 million—for refuge accommodation. In addition, £1 million from the homelessness budget was matched by another £1 million from Comic Relief—its largest ever domestic donation, so many thanks to it—for setting up a national helpline. I refer to domestic violence in the context of homelessness because we know from figures that we are collating that, although it varies from region to region, women and children fleeing violent partners account for 16 per cent. of homelessness nationally. The connection is clear and the problem needs a joined-up approach. I take the point about more research on homelessness having to be done. We are committed to doing that.

The hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington mentioned initiatives, including a review of area-based ones. He will know that we have made significant reductions in the number of such initiatives. I continue to keep a wary eye on new initiatives, which must pass strict tests. A great deal of work is happening locally. In Bolton, a local authority is putting its regeneration initiatives together to see what extra results can be gained.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned access to finance. That is an area huge enough to have a debate of its own. He was right to mention business funding, particularly access to business by black and minority ethnic communities. I hope that we shall return to that subject in detail.

This has been an extremely important debate. We have not dealt much with the new deal for communities, which I believe will significantly change the 39 areas to which it will apply over a long period. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Hammersmith and Fulham, who is the chair of the north Fulham NDC partnership. The neighbourhood renewal fund will kick-start mainstream programmes and bring the integrated funding for which so many hon. Members have asked. I am pleased to have made my contribution to this important area of policy, and to have listened to so many good contributions.

A303

12.30 pm

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): I am delighted to have secured this debate on the A303, which I hope will be fairly constructive in the light of the fact that the plans that the Secretary of State for Transport unveiled last week are on the whole welcomed by myself and my constituents, and in surrounding constituencies such as that of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath).

However, I start on one slightly discordant note—relating to the Government's policy on public transport—that is directly relevant to the amount of traffic that travels down the A303, and to issues of traffic safety and congestion. Only a couple of years ago, the Government were willing to give a clear commitment that they were considering upgrading the A303 to a four-lane road, and the Strategic Rail Authority was prepared to upgrade the railway line between Exeter and Salisbury from a one-track to a two-track line. It is to be regretted that the Government's proposal to improve the A303 has not gone hand in hand with an improvement to the railway line, which could reduce congestion.

The other day, I made the mistake of referring in a local newspaper article to the railway lines between Exeter and Salisbury as "Victorian in character". I have since been corrected by several constituents and non-constituents, who pointed out that in Victorian days—from 1870, I believe—there was a dual-track line between Exeter and Salisbury. I have been somewhat unkind to the Victorians, who maintained a better railway system in the area that was more efficient in terms of journey timings than the balance of road and rail today. I hope that the Minister will touch on the issue of dual tracking the railway line, and the relevance of that to the A303.

Broadly, I welcome the Government's plans for the A303, particularly the plans to dual the A303 eastwards from the Southfield roundabout near Ilminster, towards the junction with the M3. That will be an important step in helping to ease congestion on that route. It will open up a vital economic artery for the south-west, and should improve safety on many stretches of the A303 because people who get stuck behind slow-moving traffic are often tempted to overtake. That has meant that a number of stretches of the A303 have a very bad accident record.

I begin my comments on that part of the A303 by asking the Minister several practical questions about the newly envisaged plans. What timing is envisaged for the different stretches of road? We appreciate that projects take place at different periods. There is a plan to dual the A358 up to the M3—a subject to which I shall return—and there are also plans to dual the Ilminster bypass and the stretch of road from Sparkford to Ilchester.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): My hon. Friend mentioned the Sparkford to Ilchester road that he and I share, which is of great importance, sadly, because of the number of fatalities and serious accidents that have happened along that stretch. Does he agree that the plan—which has already gone through a public inquiry with no serious opposition—should be prioritised by the Department, so that some of the funds available for improving the A303 could be spent at an early opportunity?

Mr. Laws: That is a sensible suggestion. I hope that the Minister will return to it and explain the timing status for different stretches of the A303, particularly in Somerset, and tell us which of them already has some planning consent that might allow work to be accelerated.

The second practical point concerning timing is that I hope that the A303 will not be dualled simply to speed up traffic from London towards the west. That would open up an artery of traffic that could lead to huge congestion in Somerset before the completion of the route that we hope will take traffic from the A303 Southfield roundabout to the M5. I shall return to that when I discuss the A358.

Another issue on which I want to press the Minister is grade separation on the A303 in Somerset, which is being considered in relation to Cartgate, near Yeovil, and Podimore junction. Do the Government intend to consider grade separation on those two parts of the route in the light of the fact that that could improve the flow of traffic and reduce the number of accidents on those stretches of the road? What measures is the Minister considering to deal with the environmental damage that could result from dualling those stretches of the A303? He will be aware that issues have already arisen concerning the A303 Ilminster bypass, which is a concrete road that the Government have promised to resurface properly when work is next done. The neighbouring villages close to the A303 bypass, including Seavington and Whitlackington, have experienced a lot of noise nuisance since the bypass was opened. They are hoping that planting and screening, as well as embanking, will take place when the A303 is dualled in that area, to prevent the noise nuisance increasing.

Mr. Heath: I promise not to interrupt my hon. Friend again. Road noise is a substantial problem on quite a long stretch of the A303, particularly in the area of Wincanton, where for some inexplicable reason the Highways Agency, far from increasing the planting, has cut down the trees that used to reduce the sound nuisance to local residents, with the result that the road now has a very noisy surface and the residents have nothing to shield them from the nuisance. We are told that resurfacing will not be done until 2005. Does my hon. Friend share my view that the Government and the Highways Agency can do better in providing relief for local residents?

Mr. Laws: I certainly share my hon. Friend's views on the matter and hope that the Minister has detected that this is a common concern in the villages that abut the A303 in Somerset.

The choice that the Government must make between dualling the A358 from the Southfield roundabout to the M5, and dualling over the Blackdown hills, is obviously controversial; even people within the immediate area have different views. The Government were right to say that they wish first to explore the option of dualling the A358 from the Southfield

[Mr. Laws]

roundabout to the M5, instead of going over the Blackdown hills. They were also right to suggest that they may make that choice for a number of reasons.

First, there will be a major environmental issue if the A303 over the Blackdown hills is dualled. Such an environmental controversy could result in the project becoming bogged down for many years while objections are heard. We all know that during such projects Governments come and Governments go, and as suddenly as a road scheme goes on to the agenda, it can be taken off. If the rest of the A303 were dualled from the M3, we would face the problem of much larger volumes of traffic coming down the A303, then having to go on to single-lane roads, either over the Blackdown hills or up the A358. That is my first reason for hoping that the Government will go for the option of dualling the A358.

The second issue is that the A358 is a major trunk road in the region. It has key economic significance for Dorset and south Somerset, and is a major artery from there to the vital route of the M5. At present, it is one of the most congested roads—if not the most congested road—in Somerset, and has a very bad accident record. We hope that economic, environmental and safety benefits could be secured by improving that route.

Will the Minister be a little more open and informative than the Secretary of State was in the House of Commons the other day about the inquiry into the practicalities of the A358 route? Will he tell us when it will start, and give a broad idea of when a conclusion will be reached? The Minister may have heard about the frustration of many people in the Blackdowns area when it was announced last week that the Government are to set up another inquiry into the issue. Many people in the area feel that the Government should make a decision quickly, whichever route they take. Gill Bromley, a member of the Buckland St. Mary parish council, was quoted in the local newspaper:

> "This has been going on for so many years and they are putting it off and putting it off. This is a non-decision, we are no further forward".

I hope that the Government will come up with a decision on the route very soon.

I also hope that the Government will work with Somerset county council—for which this is a tremendously important highways issue—and that the Minister will suggest to officials in the Highways Agency that they should open communications with the county council to discuss the project's practicalities. I hope that when he speaks to his officials he will make the vital point for Somerset and the Blackdowns that this part of improving the A303 cannot be left to the end. It must be done as soon as possible if we are not to end up with a huge bottleneck at the Southfield roundabout, and if the extra traffic coming down the dualled A303 from London and the south-east is not to be faced with a choice of two very unsatisfactory single-track roads.

What is the Government's thinking on the manner in which a dualled A358 will join the M5? The Minister will be aware that the junction there is already extremely busy, and that many cars and lorries that use the route do not turn west to go to Devon and Cornwall but turn east. Are the Government considering a new junction on the M5 close to Taunton, and will they consider a southerly and a northerly junction for the A358 at that point?

Are the Government determined to ensure that the A358 scheme is as environmentally sensitive as possible? Is the Minister aware that many people still suspect that the Highways Agency and the Department for Transport have always favoured dualling the A303 over the Blackdowns, and that they might be tempted to bring forward a scheme for dualling the A358 that is not as environmentally sound as it could be, so as to reopen the question of dualling the Blackdowns route? Will the Minister assure us that he will not allow that, and that he will ensure that any A358 dualling is done in as environmentally sensitive a way as possible?

I shall wrap up my comments by talking about what will need to happen if the Government go ahead and opt for the A358 route directly up to the M5 rather than dualling the A303, the Blackdowns route. Many people who live along the Blackdowns route in villages such as Buckland St. Mary and nearby Newtown are concerned about existing traffic volumes on the A303, and about the bad safety record of the A303 through the Blackdown hills. The safety and congestion issues must be addressed. There is therefore a need to ensure that if the A358 route is chosen, the Government will put in place alternative measures to take traffic off the Blackdowns route.

How does the Minister intend to instruct the highways officials to design the A358 route to the M5 so that it becomes the natural highway taking traffic from the east to the west of the country? Will signing and grade separation be used to encourage people going to Devon and Cornwall to use that route rather than the Blackdowns route? Will he also consider downgrading the classification of the A303 Blackdowns route so that people are no longer encouraged to use it?

The Minister will be aware that a series of safety measures relating to the Blackdowns route has recently been considered, including a reduced speed limit of 50 mph and speed cameras. Will he ask his highways officials, as part of the wider project, to consider whether more fundamental safety measures are needed to make the route less attractive to through traffic and safer for people using it?

There is a very dangerous junction—the Eagle Cross junction—on the Blackdowns route, which has a high accident rate. The local feeling is that traffic lights or a roundabout are needed to deal with the safety issues there. The Minister may wish to write to me about that detailed point. I am grateful to him for participating in the debate and I look forward to hearing his comments. Doubtless I will be in contact with him about the issue over the months ahead.

12.45 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr. Laws) on securing the debate and on the way in which he has conducted it; he has made his points very strongly on behalf of his constituents.

I noted his welcome for the thrust of the announcement that the Government made last week in relation to the south-west area multi-modal study. He

talked about bringing schemes forward and about extra spending on the rail scheme. He is a pragmatic and sensible man. If he were not, his leader would not have made him the number two in the Liberal Democrat shadow Treasury team. I believe that he has been put in charge of finding spending cuts of £2 billion. I am certain that he would not want any of the schemes that he mentioned today to be part of those cuts.

Mr. Laws: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Jamieson: Of course. The hon. Gentleman is probably about to tell us where the cuts will take place.

Mr. Laws: I fear that, although that would fascinating, it would take up too much of our time.

Will the Minister explain why a proposal to upgrade the rail link between Exeter and Salisbury to dual track appeared in the Government's spending plans two years ago, but has now disappeared? I say that in the most constructive way possible.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman said that it would take a long time to tell us where all the spending cuts will take place; I am sure that *Hansard* will have recorded that.

There are priorities in such matters. The hon. Gentleman will know, having the job that he does, that one has to face priorities. That is particularly true when one is in government; it is different when one is in opposition.

The A303 is an important trunk road. It is part of the strategic route from London to Exeter, which also includes the M3 and the A30. On Tuesday last week, the Secretary of State announced to the House the Government's decision on the London to south-west and south Wales multi-modal study, known as SWARMMS. The study was established in April 2000 to look at congestion on the M4 and M5, the impact of tourist traffic, the potential to transfer freight on to railways and the need for improved road services to reduce pressure on roads.

The study also considered the future of several on-hold road improvements on the A303 in Wiltshire, Somerset and Devon and on the A38 in Cornwall. The schemes on the A303 within the study's remit were as follows: the Ilminster bypass improvement; the Sparkford to Ilchester improvement—which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath); the Wylye-Stockton Wood improvement; the Chicklade Bottom-Mere improvement; the Ilminster to Marsh improvement; and the A30 and A303 Marsh to Honiton improvement. Those stretches of the A303 are the remaining single carriageway sections of the road. They have a high rate of accidents—above the national average.

The Government are mindful that this is a popular holiday route, particularly from the south-east to the south-west. The rest of the route is already dual carriageway. Sections of the road are severely congested, particularly in the busy times of the summer when holiday traffic is in evidence. The route is also important for business because it links the south-west to other parts of the country. It provides access to the channel tunnel, the M3 and the M25.

We realise that there are sensitive environmental issues relating to that corridor. Four of the schemes are located in areas of outstanding natural beauty. The Ilminster to Marsh and the Marsh to Honiton improvements are located in the Blackdown Hills area of outstanding natural beauty.

We all know that increased pressure and congestion are experienced not only on the M4, but on the M5. That is particularly prevalent in the summer months. The SWARMMS study considered the need for improvements to the parallel railway routes that might reduce congestion on the M4, M5 and A303. Those are the routes out of Paddington to Bristol and Taunton, and out of Waterloo to Exeter. On the second line, the section west of Salisbury is single-track, which, as the hon. Gentleman said, prevents further improvements from being made to journey times and service frequency on that section. However, the study concluded that, although improvements to the Waterloo to Exeter route were desirable, they were unlikely to take significant amounts of traffic from the A303. That is one issue that informed our decision.

In the discussion that we had on the statement last week, the hon. Gentleman asked my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State about the re-dualling of the Salisbury to Waterloo railway line. I can only reiterate what the Secretary of State said at the time; that is a matter for the Strategic Rail Authority, and because of the other huge and competing demands, we are unable to take that scheme forward at the moment.

The SWARMMS study concluded that the whole route from the M3 to the A303, the Exeter route, needed to be improved to provide a second dual carriageway; a high-quality road from London to the south-west. Compared with the M4 or M5, the M3 from London to Exeter is shorter by some 25 miles, with obvious savings in time, costs and pollution. An improved A303 could provide an alternative and more reliable route from the London area or from the south-west to the south-east.

As I said, the A303 and A30 west of Ilminster go through a nationally important environmental landscape. The hon. Gentleman will know that our policy on areas of outstanding natural beauty is that we do not support infrastructure developments that damage the landscape if there is an alternative. The consultants who worked on the SWARMMS study considered that there was an alternative to improving the A303 and A30; directing traffic north from the A303 at Ilminster on to the A358 to join the M5 at junction 25 at Taunton.

The A358 is already a busy section of road, catering for regional north-south movement, and the hon. Gentleman has raised that route in past correspondence with the Department. However, the consultants recommended that route as an alternative to improving the A303 and A30 through the Blackdown Hills area of outstanding natural beauty. They thought that that solution was less environmentally damaging.

The south-west regional assembly has given us comprehensive views on the SWARMMS study. It undertook public hearings on the recommendations and decided in the end to ask us to dual both the A303 and the A358. What was not clear in its representations was why both those routes needed to be improved to meet the strategic needs that the study was reviewing.

[Mr. Jamieson]

Unfortunately, life is not that easy, and there are a number of problems with the consultants' solution. First, the A358 route is longer than the direct route from Honiton to Ilminster. Secondly, it will direct traffic to the congested junction on the M5 near Taunton. Thirdly, it does not provide an extra route all the way from the M3 into Cornwall that is totally separate from the M4 and M5. In other words, extra traffic will be put on the Taunton to Exeter part of the motorway. Taunton is designated in regional planning guidance for the south-west as a focus for sustained growth over the next 10 to 15 years.

However, the route has the considerable benefit of not requiring the A303 and A30 to be improved through the Blackdown Hills area of outstanding natural beauty, as that could damage the historic landscape and a number of wildlife sites nearby. We understand that if the A358 were chosen for improvement, there would still be residual traffic, environmental and safety problems in particular to be addressed on the unimproved A303 and A30. We are therefore mindful that some improvements would be needed on the existing route if the A358 option went ahead.

The hon. Gentleman asked how the inquiry on junctions on the motorway was progressing. I would not dignify it by calling it an inquiry, but the Highways Agency is certainly considering the technical specifications and all the other issues that relate to the provision of the A358 alternative route, including any extra motorway junctions either side of Taunton that may be required.

Mr. Laws: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way a second time. Will he ensure that his officials consult Somerset county council highways officials on that inquiry, and does he expect the inquiry to report with a final conclusion on whether the A358 will be made a duel carriageway in the next 12 months?

Mr. Jamieson: I assure the hon. Gentleman that all the relevant parties will be consulted. That is the thrust and the spirit of the multi-modal studies. We want this local input. Indeed, we have had enormous input from Somerset county council and all the other county councils that have been a central part of the inquiry. I cannot predict how long those discussions will take, but we hope that they will not stretch too far into next year. We want the matter to be resolved fairly soon, because it is key to progress on the entire route.

There are planning and environmental issues relating to the whole route. Which parts of the route will be dealt with first will be a matter for careful consideration. I take into account the comments made by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome, as we realise that several benefits might be attained by dealing with some parts of the route before others. We want to take the views of the county councils and Members of Parliament into account when we go ahead with the plan. We must balance the benefits to road users with the environmental impact, but whatever decision we take will upset one group or another. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are not yet in the position to take that final decision. However, I hope that we will be able to do so shortly. We are, however, clear that the south-west needs the two high-quality routes.

As I said, parts of the M4 and M5 are suffering problems of severe congestion, and the targeted programme of improvements lists four improvements to tackle some of those problems. More importantly, hon. Members will be pleased to hear that we have accepted the SWARMMS recommendations for the area east of Ilminster. The Highways Agency continues to work with the statutory environmental bodies to prepare the schemes to allow their entry into the TPI. Part of that work includes looking at junctions and roundabouts on the route, and making improvements at roundabouts such as Cartgate and Podimore. That should allow us to announce a comprehensive package of measures, some of which we hope to be able to deliver quite soon.

I know that the hon. Gentleman will ask why we cannot immediately ask the Highways Agency to press ahead with the construction and why there is a need for further delays. The answer is that we are not yet ready to include all these schemes in the TPI, but the Highways Agency is working with various bodies to see how we can make rapid progress on the schemes. Those discussions mean that I am confident that the schemes will be an improvement on others that we promoted in the past. They will incorporate the latest mitigation measures to reduce the environmental impact. I noted the comment about the trees. I am aware that the Highways Agency is the second largest planter of tress in England—second only to the Forestry Commission—and I am proud of that green aspect of the work of my Department.

As hon. Members have suggested, not all the schemes are in the same state of readiness. We intend to be in a position to make further announcements in the first half of 2003 on some of the priorities. I appreciate that improving the A358, as SWARMMS consultants recommend, would have local benefits, as well as facilitating longer-distance travel from Devon and Cornwall. We recognise that the north-south route from Dorset and Somerset to the M5 and north of Bristol is important, and we will get detailed advice from the agency and produce some answers on that as soon as possible.

We have had a short but useful debate. If I have failed to cover any issues in the short time available, I should be happy to correspond with the hon. Gentleman to answer his questions more fully.

Domestic Violence

12.59 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): The subject of the debate is battered women who kill. A few years ago the headline court cases of Sara Thornton and Emma Humphreys brought these women and their predicament to the public's attention. They were long-term sufferers from domestic violence who, in the end, killed their violent partners. Before their cases, the jurisprudence of the murder made little allowance for the effects of battering on such women.

In a majority of the 20 or so cases that come before the courts every year, the women are convicted of murder. They are convicted because they fit badly into the principal defence of self-defence, which has developed in the law with men—the majority of violent criminals—as the model. Classically, a case might involve a woman with no convictions, who would probably never harm anyone in other circumstances, but ends up a killer. The husband may often appear a nice, charming man, but is all too frequently drunk. He is sorry when he has been violent and promises to change; she believes it, but blames herself because she cannot make him want to change enough. She is economically dependent on him and if she left, her children would become part of a poor, emotionally disadvantaged one-parent family—so she stays. The men keep telling the women that they cannot leave and the women become convinced of it.

The police, the Crown Prosecution Service and others know that a woman in these circumstances may typically be assaulted 35 times before she seeks any help. When she does, the man sees it as the first step towards her leaving him, and it becomes the most dangerous time for the woman. Many women who leave partners in those circumstances have sometimes been followed and forced to return, and they often continue to be intimidated long after leaving. The need for secrecy about the location of refuges makes the dangers all too clear. It is difficult to disappear: they will have friends in common and he will have the right of access to the children.

Let us examine the problem from the male point of view. Almost half the total number of women killed in England and Wales are killed by a partner or ex-partner, usually when they are about to leave or just after they have left. In contrast, only between 6 and 8 per cent. of men killed in England and Wales are killed by their female partners.

Sometimes the circumstances do lead women to kill. Characteristically, the woman kills the man with a single blow, often with a kitchen knife, when she is under attack from his fists. She will be charged with murder, which is unlawfully killing someone, intending to kill them or to cause them serious harm. Four defences are possible, but the only ground for an acquittal is self-defence: the other three would reduce the conviction to manslaughter. Self-defence is the main defence, but it is the one that women fit least well into.

Self-defence is lawful when someone is attacked and he can use such force as is reasonably necessary to defend himself, but the force must be proportionate to the attack and it must stop when the attack is over. The measure of proportionality is seen through his eyes, so it has a subjective aspect.

More than 90 per cent. of violent offences tried by the courts are committed by men. Unsurprisingly, defences evolved in the courts to deal with male responses. Self-defence, with its requirement for proportionality, is effectively made for two reasonably physically matched men fighting. In that sense it is fair, allowing the attacked man to defend himself until he feels safe from further attack. However, is it fair to women who are attacked and use self-defence, especially to women who are victims of repeated domestic violence?

Women's situations and responses are different from men's. Women see themselves as physiologically somewhat fragile. They are not used to fighting, or to feeling the need to fight back, and they are less likely to have had training or practice in measuring force to make it proportionate in a fight. On average—I am the exception that proves the rule—women are smaller than men, and also weaker.

Women say in evidence that if they defend themselves using proportionate force to a man, not only does that not stop the attack, but it provokes worse violence. In the case of domestic violence, if a man has attacked a woman before—perhaps not in a life-threatening way, but inflicting pain, cuts and bruises and causing discomfort and depression—the woman will be afraid of provoking more of the same. If she has to fight back, therefore, she will not be calm and will panic too much to be able to measure a response. Self-defence entitles the woman to defend herself until the attack stops, but to do that she will have to stop the attacker completely. She will, at least, have to make him unconscious, and to do that she will need a weapon. We are now moving away from a proportionate response to his fists.

Many women say that they use a weapon to put the man down and thereby stop the attack, as an observer might say. However, they are gripped with the certainty that he will get up and attack them again straight away. In the middle of an attack when the man is down, they feel that they will feel safe only by hitting him more to ensure that he stays down. That is not convenient testimony, but it is what women have told psychiatrists, many years after their convictions, in anonymous surveys that have nothing to do with getting an appeal or retrying the issues.

The need to go beyond proportionate force to stop an attack only takes a woman to the point where a man is entitled to go in law—to defend herself until the attack stops. There is a subjective element to the matter, which must be looked at from behind her eyes. She does only what a man is entitled to do, but in her case it involves disproportionate force and so takes her outside the realm of self-defence.

Women do not fit the model of self-defence as evolved by the courts. That is not surprising, because violence has been male territory. The mismatch with self-defence goes a step further. There are cases in which self-defence is coupled with what seems to be delay. A man's previous act of violence is over and he is asleep, but the woman is sure that when he wakes up he will attack her again. She is convinced that she cannot leave, and feels like a hostage, waiting for him to wake up and torture her. If she strikes out at that point, it might seem even further from the male model of self-defence.

In trials in Canada, expert evidence is allowed to explain that mismatch, and the processes through which the woman goes. In the United States, the Washington

[Vera Baird]

state Supreme Court has accepted that any instruction to a jury that limits force to proportionate self-defence for a woman is not giving her the equal protection of the law. In England, neither of those things are the case. The jurisprudence is male. Without expert advice, women's reactions are not understood and may seem counter-intuitive. Consequently, self-defence is a poor defence option for a woman facing a murder trial. Its biggest disadvantage is that if that defence fails, she will be convicted of murder and receive a mandatory life sentence.

Women should, but dare not, invoke self-defence, and settle for a partial defence such as provocation, reducing their conviction to manslaughter. Consequently, the understanding of women's different reactions, of the kind that I have outlined that have been accepted in Canada and the United States, are not being put before English judges and juries because women dare not do it. No attempt can therefore be made to develop a female model of self-defence. That can be remedied only by a review of cases of battered women who killed, and that issue should be looked at carefully in the domestic violence review that the Government will carry out.

Unlike self-defence, the defence of provocation—the partial defence to murder—has adapted to women's needs. Provocation reduces murder to manslaughter if the killing is done during a sudden and temporary loss of self-control caused by things said or done that would also make a reasonable person lose their self-control. The courts are increasingly starting to understand the way in which women react to repeated provocative conduct, which is what domestic violence turns out to be. In the famous case of Emma Humphreys, the whole history of violence against her by her pimp was put in, to show her loss of self-control when she finally stabbed him in its fullest context.

That is good for future cases, but it raises a second problem. When case law moves the law on, it is not so well known as when a new statute is passed. Although the cases are famous, what they say is not. It is likely that many women before Emma Humphreys would have been convicted only of manslaughter, had the full extent of the provocation against them been included. The legal rule is that once the law has been declared, and once, as in this case, cumulative provocation can be brought into evidence, it is deemed always to have been the law.

A number of individuals have emerged from prison—usually in response to publicity—to appeal and to benefit from the changes in the law brought in by the Court of Appeal. They were convicted before cumulative provocation was allowed. They have appealed since, and their appeals have been allowed. Diana Butler from Yorkshire, Josephine Smith from East Anglia and Donna Tinker from the north-east are three who have appealed and benefited from that law change. They had the help of campaigning groups such as Justice for Women and Southall Black Sisters, but neither of those groups, nor any other, has the resources to identify and to prepare the appeals that must be outstanding for other women on a case-by-case basis. It is likely that there is a group of women scattered around the prison estate, serving sentences for murder, who were convicted before the law changed and who would now only be convicted of manslaughter. They are now entitled to an appeal and do not realise it. This is an unusual position; indeed, I imagine that it is unique.

There are particular difficulties in relation to domestic violence victims. They do not readily talk about what they have suffered, and so they are even less likely to respond to the publicity and to come out; nor is it known how many women are serving sentences in England and Wales for the killing of violent male partners. North American research finds that between 70 and 80 per cent. of women serving murder sentences are serving them for the murder of their partner as a result of domestic violence. The English academic Horder sees no reason to think that the proportion would be significantly different here. I have asked parliamentary questions to try to find out how many women who have killed their partners are in prison, but no record of that is kept. The Home Office's best estimate is that 14 women are in prison for the murder of violent male partners. At the time of the debate, however, the Justice For Women group is supporting 19 women who are in exactly that situation, so there is clearly a significant underestimate.

Miscarriages of justice, as some of those cases may be, should go to the Criminal Cases Review Commission. Appearing before the Select Committee on Home Affairs, the chair of the commission, Sir Frederick Crawford, was asked when he would exercise the commission's power to self-refer, whereby it would not wait for an application, but would consider cases that might be unjust and take them to appeal itself. Sir Frederick said that he would want to exercise his self-referral power on precisely the sort of case to which I have referred, but the commission has never done so. One imagines that it is too over-burdened to self-refer at all. In the case of Josephine Smith, which I mentioned earlier, it took three years from drafting grounds of appeal to the review commission sending it to the Court of Appeal.

What is to be done? Five, 10, 20 or 50 women may be serving life sentences, and perhaps many of them should be released now that the law has changed. They may be mothers. They may not know what they are suffering. I have pointed to two different ways in which I seek help from my right hon. Friend the Minister—two different ways in which the law on murder causes injustice to women victims of domestic violence who snap and kill.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I thank my hon. and learned Friend for raising an important subject and eloquently setting out the issues relating to women who are imprisoned for murder following domestic violence. Does she agree that an additional point is that a woman is doubly victimised when she is a victim of murder? A perverse incentive in sentencing means that it is to the perpetrator's benefit to kill the victim of domestic violence, because there will be no victim impact statement and no voice to counter allegations that she had aggravated his anger and thus caused him to murder her. Should not that be taken into account in the domestic violence review, to which my hon. and learned Friend referred?

Vera Baird: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that important intervention and I agree with her. Further to her point, domestically violent male killers of women

have committed frequent criminal offences. Let me put it another way. Women victims of domestic violence who become defendants have had repeated criminal offences committed against them by the perpetrators, against whom they turn. However, many men who kill their partners have had no such experience. Their cause for complaint is that the woman nagged them, or said that she was going off with the gym instructor, as happened in a famous case a short time ago.

It is well known that domestic violence affects one in four women, although battered women who kill are few. If the criminal justice system continues to treat them harshly, that sends out a clear message that the state is not prepared to understand the ramifications of how domestic violence affects women. If women electors are to have confidence in the system, the two features to which I hope I have pointed adequately in this short debate must be changed.

1.18 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird) on obtaining the debate. Having heard her introduction, I believe that on this occasion the appellation "learned" is justified. I do not use it in every circumstance, but perhaps I should. I also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran), who chairs the all-party group on domestic violence, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Ms Drown), who is also actively involved with these issues.

In addition to being the Home Office Minister with responsibility for crime reduction, including the reduction of violent crime, I chair the inter-ministerial group, which meets regularly to co-ordinate the Government's response to domestic violence. I hope to say a little about that later if I have time.

Domestic violence is an unacceptable violent crime that claims the lives of two women a week. It accounts for a quarter of all violent crimes and nearly half of all female murder victims are killed by a partner or an ex-partner. It is important for the Government and many other agencies to make a priority of stopping domestic violence and bringing its perpetrators to justice. The British crime survey indicates that there were 635,000 incidents of domestic violence last year. That estimate may increase as we improve the survey methods to make them more confidential, and as more incidents are reported. Certainly, one in four women is affected by domestic violence in her lifetime. I shall attempt to set out the legal position as I understand it, and then respond to the two particular areas of concern raised by my hon. and learned Friend.

The law on homicide does not distinguish between men and women, but statistics do not support the view that, in similar circumstances, men are more likely to be convicted of manslaughter and women are more likely to be convicted of murder. On the contrary, the statistics for England and Wales show that in convictions for partner or ex-partner homicides, a far greater percentage of men are convicted of murder and a greater percentage of women are convicted of the lesser charge of manslaughter.

Over the past six years, on average, three women a year were convicted of murdering their partner or ex-partner—14 per cent. of cases—compared with an average of 36 men a year, or 37 per cent. of cases. The law must deal fairly and appropriately with those who kill, recognising the variety of circumstances in which killing may take place. We believe that the law on homicide is appropriate and that courts are able to take account of the experiences of women who have been the victims of domestic violence.

Self-defence is a defence that can be used by both men and women. It is partly a common law defence, but the Criminal Law Act 1967 provides that a person may use

"such force as is reasonable in the circumstances in the prevention of crime".

The courts must therefore consider any defence on a case-by-case basis. Self-defence is a complete defence to a charge of murder; if successful, it results in the acquittal of the defendant. Self-defence is available to those who use such force as was reasonable and necessary in the circumstances to prevent injury to themselves, their family or their property. If made out successfully, it is a complete defence to injury or killing. It is for the jury to decide whether the force used by the defendant was reasonable and necessary in the circumstances. That is not a matter of blow-for-blow proportionality. A person suffering an attack may use the force that they honestly believe is reasonable in the circumstances, depending on the nature of the threat that they face. The courts take account of what was reasonable in the circumstances for someone in the defendant's shoes. For example, allowances are made for panic in the heat of the moment or for the fact that the defendant was small and frail and the criminal large and threatening.

If I understood the argument of my hon. and learned Friend correctly—I hope that she will forgive me if I did not—it was concerned less with the way in which the primary legislation is stated and more with the degree to which current practice encourages, or otherwise, defence solicitors and their QCs to argue a case in court. Through her professional efforts, my hon. and learned Friend has played her own part in raising the profile of defences and the arguments that can be made. I am sure that what she said today will reach a wider audience than those of us who are in the Chamber.

It is true that self-defence cannot be used in the anticipation of violence towards the defendant. Although I do not think that my hon. and learned Friend made a case this morning for changing that, I am aware that some groups have argued for such a change in primary legislation. It is very difficult to see how one could legitimise killing in anticipation of violence, as some appear to have suggested. I do not think that legitimising the planned killing of another person should be advocated as a way of dealing with violence. My hon. and learned Friend did not do that, but I am aware of some of the wider debates and arguments.

As my hon. and learned Friend said, provocation may be used as a partial defence, reducing the offence to manslaughter. As she set out very well, case law confirms that response to an act of provocation need not be instantaneous and that the cumulative effect of prolonged abuse may be taken into account when assessing the impact of a final provoking incident. She raised the interesting and perhaps unprecedented question of whether that change in case law has created an identifiable group of imprisoned women who have

[Mr. John Denham]

not yet had the opportunity to exercise that defence. That is a provocative question, as would be the question of why they were not able to exercise that defence. However, my first reaction to it is that the power to act on that lies not with the Government but with others, such as the commission to which she referred. However, that was an interesting and important point.

We have focused on court processes and the legal position of women who kill in circumstances of domestic violence. To close the debate, I should like to restate the importance of the Government's wider strategy—to try to stop the abuse at the root of such killing and to provide proper support for sufferers of such abuse so that other, better remedies are available to them. We are taking steps, although we must build on them further, to protect women from domestic violence. The Protection from Harassment Act 1997, for example, provides a remedy for behaviour causing harassment or fear of violence. Criminal evidence legislation has given greater support to vulnerable and intimidated witnesses.

There are many good projects up and down the country. Yesterday I visited the women's support unit in Cardiff, which provides very effective support to women who suffer from domestic violence and helps them through the complex legal procedures involved in housing, benefits and so on. It is important that women suffering from violence in their relationships have real options; somewhere safe to go, financial support and help in finding new schools for their children if necessary. They need information, help and support throughout the process, including ensuring that the offender is prosecuted and punished for his violent behaviour.

In short, we must do everything we can to help victims before matters reach the point where lives are lost—most fundamentally, the lives of the two women a week who are murdered at the hands of their partners or ex-partners, but also the lives of the men murdered by women who have suffered from domestic violence, although that is much rarer.

Much work is being undertaken. We are working with the police service to pilot the use of risk assessments, so that we can better identify the women who are at greatest risk and give the right priority to planning the safety and protection of victims. We want to ensure that assistance and support are in place so that domestic violence incidents do not go unreported. It is important that the measures on which we will consult in the new year ensure that the protection that the law is meant to offer women who suffer from domestic violence is real and can be upheld. More widely, we need to increase safe accommodation choices for women; we announced measures for doing so last week.

We must ensure that the health service plays a fuller role in supporting women who are victims of domestic violence and that the police and the Crown Prosecution Service give a consistent and appropriate response. Fundamentally, we must also continue to promote education and raise awareness so that the sense of the unacceptability of domestic violence as a violent crime is shared throughout society.

Post Office

1.30 pm

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): I am delighted to have the opportunity to debate the Post Office universal service obligation, not least because it is of particular importance to rural areas and areas in which residents have set up small businesses in their own homes.

My constituency is one of the most rural in southern England, and employment is concentrated in the new high-tech industries. There are many self-employed computer specialists, and such people depend on the postal service being prompt, reliable and universal.

It is remarkable that, in the 21st century, the postal service is struggling to meet the standards that it met in the 19th century. Nevertheless, we are to see not only a switch to a single daily delivery in the UK—the scheme has been piloted recently in my constituency, which is part of my motivation for this debate—but less efficiency, a more impersonal service and the decimation of a rural and urban post office network. Above all, we are witnessing a significant threat to the principle of the universal postal system—one that provides daily collections and deliveries throughout the country at a uniform price.

The universal service obligation was written into law by the Postal Services Act 2000. That states:

"a universal postal service is provided if",

except under exceptional geographical or other circumstances,

"at least one delivery of relevant postal packets is made every working day to the home or premises of every individual or other person in the United Kingdom"

and with uniform postal costs throughout the UK. I shall return to the point that the Act stipulates not a second delivery but at least one delivery every working day. It is important to appreciate the wider picture.

It is widely accepted that the Royal Mail will face much more intense competition in coming years. That prospect has the potential for improving postal services in some respects, but there are also clear dangers. As the Public Accounts Committee concluded earlier this year, more competition could mean reductions in low profit services and an erosion of the principle of a universal service at a uniform tariff. As elsewhere in our public services, the mantra of competition and efficiency can translate into the removal of basic service provision.

In response to my questions at the Public Accounts Committee hearing on 25 March, the chief executive of Consignia—as it then was—admitted that the uniform tariff, under which the cost of postage is the same wherever one lives in the UK, could be scrapped as more competition is introduced. He accepted that that could damage rural communities in particular. Yet the Government have led us to believe that liberalisation is secondary to the statutory requirement, under the 2000 Act, for a universal service, with attention to the needs of pensioners, those on low incomes and those living in rural areas. To quote the Secretary of State:

"We have . . . established that Postcomm's primary duty is to ensure that a universal service is delivered. Any proposals or decisions from Postcomm about market opening must be subsidiary to that duty."—[*Official Report*, 14 February 2002; Vol. 380, c. 297.]

I hope that the Minister will take the opportunity today to assure my constituents that that remains the Government's commitment, and that the growing concerns in west Berkshire about a decline in service will be addressed. Many of the problems faced by Royal Mail, in terms of failing to meet targets and declining profits, are the product of inefficiency only in the sense that inefficiency stems from inadequate investment.

At the same hearing of the Public Accounts Committee, it emerged—again in response to my questions—that the Post Office's losses are in large part due to its profits being eaten up by the Treasury over many years rather than being reinvested in new technology and services. The subsequent Public Accounts Committee report found:

"Consignia would have liked to invest more than £1 billion in recent years on greater automation of its sorting process, and in improving the quality and condition of its sorting offices. This was in the context of profits totalling some £3.8 billion (in cash terms) made by the post office over the last 20 years, around 70 per cent. of which (in cash terms) was paid over to the Government."

Those Members who, like me, have made a pre-Christmas visit to a local sorting office will be aware that most are woefully out of date, badly maintained and dilapidated.

Postcomm's proposals envisage a faster timetable for liberalisation than that envisaged by the European Commission. Postcomm envisages full market opening by 2007, while the Commission is talking about 2009, subject to an impact study. That raises the prospect of European postal companies having greater access to the UK's domestic postal market than the Royal Mail does to theirs.

As I have already noted, the 2000 Act does not stipulate a second delivery. It stipulates only

"at least one delivery every working day".

There is nothing wrong with that statement in itself, but there must also be regard to ensuring equity—fair and equal treatment for households and businesses across the UK—and reliability of delivery. Sadly, neither of those conditions is presently being met.

Newbury was one of the pilot areas for the single daily delivery, which started in July. Interestingly, three of the pilot areas were so horrified by the way in which the scheme worked that they refused to continue it after just two weeks. The basic components of the scheme were outlined in a press statement on 10 July. "Customers" receiving 20 or more letters a day on a regular basis were to get a delivery before 9 am. Most other customers were to receive their mail between around 9 am and "lunchtime". Customers could choose to pay for a delivery before 9 am, at a cost of £62.50 a month, or they could opt to collect their own mail free of charge.

Businesses could pay £184 a month for deliveries from 6 am if they were within 10 miles of the delivery office. In terms of outcomes, the magic word was "efficiency", which was defined in two senses. First, Royal Mail told us that there would be a "saving", as distinct from a cut, of around £350 million a year. Secondly, more letters would be delivered "on time", which means the next working day after posting.

There are some basic absurdities about the scheme. The cut-off point of 20 or more letters a day seems completely arbitrary. In fact, rather than paying £62.50 a month, it was cheaper for some of my constituents who were just under the limit to mail themselves empty envelopes, to bring themselves over the threshold. I am told that only one man in the country—not a constituent of mine—opted to pay the £14 per week charge.

More fundamental issues are also at stake. For those of us who are interested in maintaining a public service ethos in postal services, the language used in press statements of that sort rings immediate warning bells. People are no longer local residents; they are now called "customers". Cuts are cloaked in the language of "efficiency" and "savings". One journalist pointed out that in reality, it is not the second delivery that is being removed, but the first.

Last month, Newbury residents were told that the pilot scheme had been a great success. In a letter, which infuriated many of my constituents, addressed to "customers", Royal Mail informed residents that

"The pilot has . . . confirmed our view that a single delivery is the right way forward."

Postwatch took a more critical view. From the outset, the public watchdog insisted that

"customers' opinions and views be given full consideration when final decisions are made."

It also stated:

"Whilst we recognise that Royal Mail needs to make changes to provide a more efficient service, we cannot support those changes without a true understanding of customers' opinions and experiences."

Postwatch also noted that

"the trials were inadequate in duration and were run over the awkward summer period. Customers did not have enough time to gauge whether the new delivery arrangements were acceptable."

The fact that the Post Office thinks that the trial was such a triumph is contrary to the remarks about it that I hear from my constituents.

What lessons can we learn from the pilot scheme in Newbury? As for equity, small businesses in west Berkshire were put at a disadvantage when the Royal Mail singled out particular areas for the pilot. Later delivery times disadvantaged small businesses more generally, particularly in areas such as west Berkshire where many people work from home. The £184 per month for earlier delivery may be small change to larger companies, but not for small businesses or the self-employed.

Anne Karpf, writing in *The Guardian*, pointed out the fundamental point—that

"by separating off ordinary customers from business ones"

Royal Mail

"has irrevocably fissured the postal service in one of its fundamentals—universality."

As she pointed out, public service is not supposed to discriminate. Why—in social terms, as distinct from considerations of profit—is the so-called granny post deemed less important than express parcel deliveries for those able to pay? A cross-subsidy is not, or should not be, a term of disrepute, because it lies at the heart of the public service ideal.

What about reliability, a concept that is quite distinct from the narrow market conception of efficiency? Certainly the experience of my constituents—or should

[Mr. David Rendel]

I say "customers"?—does not support the conclusions reached by Royal Mail. In a letter, one of my constituents stated:

"On at least 3 occasions the post has not arrived before 3.30 pm, and on many occasions it has been after 1 pm. I have had 3 letters this week, that I have had to put back in the post box because they were not for me. Two letters last week arrived 5 days after the post mark date, so I presume they suffered the same fate. A neighbour told me that number 29 got number 27's mail and number 31 got number 29's mail. I had a letter delivered after 6 pm one night so I expect that had been delivered to someone else in the road."

Is that the "consistent service" that "customers" were promised in the letter that they received from the Royal Mail in November? The shift from the individual local postman who knew the area and the houses to which he delivered the mail to "teams" has resulted in less reliability, not greater efficiency. For businesses, reliability is more important than the number of deliveries in a single day, but the switch to a single daily delivery has not secured greater reliability.

There is a strong impression that the Royal Mail reached its conclusion before the pilot began. That is suggested by the fact that its press announcement in July stated:

"Following the pilot schemes, a national roll-out of the single delivery will start in the Autumn and be completed by October 2003."

That was the stated intention before the pilot scheme had even started. Local experience of the changes and the views of people in Newbury and elsewhere have simply been ignored, because they had been discounted from the start.

In the past, the Government have said that the universal service guarantee comes before any commitment to liberalisation, but that guarantee is now under attack. A scheme that has failed to deliver a better service to my constituents—it has worsened it—has been given a nationwide stamp of approval. Is that the price that we are being asked to pay for the Government's failure to unlock the resources needed for investment in and modernisation of the postal service?

A report published this week by the New Economics Foundation warns that community life in Britain's small towns and villages is declining, with the closure of one fifth of our corner shops, grocers, high street banks, post offices and pubs in less than a decade. The report raises the prospect of a "ghost-town Britain", with town centres in terminal decline and many of our communities isolated and excluded. Post offices are part of that equation. More than 4,000 post offices have closed since 1981. In 1997, 20 per cent. of rural post offices were the last shop in the village.

The post office is more than just another business; it is a vital social service that helps to sustain community life. The mail is an instrument of social inclusion, affordable for even our most deprived citizens and available to even our most isolated. If that is to remain the case, the Government and Royal Mail must rethink their priorities.

1.44 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Miss Melanie Johnson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Newbury (Mr. Rendel) on securing this debate on the Post Office universal postal service obligation. I have listened to his concerns and welcome the opportunity to respond to them. I speak as the granddaughter of a former postmistress in Bucklebury, Berkshire, not very far from the hon. Gentleman's constituency.

Mr. Rendel: It is in my constituency.

Miss Johnson: Indeed.

A key feature of the structures that were established in 2000 was regulatory reform to promote and protect the consumer interest. The Postal Services Act 2000 established not only an independent regulator, Postcomm, to ensure the provision of the universal postal service and to oversee the regulated postal market but a consumer council, Postwatch, which is specifically charged with responsibility for addressing the needs of consumers. The establishment of an independent regulator was widely sought, particularly by Post Office management and the trade unions, to enable the company to have commercial freedom, at arm's length from government, to operate in an increasingly competitive and dynamic market in which consumers increasingly have a choice of communication means and supplier.

The hon. Gentleman made some slightly disparaging remarks about the role of competition, but I am sure that he recognises, as we do, that it is a good feature of a market when it works well and that it provides choice and cost opportunities for consumers.

The consumer interest was and remains a main feature of the Government's reform of the postal services; therefore, maintenance of a universal service is the highest priority. Our commitment is well demonstrated by the 2000 Act, which enshrined the universal service obligation in UK primary legislation. It was a significant step forward for consumers and the UK postal service. Daily postal delivery service to every address in the UK at a uniform rate remains at the very centre of our approach to postal services, and the legal obligation to maintain universal service is the regulator's primary duty.

Let me turn to the questions that the hon. Gentleman raised about postal liberalisation in Europe. Concerns have been expressed that the UK is moving faster than Europe, but what is happening in the UK is consistent with European trends systematically to open the letter post market to competition. Some member states have already opened their markets in whole or in part, and the European Union has adopted a framework that provides for others to do the same.

Within the parameters set by the European directive, the UK and other member states determine the most appropriate course of action for their own markets. In the UK, Postcomm has a duty to ensure that the market is opened to competition in a way that meets the needs of consumers and is consistent with its primary duty to ensure provision of a universal service.

The hon. Gentleman commented on the single delivery. He does not need my advice about talking to the local management about some of the particular problems that his constituents have experienced; I am sure that he does that on a regular basis, as we all do when such issues arise on our own patches.

Royal Mail is a business and is run on a commercial basis. Delivery processes are a commercial matter for the company. It cannot continue to lose more than £1 million every working day; it must get a grip on its costs in order to be in a position in which it can provide the quality of postal services that we require in the future.The second delivery had become an anachronism. It was delivering just 4 per cent. of the UK's mail while accounting for 20 per cent. of Royal Mail's delivery costs; obviously there was a huge discrepancy. Reducing that disproportionate cost will make a positive contribution to retuning the company to profitability. Royal Mail wants to save £350 million gross a year by reorganising deliveries.

The new services have been tested as part of pilots during the summer. Contrary to the hon. Gentleman's uncharitable suggestion, the experience of that will be properly reviewed by Royal Mail. That is not to say that Royal Mail does not intend to roll out the new delivery specification during 2003, but it does mean that we can assess the impact of delivery changes on small businesses—something that was specifically assessed during the pilots.

I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's remarks on his constituents' experience of delivery during the pilot arrangements that were tested this summer, and these will be studied by Royal Mail. The whole point of a pilot is that it is a dry run that tests whether things work as well as they should and works out how to respond if they do not. I am sure that Royal Mail has learned from the experience.

On rural and urban services, the performance and innovation unit recommended options—Postcomm advised us of them last year—for supporting the rural network of post offices from 2003. On 2 December we announced the details of a £450 million funding scheme to assist the rural network during the next three years, subject to European state aid clearance. That funding is part of an overall financing package for the Royal Mail group in line with the Secretary of State's announcement in June.

On the rural network, the Government have made a firm commitment to prevent avoidable rural closures before 2006; we have made available a £2 million fund to support community post office initiatives. We will make available £450 million—£150 million a year from 2003 for three years—to help continue to provide access in rural areas where it could not otherwise be sustained on a purely commercial basis. Much is being done to support the rural network.

On the urban network, the Government have earmarked £210 million for the reinvention programme, obtained the necessary green light from the European Commission for the arrangements and, on 15 October, received Parliament's approval for the expenditure.

Details of a £15 million scheme to support post offices that are invaluable to the communities in deprived urban areas throughout England will be published shortly. An equivalent programme was launched in Wales on 15 November, and the devolved Administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland are developing or considering similar schemes. Those actions are supported by substantial funding, making it clear that the Government have lived up to their commitment to implement the PIU report. The Government maintain that commitment.

I shall turn to the operation of Royal Mail as a universal service provider, and to our measures to put it on a stronger footing. The Postal Services Act 2000, together with the arm's-length relationship that the Government have given the company, provides the commercial freedom that is necessary to enable Royal Mail to respond to competition and meet consumer demand successfully. The Government's 2001 manifesto commitment to

"high-quality, universal postal services, and a dynamic Post Office which can thrive in a world of technological change and increased competitive pressure"

meant that restructuring the company was a key priority. To put Royal Mail on a stronger footing, we have taken action to help the company face the future. We have already spoken about the package of reforms, and this year we have further strengthened management by appointing a new group chairman, Allan Leighton, and securing a new chief executive—to be announced—for the post office network. A new human resources director will also take up post early in the new year and the non-executive team has been further enhanced with four additional directors. The appointment of a new chief executive for the mail business and a new chairman of Post Office Ltd. is under way.

Royal Mail Group is already implementing a radical restructuring programme and over the next three years, under the renewal plans announced by Allan Leighton, the losses will be eliminated and the company returned to profit.

I was interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's comments about visits to post offices and the information that Royal Mail Group sent to us. We were all encouraged to do something and, in my constituency a week or two ago, I took up the offer and visited the Hatfield regional distribution centre of Royal Mail Group. It was very interesting to see how it has changed much of what it was doing over the past six months or a year to provide a more efficient and effective operation. That has resulted in a real turnaround in the performance of that distribution centre, and it is the sort of action we are expecting to see. It shows that real improvements can be brought about in the way in which things are done, and in efficiency and outcomes for customers, whether that involves businesses, individuals or business-to-business transactions.

That all came on the back of Lord Sawyer's examination of the deep-rooted industrial relations problems in Royal Mail Group. I congratulate all concerned on the resulting reduction in the level of strikes. We believe firmly that greater commercial freedom in the public sector is the right policy. The company's renewal plan is to address the problems of the past and restore profitability.

The package of measures introduced from June onwards has enabled the company to utilise the reserves of £1.8 billion on its balance sheet, which represents accumulated past dividends and cash generated by the business—that picks up a point that the hon. Gentleman made about the history. It enables the company to fund the necessary investment in Royal Mail Group's business to implement the renewal plan and to provide support for the nationwide network of post offices—subject, when necessary, to the relevant state aid

[Miss Johnson]

clearances. We remain committed to ensuring that continuation of the universal service is secured efficiently and effectively.

Mr. Rendel: As the Minister seems to be coming to a conclusion and we have a minute or two remaining, can I take her back to the question that she attempted to answer on the timing of the introduction of competition? She said that the introduction of competition in this country two years before Europe comes within the European directive. Does she agree that, nevertheless, the fact that Postcomm decided to introduce competition in that way seems to mean that Royal Mail Group will not be allowed to try to run postal services in Europe until two years after the equivalent European services have been allowed to try to run services in this country?

Miss Johnson: That issue needs to be considered carefully, but there has already been an opening up of markets in parts of Europe. It is appropriate that, within the parameters set by the European directive, the United Kingdom and other member states can determine the most appropriate course of action for their own markets. Obviously, we believe that, in the UK, we are moving at the right pace for our own market and its opportunities. A competitive business in the shape of Royal Mail Group represents a great competitive opportunity for the company and I am sure that the group actively recognises that.

We are looking to the continuation of a universal service to secure a viable and successful network of post offices to complement the improvements that we hope Royal Mail Group will achieve and to see an effective and efficient delivery service secured throughout the UK.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at one minute to Two o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 18 December 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Rwanda

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Dan Norris.]*

9.30 am

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): I am grateful to have secured today's Adjournment debate on an area of the world that continues to demand the attention of the international community. Rwanda is a country that suffers from all the problems endemic throughout sub-Saharan Africa, but it also has to cope with the effects of one of the most horrendous incidents of genocide in the 20th century, in which more than 1 million of its population were massacred in about 100 days in 1994. The failures of the international community at that time are well documented, but the question now is how we are contributing today and what we shall do in future to ensure peace and justice for that troubled land.

In October this year, I was fortunate to be part of a cross-party delegation organised by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. I am delighted that several colleagues who were part of that delegation are here today—including my right hon. Friend the Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), who so expertly led that delegation. Unfortunately, my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), who is chair of the all-party group on the great lakes region and genocide prevention and has done enormous work to highlight the problems facing Rwanda, is unable to be present. However, I am sure that hon. Members will recall from her address sponsoring the Queen's Speech this year that our delegation faced some unusual challenges, including a closer than expected encounter with a group of silver-backed gorillas who managed to instil more terror in our party than an invitation to a personal meeting with our Chief Whip.

I believe that I can speak for all members of the delegation when I say that our visit greatly increased our insight into the scale and depth of the challenges that face the Rwandan nation. I wish to concentrate on one particular day during our visit. It brought it home to me that the reconciliation that so many seek is not only a personal desire for justice, but essential to the survival of the nation. The day started with an unscheduled meeting with President Kagame, who answered our questions candidly. We focused on relations with the Democratic Republic of the Congo, a matter to which I shall return.

We then travelled to the genocide site of Ntarama. The site was an abandoned Catholic church where terrified Tutsis and moderate Hutus had gathered, under the false belief that they would gain sanctuary from the rampaging mobs. Churches were often the site of horrendous massacres in 1994. More than 5,000 people—mostly women and children—were killed at that site alone. Their skulls and bones were laid out on shelves, a dreadful reminder of the legacy that the people of Rwanda have had to cope with as they struggle for survival. Even eight years on, the atmosphere of death and despair was overwhelming. That the survivors had deliberately left the remains of their families and friends where they fell was an accusation to the world that had abandoned them and a warning for the future. All they ask for is a proper memorial to the dead.

We continued our journey to one of the Gacaca courts that is made up of local lay justices. It was set up this year to deal with the outstanding backlog of cases—about 115,000—from the genocide period. At first glance, the scene seemed almost idyllic. Women in brightly coloured clothes sat on the ground in the shaded wooded area, along with numerous babies and toddlers. More women, together with men of the rural community, stood at the back or at the side of the loosely formed square—about 500 in all. On the other side of the square, perched on small wooden chairs, sat 18 men and women with a man sitting next to them, huddled over papers on an unstable wooden table. The sun streamed through the trees as the children of the local school ran up to stand behind the seated dignitaries. My eyes were then drawn to the four men sitting on the bench dressed in bright pink shirts and shorts—the prisoners.

After a short introduction from the president of the judges and a minute's silence in honour of the victims, the prisoners walked up to the desk in turn and were asked to identify the killers of two local people. They gave out a list of names dispassionately, and returned to sit on the bench. However, the president called back one of the prisoners, Martin. He looked as though he was only in his early 20s, which meant that at the time of the genocide he would have been in his early to mid teens.

Martin was asked to give an account of his actions on a particular day. He stated that he was part of a group that went out to look for and kill some of the local Tutsi population. The victims were put into an irrigation ditch and the group started to attack them with machetes. A local senator came along carrying a gun. He asked Martin whether he had ever used a gun before. Martin said no, at which point the senator suggested that he try it out in an attempt to kill off the remaining victims.

The assembled community heard the confession in silence. Suddenly, a woman who was sitting behind us walked up to the judges and stood beside the prisoner. Some of the women assembled gave her a quiet handclap of support. She asked how her father, one of the victims, was killed. Martin did not look at her but confirmed that a sword was used to kill him. Then she stated that the mob had cut off her sister's breasts before she was killed, and that her mother had been stripped of her clothes. Again, Martin did not deny the contention.

Still outwardly composed, the woman asked whether Martin had killed her three children. Due to a mix-up at that point, she was forced to hand the microphone directly to Martin. He stated without showing distress that he had murdered 13 people on that day, including her three children. She walked back to her seat, where she later broke down in tears. The clerk wrote a statement for Martin to sign and the president announced the end of the hearing—hearings are held weekly—and the crowd dispersed.

It is difficult to guess the feelings and reactions that must have been raised in the community by that stunning confession. Many are still deeply traumatised

[Ann McKechin]

and find it difficult to discuss their loss. Many are afraid that the current peace will fail and that the country will again descend into violent revenge. Some who took part in the genocide but remain free are afraid of being identified by the prisoners. To us in the west, such a lack of outward emotion from both the victims and perpetrators seems incredible, but the courts are the first nationwide attempt since the genocide to recognise the truth and achieve some form of comprehensive reconciliation among the Rwandan people.

Two days later, we visited one of the country's prisons. Inside were gathered more than 700 prisoners—men, women and children—who were literally squashed in appallingly squalid and tiny accommodation. Even after only a few days' stay, it was glaringly apparent that the Government do not have the resources to maintain so many prisoners while such a large proportion of the population outside is living in abject poverty. That is the main reason why the Government have offered such a generous deal to those prisoners who agree to confess.

Martin's punishment will be determined not by the local Gacaca court, but by a superior district court. The maximum penalty for those who murdered under the direction of others and have confessed is 20 years, of which one half will be served in the prisoner's community. As Martin has been imprisoned for more than seven years, he can expect to return home in less than three years. In turn, the victims' families and the local community are encouraged to accept the confessions and, in a few short years, to allow the perpetrators to live among them again.

The United Kingdom Government have assisted in funding some independent research into the new system, and that research is being piloted in various areas throughout Rwanda. Although the initial reaction has been largely favourable, significant problems still exist in achieving consistency and implementation. It is clear that the meetings revive very painful memories that can lead to even more trauma for the witnesses, and the support offered to them is still weak. Prisoners can appear emotionless or even aggressive when giving evidence. In many cases, that is probably a symptom of traumatic stress, which many of them are experiencing in coming to terms with their participation in the killings and many years of brutal imprisonment.

In addition, many of the local judges are illiterate, and at present they receive a maximum training of only 36 hours in Gacaca law and the legal process. Understandably, their decisions are at times unsatisfactory, and they find it difficult to respond to complex questions about the process asked by members of their community.

The Rwandan Government have still to find much of the funding for the scheme, including the implementation of the community service programme. By contrast, this year the international community will contribute $177 million to the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which was established in 1995 at Arusha in Tanzania to try the leaders of the genocide. To date, only nine cases have been fully processed, although in a welcome step the United Nations agreed in August this year to treble the number of judges to speed up work on the backlog. It is unprecedented for the Gacaca system of justice to be applied on such a scale and the risk of failure is high. The necessity of establishing an international tribunal regarding the ringleaders is not in question, but there has been a weak response from the international community to the struggles of ordinary Rwandans in coping with the aftermath of the genocides.

The UK's record of assistance was consistently commended by everyone whom we met during our visit. I would, however, urge the Secretary of State to persuade our European colleagues to take greater heed of the need for justice. Despite the inherent risks of such a process, it has received widespread support and it is, at present, the only viable solution whereby reconciliation might be achieved. Time is not on the Rwandan Government's side. The transitional Government will come to an end next year and, for the first time since the genocide, there will be elections for both the Parliament and the President. There is growing cynicism in Rwanda about the work of the international tribunal, which is expressed at the highest levels from President Kagame down.

Last month, Carla del Ponte, the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, visited Westminister. She reported that the Rwandan Government and their agencies were increasingly reluctant to co-operate with the tribunal's investigations, particularly with those that related to inquiries into crimes of retribution by forces that are loyal to the Administration. There is mounting speculation that the Rwandan military are putting pressure on the President and his Government to block inquiries.

Carla del Ponte rightly mentioned the old maxim that justice must not only be done, but must be seen to be done. The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia is closely followed by the Serbian population, but there is little access to television in Rwanda. Accordingly, most of the people there are unaware of the extent of the complex and expensive work that is carried out by the tribunal and of the scale of the evidence against the genocide ringleaders. Despite the criticisms, the tribunal has achieved the first finding in international law of the crime of genocide. Anyone who meets Miss del Ponte will quickly become aware of her professionalism and her determination to fulfil her remit. She herself acknowledged the inherent weakness of instituting such proceedings many hundreds of miles away from the nation, and from the victims who suffered the dreadful crimes.

I am concerned that the remit of the UN regarding the tribunal and the scope of the inquiries should take some account of next year's political changes, because at the end of the current, transitional Government a new constitution will go to a referendum for approval. This is not to suggest that any person should escape justice, but to accept that it is important that none of the international agencies provide—even inadvertently—causes for destabilisation in this sensitive and vital period of change. The Secretary of State might want to comment on whether she would consider it appropriate for the UN to suspend direct investigations in Rwanda for a short, defined period until all elections are complete and then to propose that all further hearings of the tribunal be moved to Rwanda, wherever possible.

Internally, the Rwandan Administration must become sensitive to avoiding a build-up of tension and mistrust among their own population. The restrictions on political and civil liberty, which are to some extent understandable in view of the fragile security situation following the aftermath of the genocide, are radicalising opposition in such a way as to stifle reconciliation and hinder the transition to democracy. It is counterproductive and even dangerous to clamp down on institutions of common ground, where both Hutus and Tutsis can meet, talk and, hopefully, agree on their nation's future.

I would refer to the independent monitoring document that was commissioned by the Department for International Development last year, which commented that the law on non-profit associations, the press law and severe constraints on important political parties limited the scope for genuine political dissent. We must bear it in mind that 115,000 prisoners will be released into the community in the next three to four years, and it is also anticipated that there will be an influx of demobilised soldiers. It would be disastrous if those people were the focus of recruitment into an aggressive anti-Government sect. It would be preferable for the current Rwandan Patriotic Front regime to permit more peaceful public criticism and debate. I hope that the Secretary of State will use her best endeavours to encourage the Rwandan Government to permit a more open political system.

Another important aspect of long-term peace is the cessation of conflict in the neighbouring Democratic Republic of the Congo. The Rwandan Government are to be commended for the prompt withdrawal of their troops following the agreement that was reached between the two countries earlier this year in South Africa. Yesterday's announcement of a new peace deal between the warring factions within the DRC is very welcome and to the tremendous credit of the South African negotiators. However, as President Kagame made clear to us at our meeting, the eastern DRC has not been an effective state for many years. It will take time to address the root causes of that situation. If the militias that are operating in that part of the DRC are not disarmed, and if they continue to pose a threat, the President says that there is a strong likelihood that Rwandan forces will have to re-enter to secure their own borders. That may be understandable, but the consequence is likely to be a collapse of the Pretoria peace process and renewed conflict.

Despite yesterday's announcement, and contrary to the pronouncement of the DRC Minister of Information, I believe that the continued presence of an international peacekeeping force is vital to facilitate an effective disarmament. The recent UN decision substantially to increase the MONUC force is very welcome; but as the Secretary of State well knows, the current force is under strength and there will be great difficulty in persuading neighbouring states to provide further forces unless the richer nations of the world—including our nation—are prepared to provide the appropriate finance. The UK is in a strong position to influence decisions in the area and I am pleased to note that the UN recently considered providing finance for a peacekeeping force in neighbouring Burundi. I hope that our Government can argue a similar case for forces in the DRC.

Sadly, the humanitarian situation in eastern DRC has not improved. There is an urgent need to address the political vacuum and protect the civilian population. The conflict has claimed the lives of 3 million people since 1998. The suffering continues. Most commentators feel that there will not be sustainable peace in the region until economic factors, such as mineral exploitation, are taken into account.

The recent report by the UN panel of experts—about which the Secretary of State has reservations—and last month's report by the all-party great lakes group, provide disturbing evidence of the involvement of Rwandan-backed military groups and companies in large-scale mineral exploitation that provides no benefit for the local population. For example, in recent years there have been noticeable increases in production and export figures in Rwanda for certain minerals that are not found in large quantities in Rwanda itself. It is alleged that such economic interests have been funding as much as 80 per cent. of the Rwandan army's operating expenditure. There is also strong evidence of the involvement of a number of European Union companies in that type of exploitation. That involvement is in clear breach of the guidelines of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development for multinational enterprises. In the light of the reports, will my right hon. Friend tell us how her Department intends to respond to the recent recommendations? What assessment has she made of the reports?

Given the recent history of the great lakes region, does my right hon. Friend agree that none of the problems faced by any one country can be assessed in isolation? Should the Government not now be taking a more integrated, regional perspective by producing a regional policy paper? Does my right hon. Friend agree that the current memorandum of understanding with the Rwandan Government should be strengthened in the area of conflict resolution to cover human rights issues and mineral exploitation? With a lack of local, national and international regulatory bodies in the DRC, certain western companies have paid little or no regard to the rights and concerns of the local community.

The most recent report from the UN panel of experts named 12 UK businesses that are considered to be in breach of the OECD guidelines. I urge the Government to carry out a review of those businesses and to contact them to remind them of their corporate responsibilities and the need to abide by the OECD guidelines and the UN declaration of human rights. We must not forget that there has been a mass of human rights abuses by all sides in the current conflict. As in Rwanda itself, the right to justice must be addressed if reconciliation is to be achieved.

Carla del Ponte suggested that such issues might properly be investigated by the new permanent International Criminal Court. I hope that the UK Government, and the Secretary of State, will take an active role in setting up an appropriate international mechanism to bring the culprits to justice.

The UK Government—and my right hon. Friend in particular—have taken a commendably pragmatic view in assisting the Rwandan Administration to develop essential public services. The UK has made a major contribution to its reconstruction. However, the

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approach of the European Union, which has major influence in that part of the African continent, has been disjointed and slow.

Not only does Rwanda suffer from all the major problems that afflict sub-Saharan Africa, but the overwhelming majority of its adult population witnessed acts of violence during the genocide. Their scars are deep, and unless the global community—and the west, in particular—is prepared to support with substantial measures their search for peace, democracy and justice, the possibility of further genocide cannot be discounted.

9.50 am

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on securing the debate. I failed to secure it last week, but she has succeeded this week. We applied for it for the same reason; we were both part of the group to which she referred. I pay tribute to the hon. Lady for the way in which she expounded on many of the various issues that we learned about in Rwanda and the rest of the great lakes region.

It is a testament to the importance of the debate that the Secretary of State herself is replying to it, because that is not the usual practice in this Room. She has visited Rwanda several times, and she has probably seen far more of it than the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) and me. As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill has comprehensively explained the situation as we found it and as it has developed since our visit, I will not speak for long.

Unlike a couple of other members of our delegation, I had never been to Rwanda before and I had not taken a great deal of interest in its affairs, so I was on a very steep learning curve. I was quickly struck by one thing: there is a recognition that one does not talk about Tutsis and Hutus because Rwandans are trying to blot out the tribal distinctions as part of the reconciliation process. It was also regularly pointed out to us that people from both backgrounds were actively involved in that process.

There was a great deal of discussion about the origins of the denomination of Tutsis and Hutus. It frequently referred back to when Rwanda was controlled by the Belgians, who issued all Rwandans with identity cards on which their race was stipulated. The story goes that the designation of their race depended entirely on how many cows they had, which was a measure of wealth. I do not know whether that is true, or whether—as others would argue—the origins of that distinction can be traced back to tribal movements in Africa many hundreds of years earlier.

One of my first impressions of Rwanda was that it is very different from anywhere else in Africa that I have visited: I do not pretend to be very widely travelled, but I have been to several countries. Like the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, I was astonished by what we saw of the Gacaca system of justice. It looked as though it might have a chance of working, and I hope that it does. The memory of that man admitting to the slaughter of so many people, including the children of a lady who was present, is seared on my mind, and her deportment as she simply turned and went back to her seat—instead of trying to strike him, or bursting out screaming—was a huge testament to her inbuilt strength of character.

I do not think that many of us would have behaved in such a way. I cannot help but reflect that when a person in this country is accused of a horrendous crime against—for instance—children or women, large crowds gather outside the court and people scream, shout, push the police and thump the passing vehicles. Sadly, an event such as that happened in my constituency, but regardless of how dreadful the crime is, that is not responsible behaviour. It contrasts starkly with the ability of people from a less educated and poorer background to be much more resilient. Perhaps we have a lot to learn from them.

As our visit continued, I began to be struck most obviously by what I can describe in public only as a question of whom I should believe. Everything seemed to be too good because we constantly heard about reconciliation. However, something in my mind made me think that the people who came to power since the genocide were the winners. They had done a tremendous amount to put that behind them successfully, but at the back of my mind I wondered whether another—perhaps larger—group of people was somewhere feeling huge resentment because it was on the other side. However, we saw that the process of reconciliation was genuine, determined and successful.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): There are groups that have been overthrown. They are organised in the DRC and several are determined to return and to complete the genocide. They are out there and organised, which is part of Rwanda's problem.

Mr. Paice: I am grateful to the Secretary of State. I was fully aware of that and I was going to mention the groups outside. I was not referring to armed groups but wondering about the level of resentment in the general population. In other words, I was wondering about the level of support that the outside groups would have if they came back.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill said, the Rwandan Government should be congratulated on the withdrawal of their troops from the Congo under the terms of the Arusha accord. However, we challenged the President and others on the basis of several stories about such things as plundering mineral wealth. They flatly denied that such events had taken place, but I understand that there is clear evidence that they did.

I shall cite another example about which I do not know the truth—I can call that only misinformation. A person who made the visit with us and works with the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and the great lakes group went on to Burundi. He said that

"the Rwandan Government claimed in a letter to the UN SC on the 17th October this year that Uvira"—

which is in Burundi—

"was attacked by Interahamwe and ex-FAR forces using military boats with rocket launchers operating on Lake Tanganyka. However, I was in Bujumbura—close enough to see Uvira clearly across the lake—on the 18th of October and no-one had seen these boats. Equally, journalists in Uvira reported that the town was captured by Mai-Mai forces, not Interahamwe or ex-FAR."

I do not know the truth of that, but every time that one hears such conflicting information it raises the question of what one should believe.

I want to discuss food and agriculture, a subject that those who made the trip will recall was of particular interest to me, and to share my thoughts with hon. Members and, especially, the Secretary of State. I have visited several African countries and, indeed, countries that are well known for their agriculture such as Britain and Australia, but I have never seen land so comprehensively cultivated as that in Rwanda. Every hill and slope is cultivated. The downside is that there has been considerable erosion of the natural jungle, which, to pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, is the haunt of the rare mountain gorillas. It is important to address the conservation of the gorillas, but the gorillas might also be valuable for tourism in Rwanda. I hope that the Rwandan Government will recognise that and not allow further erosion of the jungle.

It was obvious to me that although Rwanda is a poor country, it is not food-poor. We did not see anyone who appeared malnourished in any way. Everyone, including the 7,000 prisoners to whom the hon. Lady referred, was healthy and well fed. It is not a country that starts off with food poverty, as so many others do, and it is obviously an agrarian community. We were asked several times by people whom we met how Britain could help them to develop their agriculture. That is my question for the Secretary of State. The more I pursued my questioning with them, either with our group or privately, the more I realised how basic were their needs.

The Rwandans had read that the common agricultural policy was not allowing them to export to Europe, which, without getting into the realms of the CAP, is only partly true. We know that many African countries are exporting fruit and vegetables to Europe—I have seen that for myself elsewhere in Africa. The CAP is not in itself a block, but there are huge problems.

Having spent 10 years working in an agricultural co-operative in this country before coming to the House, I have strong views about encouraging working together and farm co-operatives. What struck me was that the Rwandans would not require a high-powered delegation, or aid workers trying to impose a system from on high. Although I do not suggest that that is being done, it often has in the past.

It struck me clearly that all that the Rwandans wanted in so many areas was for a few people with good, solid, basic experience of encouraging people to work together, to go in to help build the local organisations. That will take time. Those people should teach the Rwandans about the need to produce consistent products in a reliable supply, so that potential buyers will be interested. That would take the Rwandans beyond the largely subsistence level of agriculture that they have at present.

From the parts of the country that I saw, I realised that Rwanda would never be a country with a huge, large-scale agricultural industry in modern technological terms because the landscape is not suitable, although I understand that parts of the eastern side are much flatter and might be more easily mechanised. However, there is great potential. Rwandans have suffered dramatically as a result of the collapse in commodity prices for coffee and tea, which have been their only real exports in the food world. Coffee prices have collapsed, so over the past five years the export value of coffee has all but halved, which is terribly serious because it is virtually the only source of export earnings. We must help the Rwandans to find a replacement for coffee; because of the lack of other natural resources, other types of agriculture must be regarded as the main contender, along with tourism.

I hope that the Secretary of State will agree that the Rwandans' need is at a low level. They do not appreciate or understand world markets. They require not lectures but on-the-ground help from a few people who are prepared to go there and commit themselves. Those people must have a considerable knowledge of what happens elsewhere. It would not be expensive and is something that we could do to help the Rwandans in the long term. It may be more effective than anything else that we can do and is well worth considering.

I hope that Rwanda comes through the end of transition next year satisfactorily. For all the reasons mentioned by the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill, I hope that the Rwandans can resist potential incursions from extremist Hutu forces outside their country—I hope that they stay outside the country.

Rwanda has huge potential but, as the hon. Lady said, it requires a lot of support from the rest of the world. I believe that Britain should be a significant provider of that support.

10.4 am

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): It is a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who was a member of the IPU group that visited Rwanda two months ago. I join him in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) not only on her participation in that excellent group but on her good fortune in obtaining the debate and on her excellent speech. I join her in expressing our best wishes to my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), a proactive member of our group who continues to follow those interests in the House; we look forward to her return after the Christmas recess in full health.

My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill gave a moving account of some aspects of our visit to Rwanda. She reflected on the terrible genocide that took place there, and then brought us up to date by speaking of yesterday's talks in Pretoria. I hope to touch on that subject during my brief remarks.

I first visited the region in 1994; I went not to Rwanda but to Uganda. Given that 1 million of Rwanda's population of 9 million were lost in 100 days, the spin-off to the neighbouring country of Uganda was dreadful. Sir David Steel, I and others saw the bodies floating down Lake Victoria, and saw the mass graves and the refugee camps. We saw then, and we are reminded of it today, that Rwanda cannot be considered in isolation. Nations in that region have problems and ambitions.

I am delighted that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development will be replying to the debate, because everywhere we went during our

[Mr. Tom Clarke]

IPU visit people had the highest regard for DFID's work and said that if its contribution could be emulated by other countries, within the European Union and elsewhere, even more progress could be made.

Given the problems of genocide, there are issues that clearly could not be resolved in the short time since 1994. Even today, they represent a major challenge to the international community. My hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill was right to remind us that, at our memorable meeting, President Kagame made some criticisms of the international community during that period of genocide; most of us felt that he had a point. We do not want to sit back and have the same criticisms levelled at us—with the same justification.

The Secretary of State is of course very much aware of the memorandum of understanding between the United Kingdom and Rwanda, which is so important in trying to solve some of the problems. She will recall the major aspects of that memorandum—respect for human rights, media independence and transparency. Some progress has been made but, as my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill said, we would be greatly mistaken if we thought that we had made anything like the progress that we would wish to see. Certainly, the evidence of the Gacaca courts was impressive.

On one point, however, it is important that we place our frustrations and impatience on the record—the achievements of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Regardless of what we have heard—the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire made some relevant points—we must bear in mind the tribunal's lack of achievements. It has not indicted one RPF member, and the fact that an investment of $800 million over six years has brought only nine convictions suggests that there are still serious problems.

We know the pressures on the Rwandan Government, but there are still questions about their role. I have no doubt that people are genuinely committed to the reconciliation about which we have heard so much, but I would add one point to the comments that my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill made about justice. If there is to be reconciliation, we must remember that justice delayed is justice denied. That is why we were very aware of our responsibilities when we visited Giterama prison, which holds 7,000 to 8,000 people. We welcome DFID's contribution of resources, but it is clear to us all that we must encourage those involved to speed up the process of justice.

We had other opportunities to say how we felt. I hope that what we said was accepted with humility—as I hope that what I have said today about the role then and now of the international community will be. For example, we were glad to have the opportunity to raise a case of clear injustice on behalf of a constituent of my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love), who may catch your eye later, Mr. McWilliam. I am sorry that there has been a delay in responding, despite the promises that were made at the time.

We look to the future of Rwanda with realism and, I hope, more than a degree of optimism, particularly given the role of the Secretary of State. However, we cannot forget the valid criticism that was made fairly recently in, for example, the UN panel report. Nor can we overlook the International Crisis Group report, which was published in November 2002. It said:

"The RFP wields almost exclusive military, political and economic control and tolerates no criticism or challenge. For the past three years, opposition political parties have either been dismantled or forced to accept the consensus imposed by the RPF, the independent media has been silenced, and civil society has either been repressed or coerced."

We are concerned about the July 2003 elections. We want pluralism to prevail, and Opposition parties, which seem unable to compete with the RPF, to be given the opportunity to do so. Otherwise, many people will regard the whole exercise as a mere sham.

I shall now mention the decision taken yesterday in Pretoria, because it offers great hope. There was a need for a peace process, and there is a need to ensure that it works this time. We recognise the role of the President of Rwanda, and he was very forthcoming when we met him. We welcome the withdrawal of his troops from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, but I remember one of his comments in particular. He said that he would not hesitate to send his troops back if the Government of Rwanda thought that there was a challenge to the country's borders. The situation in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Burundi and in the whole region remains worrying. Any suggestion that Rwanda is isolated does not reflect the realities of the region.

I hope that we can examine the peace process in Pretoria and consider the opportunities there, including those for tourism. When some of us were at Lake Kivu, we observed the enormous potential for tourism in Rwanda. The mineral resources, properly shared, offer a great deal of hope to all the people of the region. The greed that has been associated with them may have been the source of some of the strife that has occurred, including the terrible genocide.

I hope that we can view Rwanda in a regional context and address it from that perspective. I pay tribute to the tremendous work done by the Secretary of State, and hope that, reflecting what was said during our visit, she will consider the possibility of a regional peace conference.

I end, given that we are in Great Britain approaching Christmas, by quoting the words of Charles Dickens:

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times".

What we saw and have debated represented the worst of times for Rwanda and for the region. However, given the tremendous opportunities ahead and the region's natural resources, I believe that, for Rwanda and its region, the best is still to come.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. If hon. Members keep their contributions short, I can fit them all in.

10.16 am

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am privileged to follow the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke), and I join colleagues in congratulating the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on having secured the debate.

I have never been to Rwanda, but I have had two experiences that I associate closely with the area. The first was in 1986, when I had the mixed pleasure of serving for nine months in Uganda with a British Army training team. That was when President Museveni's forces successfully defeated President Obote's and established what we hoped would be a new era of prosperity, hope, common sense and justice in that country.

I was a young man, and it was my first experience of genocide. Sadly, I seem to have become a genocide tourist ever since, having seen what has happened in Kosovo, Northern Ireland, the Balkans and various African countries.

Clare Short: It is not genocide in Northern Ireland.

Patrick Mercer: Well, one has to make a judgment as to whether that is genocide; it might be classified as such over the past 300 years. I first really understood what was meant by genocide when I saw the large corrugated metal platforms that were established outside Ugandan villages, laden with the bones, the skulls, the ribs and other body parts of those who had perished in Uganda under various regimes. It was a horrifying sight. Sadly, I recognised the names of some of the young Ugandan officers whom we had trained and who had served under us as being associated with the continuing problem and, perhaps, having contributed to it. I hope that they had not.

The second experience was, strangely, in north-east Nottinghamshire, where I am lucky enough to have an organisation called the Aegis trust working in a house outside the village of Laxton, sometimes known as the Holocaust centre. It started by examining specifically the problems experienced by Jews under Nazi rule in the second world war, but it has evolved and has generated itself into a much greater concern, opposed fundamentally, root and form, to genocide. It has, rightly, concentrated recently on Rwanda and the lessons that can be drawn from the genocide there for the whole of the world, especially the great lakes region of Africa. Thanks to that coincidence within my constituency and to my personal experience, I feel reasonably closely associated with the area.

I shall talk briefly about the extraordinarily dangerous situation that continues in the northern Kivu area of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I need not tell the Minister what has happened there in recent years. The two nations of Rwanda and Uganda have elevated what might be called a tribal quarrel into a conventional conflict, bringing much additional misery to the region on top of the Rwandan genocide. Despite the several mentions that there is a sign of hope in the Congo and of the warring factions signing a peace deal, the area is still enormously dangerous. Both nations must accept that they cannot fight on foreign soil, kill 600 civilians, destroy the second largest town in the Congo and not be made to pay the reparations that are due under UN Security Council resolution 1304. I wonder whether the United Kingdom should review its aid policy to both Uganda and Rwanda if the reparations are not paid properly—perhaps some moral arm-twisting can help to redress the regrettable situation.

The governance of the two countries has been mentioned. Their military elements can distort the proper democratic rule if that can be seen to influence events. Can it be acceptable for international donors to be involved with nations that go to war on a whim? If there is a risk of renewed fighting in the area, the international assistance programmes should be scrutinised and, perhaps, suspended.

MONUC, the United Nations observers' mission to the Congo, has been mentioned. I am delighted to hear suggestions that the mission should be reinforced so that its already very effective job can be improved. With more personnel, better communications equipment and further transport, especially aircraft and helicopters, it might be even more effective—particularly, in view of the news of an upsurge in violence by insurgent groups in the area, through its monitoring positions established on the border, at Kanyan Bayonga and Lubero. By addressing all these points, we could help to prevent a recurrence of violence in the region.

I shall finish by concentrating on the work that has been done to commemorate the slaughter that has occurred in the past decade or so. There are more than 200 sites of mass killings in Rwanda, and a number of projects are trying to put money into turning seven of them into appropriate permanent monuments to the folly of genocide. It is hoped that they will instruct nations near and far about the effects on countries, nations and Governments of policies that run out of control.

On 3 September, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pledged £300,000 to preserve mountain gorillas in Rwanda. She stated that

"if the Great Apes are to be anything more than a memory this is a fight that we have to win. I am confident that we will do so."

Clearly, that is good for the gorillas, and I am delighted about that, but perhaps we should be looking to fund more important or more focused projects. It is pleasing to hear that, in the past couple of days, local government officials from the Congo have gone to visit sites in Rwanda. They have gone to learn lessons from what happened in the past, so that they can, perhaps, be avoided in future. If more funding can be found to ensure that the sites remain as a permanent memorial, and if the victims—those who looked on, those who took part, and those who suffered, even as second parties, in the killings in Rwanda—remember and are remembered, the lessons of what happened in 1994 may not be forgotten.

10.25 am

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Of necessity, I will be brief. First, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on securing the debate.

I shall illustrate the problems that we have talked about with the tragic case of Charlotte Wilson, a 27-year-old teacher and the daughter of one of my constituents. Almost two years ago, on 28 December 2000, she was murdered in Burundi. There was significant publicity surrounding the event. I have an article from *The Guardian*, published at the time. The crime was horrific. Charlotte was travelling on a bus from Rwanda to Burundi when, about 15 miles outside

[Mr. Andrew Love]

Bujambura, the 30 passengers on the bus were ordered off. Charlotte and her fiancé, along with 21 other people, were massacred for no apparent reason.

Charlotte worked in Rwanda for Voluntary Service Overseas. Interestingly, she was told that Rwanda was safe at the time, but that Burundi was not. However, because of her interest in the region, she chose to travel there with her fiancé. As her mother will attest, she was committed to the work that she was doing there, to the children, to Rwanda and to the region. Since Charlotte's death, her mother, Margot, and her brother, Richard, have worked tirelessly to pursue justice on her behalf and on behalf of the other victims of that particular crime. They, too, have a commitment to Rwanda and to the region, have travelled there both before and since and continue to take an interest in the area.

During the two years since those events, there have been reports from non-governmental organisations and local people. Indeed, a witness, Eric Marango, came forward, and there was concern in Rwanda about his safety. The family tried to bring him here as an asylum seeker, but they met the usual Catch-22, which is that if someone presents himself to an embassy or high commission and asks for a visa as an asylum seeker, he will not receive one. He must deliver himself to the shores of this country to be received as an asylum seeker. Therefore, Eric Marango remains in the country.

There has been a police investigation. Indeed, officers from Scotland Yard went to Rwanda, but they face enormous difficulties there, and we have discussed how fragile the situation is in Rwanda. Of course, witnesses are reluctant to come forward because there is a widespread climate of fear. However, the police and others have assembled various witnesses from non-governmental organisations. Local reporters for international newspapers and magazines and others have identified the Force Nationale de Liberation as the organisation responsible for the crime. It is an extreme Hutu group which, sadly, is still very active, especially in Burundi and the DRC.

I will not go into the situation locally, except to say that although significant progress has been made in Rwanda in establishing legal institutions—we should pay due attention to the work of DFID and others in achieving that—the situation in Burundi continues to deteriorate. There is great concern about that.

I should like the Minister to take on board a number of issues. I hope that DFID and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office will continue to put their best efforts into trying to resolve a heinous crime. They have been doing as much as they can, and I welcome that. I hope also that they will not give up on the case, but will continue to do what they can to bring the perpetrators to justice. Legal institutions must continue to be established. There is a particular problem in Burundi, where the situation is still tense and unstable.

There have been reports that the FNL is not only active in the region but has contacts in Belgium, and perhaps in other parts of the EU. It has been reported that its leader, Agathon Rwasa, has travelled to Europe on numerous occasions. I hope that the Minister and the Home Office will consider whether that organisation should be proscribed as a terrorist organisation. I do not know whether anyone is active in this country but, if possible, action should be taken in the United Kingdom, in Belgium and throughout the EU to proscribe that terrible organisation. I hope that the Minister will continue to focus on the region. If things continue to deteriorate in Burundi and in the Congo, we could face circumstances similar to those of eight years ago. No one wishes to see that. The international community—and perhaps Britain in particular—has a responsibility not to allow that to happen.

10.31 am

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West): I congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on securing the debate, and other hon. Members on their interesting contributions.

Like the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), my hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) was on the visit but is unable to be here this morning. I have discussed the issue with her at length, and she is optimistic about Rwanda's future and about what is happening on the ground there. She congratulates the Secretary of State for the work that her Department has done, with particular emphasis on education. My hon. Friend has also commented on the success of the vaccination programmes.

The plight of those living in Africa has once again grabbed the attention of those who write this country's newspapers, with the main focus on Ethiopia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. Rwanda, however—a country that dominated the headlines in the mid-1990s—tends not to take up much column space these days. That is why debates such as ours are so important in keeping Rwanda on the agenda after the news teams have left the country. As the right hon. Member for Coatbridge and Chryston (Mr. Clarke) mentioned, the problem does not recognise national boundaries. It spills over into neighbouring countries, as other hon. Members said. The problem affects the entire region, whether it is the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Uganda or Burundi.

Condemnation of genocide unites the world community, which has an obligation to step in and stop it when possible. That did not happen in 1994, however. It is difficult to find words that properly describe what happened then. "Horrifying", "appalling" and "sickening" do not seem to sum up the scale of the tragedy. We all remember the pictures on our television screens and the stories in the newspapers. The operation was meticulously organised, as the journalist Linda Melvern wrote in her recent book:

> "The 1994 genocide was planned in detail. Elaborate lists were drawn up of those to be massacred; half a million machetes and huge numbers of axes, hammers and razors as well as guns were purchased in advance and stockpiled—the costs met by cunningly diverted aid funds. One of the organisers of the genocide, Colonel Bagosora, boasted that he was preparing 'apocalypse deux'."

Much has been said already about how those who perpetrated the genocide that has killed more than 1 million people, in far and away the largest-scale organised killing since the second world war, should be brought to justice. Of course, it is important to the people of Rwanda to believe that justice has been done. It is to be hoped that the new Gacaca court system will help to speed up a process that has so far been painfully slow. However, I share concerns about the increasing

number of reports of intimidation and bribery—and even of the murder of witnesses who were due to give evidence. In Kigali alone, investigations are taking place into the deaths of 20 people believed to have been killed to prevent them from giving evidence in a local court. It is clear that a strategy for the protection of witnesses is a missing piece of the jigsaw, which must be put in place if the process is to be a success.

Reservations have also been expressed about the lack of training available for the so-called people's judges who pass judgment as part of the Gacaca system. The fact that defendants have no right to legal representation must be questioned by all those interested in fairness and justice. The Foreign Office has queried the matter.

Although it is important for Rwanda to deal with its past, it is doubly important for the country and its people to look to the future and face the challenging questions of how to bring about the development and advancement that we would all want for it.

Part of Rwanda's commitment to development and poverty alleviation must come through a commitment to peace with its neighbours. The peace agreement signed by Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo was welcome, but it will work only if all aspects of the agreement are implemented. So far, that does not seem to be happening. The key elements of the agreement were, of course, the disarming of thousands of ex-soldiers and their repatriation from the Interahamwe back to Rwanda. However, that itself will bring problems as soldiers begin to move round the country. The problem of AIDS is, as for other African nations, a scourge of Rwanda.

It seems that both countries are taking steps that are not exactly consistent with what many of us thought would happen after the signing of the agreement. The ongoing occupation of the eastern Congo by Rwandan soldiers is not acceptable. I read with interest a recent story in *The Observer* accusing many Rwandan soldiers of collaborating with Hutu militiamen to stay in the Congo and raid the rich mineral resources of the country. As one American diplomat said:

"The Interahamwe is now a very convenient excuse for Rwanda to loot Congo. Maybe it's 20 per cent threat, 80 per cent for show."

Another UN officer said:

"How serious are they"—

the Rwandans—

"about solving the Interahamwe issue when they seem to be fighting everyone in eastern Congo except the Interahamwe? Their security concern has become a joke."

As for the DRC, there are reports of civilian Hutu refugees, including many women, now being wrongfully arrested as part of the repatriation programme and taken into military camps such as the Kokolo camp in Kinshasa. One Hutu, a refugee from Burundi, reported that he was taken to a camp, tied up and locked in a lorry container. He was told that he was being sent to Rwanda simply because he was a Hutu. Surely that was not the repatriation that we envisaged when the peace deal was signed.

As others have said, Rwanda, internally, remains a country in real need. The latest figures from the World Bank show the percentage of households below the poverty line at around 70 per cent.—an increase of 17 per cent. since 1994. Life expectancy is not even 40 years and almost a third of children die before reaching the age of five. I mention the latter point because, of course, it relates to one of the key development goals set by the United Nations, classed as one of the key indicators in the eradication of world poverty. Illiteracy levels are high too, with an estimated one third of adults unable to read or write.

I do not make light of the efforts of the UK Government, and in particular the Department for International Development. It would be wrong not to note, and welcome, the commitment shown by the Government to the development of Rwanda, as set out in the 1999 country strategy paper. That is not to say that I have no criticisms to make—I am sure that that will come as no surprise to the Minister, for whom I have great respect.

Rwanda, not unlike its neighbours, is living in the stranglehold of HIV/AIDS. The country is among the 10 most heavily infected African countries, with almost 13 per cent. of its population now infected. The genocide of the mid-1990s and the massive mobilisations of population that followed served only to break up family units. That has been accepted as a factor in the increase in the number of HIV-positive people. It is important to remember that a staggering 60 per cent. of the population of Rwanda are under 20 years old. Among that group 10 per cent. are believed to be infected.

We need long-term commitments from the Government, so that countries like Rwanda can tackle HIV. The HIV problem threatens Rwanda's way of life. The Rwandan Government need new resources to overcome the massive overcrowding of Rwanda's prisons. My hon. Friend the Member for Richmond Park mentioned that she thought that people were stacked like chickens in the prisons that she saw with the group that recently visited the country. The recent United Nations report on the situation was distressing. It stated that in some detention centres four inmates can occupy every square metre of floor space in open courtyards, and that there are six inmates to every square metre in dormitory buildings.

The Rwandan elections, which are planned for July 2003, offer a chance for real reform and reconciliation in the country. That opportunity cannot be squandered. I wonder whether the Secretary of State has had time to read the International Crisis Group's report that called for the international community to withhold any finance for the elections because of problems with the Rwandan Government's lack of respect for political associations. It is clear that there are very serious questions about apparent restrictions on Opposition parties and on reporting in the independent press.

Several things must happen in order for Rwanda's future to be bright. The tourism industry in what is generally recognised as a beautiful country requires supporting projects—

Mr. John McWilliam (in the Chair): Order. May I ask the hon. Gentleman to bring his remarks to a conclusion? We should like to finish the winding-up speeches.

John Barrett: Yes.

[John Barrett]

The least that we in the developed world can do is to help the Rwandan Government in their efforts to meet the challenges ahead. I look forward to hearing from the Secretary of State what can be done.

10.41 am

Mrs. Caroline Spelman (Meriden): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on securing the debate. I also thank other members of the IPU delegation for taking the time to give us the benefit of their experiences. Several hon. Members spoke specifically about constituency cases and brought their experiences to bear on the situation in Rwanda. In the spirit of good will at Christmas, I acknowledge the Secretary of State's work on bringing reconciliation and helping to maintain peace in Rwanda—it is right to record that. We have heard that there is fragility to the peace, which should concern us all. I shall endeavour to keep my remarks as short as possible because many questions have been asked—I shall add several—and we want to hear what the Secretary of State has to say.

I shall focus on next year's elections, but not because I believe that Rwanda's past is unimportant—its outworking will be with both us and it for a long time. However, it would be helpful today to think about the country's future. Democratic elections will be held in July next year. That is good news, although questions remain. There are still multiple restrictions in Rwanda on political and civil liberties and there is no sign in the outline of the constitutional plan of a guarantee, or even an indication, that any political opposition will be able to participate in the elections on an equal footing with the RPF. I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to reassure me on that point and will answer two important questions. What are her assessments of how the elections will take place and of the viability of the opposition in Rwanda?

The International Crisis Group, which is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that works to prevent and resolve conflicts in all parts of the world, has made an assessment of Rwanda's journey toward democratisation. Although the group shows an understanding of the RPF's desire to hold a tight rein on such a potentially volatile situation, it also urges greater freedom for the press and for the RPF to allow public criticism. It recommends that an independent authority should be put in place to create and oversee the foundations of general reconciliation.

Does the Secretary of State support the creation of an independent body to oversee the politics of the country through the election period? What lessons have we learned from the recent local and district elections? The International Crisis Group claims that the national electoral commission abused its powers to veto unwanted candidates and guarantee that only supporters of Government policies were selected for the district elections in March 2001.

Elections were held this year. What is the right hon. Lady's assessment of the implications of those elections and what they augur for the future? The ICG says that the RPF should recognise that its authoritarian actions, whatever their motivation, have worked against its own stated objective, which is to restructure Rwandan political culture away from purely ethnic lines through popular education.

The general tenor of the ICG's report on Rwanda is that President Kagame should try the carrot rather than the stick in the fragile peace. The Secretary of State is well aware of the situation and has faith in President Kagame. What is her response to the more critical aspects of the ICG's recommendations published last month, to which I have referred?

The non-governmental organisation Saferworld, of which I am sure the Secretary of State will be aware, works mainly on demilitarisation and weapons collection programmes and is urging our Government to support and monitor the Nairobi declaration signed in March 2000, when the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda agreed to work together to combat the problem of small arms and weapons. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) about the importance of monitoring work and the fragility of the border situation. Will the Secretary of State reassure me that the monitoring process is effective? Will she respond to my hon. Friend's remarks about the under-provision of equipment required to be effective in that process, especially in the light of the recent peace accord, which will mean the return of thousands of disaffected Hutu refugees, many still armed? That will also bring volatility to Rwanda.

I should like to pick up the point about AIDS in Rwanda, which the Tear Fund has called a second genocide. I am sure that the Secretary of State has, with me, been appalled to see the outworking of rape used as a weapon of war that has infected many female-headed households that struggle to survive. That is another disaster waiting to befall Rwanda.

Will the Secretary of State reflect with me on an incredible irony: that a country that, as the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett) said, has an infection rate of 30 per cent. of HIV/AIDS must use 30 per cent. of its export earnings to service the debt owed to countries such as Britain? I am deeply troubled by the morality of the situation, when so many sub-Saharan African countries with high rates of infection remain heavily indebted to us and other rich countries and have to use resources that could provide better health care for their citizens. I am troubled by that bitter irony.

Another area of concern mentioned by hon. Members has been raised by agencies working the Gacaca community courts set up to try genocide cases. We have heard from hon. Members who have visited them and tried to understand where the truth lies in the highly charged emotions in the court as confessions come out and reconciliation is sought. One thing that concerns them and the agencies that work in Rwanda is that there is a desperate shortage of professional legal help. Some of those who preside over the courts have no legal training. Should we not be trying to ensure that the courts gain more support from us in terms of legal provision and civil service support? The civil service has been decimated by all the tragedies that have befallen Rwanda.

May I endorse a point made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) about the agrarian situation in Rwanda? Given the

terrible famine in southern Africa and now in Ethiopia, it is a plus point—as he said—that agriculture is relatively well developed in Rwanda, but its principal exports of tea and coffee are badly affected by the collapse in commodity prices. Will that be considered in relation to the reworking of Rwanda's debts?

The Chancellor said in his pre-Budget report that the heavily indebted poor countries initiative was failing, partly because of its failure to cope with exogenous shocks. The collapse in commodity prices is one of those shocks. I appeal to the Secretary of State to examine Rwanda's case, which cannot be worse. Although the agrarian situation is good compared with that in other parts of Africa, the framework cannot cope with the country's capacity to produce and meet the market need. It must be said that Rwanda has recovered remarkably well, given that the worst attempted genocide in Africa, in which both sides lost hundreds of thousands of their people, ended only eight years ago. Let us hope that the proper execution of the election process in July will underline that potential achievement.

10.50 am

The Secretary of State for International Development (Clare Short): I add my congratulations to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill (Ann McKechin) on organising the debate and on the clarity and sweep with which she put her case. We are debating the genocide in Rwanda and the great lakes—the most recent genocide in which the world failed to act, even though we have a genocide convention since the holocaust in Europe that obliges us to act. Moreover, the United Nations presence was pulled out and the people who were camping around its site were being slaughtered. That is a deep, recent historical failure.

I have been a major actor in efforts to bring peace and reconstruction to that area of the world. For the first time since 1997, there is a debate on the situation in Rwanda in which my policies have been subjected to parliamentary scrutiny, apart from parliamentary questions. Unfortunately, we have so little time left this morning that I cannot answer all the questions that have been raised. In terms of parliamentary accountability, that seems a poor way in which to scrutinise such a crucial policy. The United Kingdom can make a difference and give people who have been terribly hurt by history a chance of a better future.

When I first visited Rwanda, there were still bones and rags in many churches. There were little collections of skulls and bones outside those churches. The north of the country was still occupied by the forces that were trying to take over the country to complete the genocide. I do not remember much television coverage of the genocide, but I remember the coverage when the people moved out and became refugees. The cholera outbreak and the fact that they were living on difficult territory were relayed all over the media. The leaders of the genocide were driving out the population as the Rwandan Patriotic Army came in to liberate the country. The international community made terrible mistakes by providing food through those military leaders, which reinforced their power. That is part of the continuing instability in the region. Those who organised the genocide are still around. They are in Kinshasa, armed and still trying to invade the country. Rwanda is trying to rebuild at the same time as forces that want to promote a complete genocide attack it.

When I first visited the country, the international community took a humanitarian guise. No country or institution was willing to engage in rebuilding the country. Although we had no historical link and our colonial experience was bad, there was general support in the United Kingdom for my decision to take a lead in helping to reconstruct the region; otherwise, its people would suffer a continuing disaster. We had to make a commitment to long-term aid to get the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank to create a programme that would offer any economic growth to Rwanda, because the country is so poor. The land is fantastically rich, but it is very densely occupied. That was one of the tensions. Then there was the drop in coffee prices that led to the genocide. There are hungry people in Rwanda because not everyone has land, but the land is fantastically fertile. There are hungry people; that is unquestionable. It is in the statistics. Statistics were quoted earlier about the number of children who do not survive to the age of five.

The state of affairs is interesting, and it led to a UK shift to giving long-term commitments that enable countries to be more ambitious about their development. Our long-term commitment enabled the IMF and the World Bank to have a more ambitious programme, and enabled Rwanda to start to rebuild. The country went on to qualify for debt relief and is seen as a successful reformer, which is remarkable when one thinks of Rwanda in 1994. When those organisations took over, everything had been smashed.

Most of the educated people in the country had been killed because the more liberal and educated Hutus—the lawyers and so on—had opposed the genocide. There has been a big achievement. There is peace across the country and the north is stable. There are more children in school than ever before in the history of Rwanda. Some 74.5 per cent. of children are in primary education. Rwanda is on track to have universal primary education by 2010. Access to education was used in the colonial experience to divide people, so that is a wonderful achievement. The books of the past have gone, and children are not labelled as Hutu and Tutsi. All children are now getting access to school.

Those are all important achievements but, as has been said, there are still hundreds of thousands of prisoners charged with genocide. Some in the prisons might have had false allegations made against them, but many are responsible for engaging in monstrous acts. There are very few lawyers in the country, as many were killed, but to get any kind of normalisation, the problem must be dealt with. Given the rate at which trials were being held in the country, it would have taken more than 100 years to deal with everyone charged with genocide.

The prisons are well organised—the local Gacaca goes on—but are like sardine cans. They are absolutely full of people in pink outfits. That is Gacaca; it tries to use a traditional Rwandan way of using community justice to get the truth out. Very senior figures might be imprisoned, but those who have done less gross things might be accepted back into their communities and do some sort of repentance or work, so that there might be some reconciliation. That is a fantastic strain on the country. Those who have killed others' children will

[Clare Short]

come back and live alongside them in their village in a country in which land is scarce. Of course, after the killing, land and possessions were stolen, so there are also disputes about who has the land, and so on. However, the country must do something; otherwise, the prisoners will be there for years to come. What Rwanda has achieved is great, but the release of people will strain communities across the country.

I am running out of time; I am very sorry. I will write to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Maryhill about MONUC, the DRC and the UN panel. There are many important things to say. There is a danger that in Burundi there will be bouts of genocidal killing, rather than one spectacular genocide. The FNL, which my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) mentioned, and which is said to be responsible for the killing of his constituent, is the one group that has not come into the Burundi peace process. I will respond to all those complicated and important questions.

One of my personal ambitions, and one of the things that the UK can help to do, is to give this generation of Rwandans a chance to move forward and have elections and a constitution, not another bout of genocide. However, Rwanda cannot be safe if the Congo is not safe and if Burundi is explosive. To care for Rwanda, one must get a settlement in the region. There have been divisions in the international community and among members of the UN Security Council. The hostility within Rwanda is like anti-semitism as it used to be in Europe. There is real prejudice and division in Africa on such questions, and it needs to be understood. I think that we can make progress. The UK can play an important role. The present generation in this country do not have a colonial experience in the region, so we may be able to contribute to its rebuilding.

I will write to hon. Members on points that I have not been able to answer. The allocation of time for this debate has been unfortunate.

South Coast Multi-Modal Study

10.59 am

Norman Baker (Lewes): I welcome the opportunity to raise an issue of considerable importance to my constituents and to others who live along the south coast. I welcome the Under-Secretary of State for Transport, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Devonport (Mr. Jamieson)—who seems to be the Minister with special responsibility for Westminster Hall. He will know that I spoke to his office yesterday to give him some indication of the issues that I wished to raise. I intend to approach this matter constructively; doubtless, the Minister will respond in similar vein.

I welcome the concept of multi-modal studies. They are a welcome innovation, introduced by the Government shortly after the election in 1997. The concept was that, rather than continuing to consider particular roads, it was sensible to consider transport corridors and examine what could be done with rail and bus developments, walking and cycling initiatives, and even short sea shipping—if I can say that without tripping over the words. The concept is sensible and the Government deserve credit for it. Unfortunately, the good intentions have been blown off course by events.

I want to focus on the south coast, which is a good area to consider. It was right for the Minister to consider it and it is welcome that the Government are paying attention to the transport situation there. The south coast corridor contains a combination of local transport movements; very few movements run from one end of the corridor to the other. The Government's multi-modal study is therefore a study of a combination of little areas of transport movement. Nevertheless, it is welcome.

Halcrow is the consultancy company that has been appointed for the study. That surprised me, because the company is clearly doing work for other organisations. Most notably, it has recently done work for the RAC, for which it produced plans to build lots more roads—which was doubtless what the RAC wanted. I wonder whether there is a slight conflict between Halcrow's work for private companies and its work in the public interest, such as this study.

My worst fears have been borne out by the report that Halcrow has produced. It comprises 80 pages, of which only four are on bus and rail. Virtually none of the report is on cycling or walking. Of the £1.1 billion that has been allocated, I calculate that around 54 per cent. is allocated to road building with only 2 per cent. allocated to buses. Even worse—I want to raise this general point with the Minister—the difficulty with all multi-modal schemes, which are desirable in theory, is that the road elements tend to be progressed whereas the other elements are treated differently. Traditionally, the Secretary of State for Transport stands up in the House of Commons and makes announcements on the building of bypasses or stretches of road, and is then able to deliver. However, rail schemes are not delivered in the same way. I have never understood why Transport Ministers cannot stand up in the House of Commons and say, "I will deliver this rail scheme." They should announce rail projects in the same way as they announce road projects; but, instead, rail schemes are shunted off to the Strategic Rail Authority, on which the Government rely to deliver rail schemes.

The SRA is reporting to the Government that it wants to cut the number of trains in use, that it cannot deliver services, and that it is therefore prioritising. Consequently, many rail schemes that are recommended in multi-modal studies—including schemes in the south coast study—will not be progressed. Even Halcrow said, as did the local community, that there was a strong case for the electrification of the Hastings-Ashford line, which is the only diesel link along the south coast. The ludicrous situation arises that it takes me longer to travel by train from Lewes in East Sussex to Ashford, in the neighbouring county of Kent, than it does to get from Ashford to Brussels by train, including the need to change at Hastings because there is no electrification. That situation, which everyone thinks should be rectified, will continue.

No electrification is proposed for Uckfield-Oxted, although that has been in the plans since the 1980s. In fact, that was in British Rail plans. The Polegate-Pevensey loop, which Halcrow was keen to progress, will not happen because the Strategic Rail Authority does not regard that as a priority. Most culpably, there are no plans to reopen the Lewes-Uckfield line. That plan is supported by not only hon. Members from all parties, including the hon. Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry), with whom I am working closely, but all the local councils, including Liberal Democrats, Conservatives and Labour in Brighton and Hove. Virtually no one is opposed to it, the costs are modest, and yet it will not feature.

On the Halcrow study, the Council for the Protection of Rural England commented that it was

"extremely disappointed at the limp approach taken"

to the issue of the Lewes-Uckfield railway line. The rail passengers committee for southern England and its chairman, the excellent Wendy Toms, have raised real issues about SRA estimates for the electrification of Kent and Sussex lines, alleging that at £154 million those were five times too high. Whether or not that is five times too high, the key point is this: the road schemes that the Government wish to progress will progress. Rail schemes, cycling, walking and buses, are all dependent on external bodies, for example, the SRA or the county council, and those might not progress.

In the Government's implicit hierarchy for transport in the multi-modal studies, road building is a last resort. I think that that is right. Similarly, there is a waste hierarchy in which landfill is last. It seems right that the transport hierarchy puts road building last, but that is not going to happen in this case. In fact, because of the arrangements with the SRA, among other things, road building is first. It is, therefore, more likely that the road schemes that are recommended in the multi-modal study would go ahead, rather than other transport measures. That cannot be what the Government intend. I give the Government credit for wanting an integrated transport policy—I believe that that is still their policy. If it is, what will the Government do to ensure that there is progress on the non-road proposals in such studies, and in this one in particular? Will they ensure that such proposals progress in the right order, before road improvements?

The CPRE recommended that the transport hierarchy should apply and quoted the Government's own 1998 transport White Paper, which said:

"Since new roads can lead to more traffic, adding to the problem not reducing it, all plausible options need to be considered before a new road is built."

Those are the Government's own words, with which I entirely agree. Because of the way in which the situation is turning out, that will not be delivered. The timetable of events is worrying.

The environmental impact of road building is also a problem, not least in my constituency, which is in an environmentally sensitive area in a new national park. The Government are pleased to have created a national park, and yet it seems that one of the first things they will do is to approve an environmentally destructive road scheme that runs right through it. There seems little point in creating a national park if that is to be done with it.

The Halcrow study pays lip service only to the positive and practical measures that could be taken on so-called soft measures, although it recognises that those have a role to play. Where are the measures to secure travel plans so that car sharing takes place? Where are the measures that would push public sector employees—many work in Lewes—into adopting such travel plans? What are the Government doing about the 51 per cent. of car journeys in the area that are made simply to take children to school or to access local work? What are the Government doing about so many people driving alone in their cars? My colleagues and I in the Lewes area conducted a survey of traffic going into Lewes off the A27—the road in the multi-modal study. We found that 91 per cent. of cars that entered Lewes from the east had only one person inside. There is clearly an opportunity to encourage car sharing to reduce the number of cars, yet the multi-modal study says virtually nothing about that.

More importantly, there is the question of pricing. The Government talk about road pricing, but I want to talk about transport pricing. A parliamentary answer that I secured from the Minister on 20 November demonstrated that the cost of travelling by car—including purchase, maintenance, fuel, tax and insurance—had, from a base of 100 in 1974, dropped to 98.7 in 2001. It had also dropped over the period of the current Government. The cost of travelling by rail had risen from a base of 100 in 1974 to 185.3 in 2001—it had virtually doubled in real terms. The cost of bus travel over the same period had risen from 100 to 166.1. The cost of both public transport options had increased in real terms under Labour, whereas the cost of travelling by car had dropped.

Surely the Minister accepts that the price that people pay to get from A to B has an impact and affects which mode of transport they choose. The Government must take action to secure lower bus and train fares rather than simply saying, "That is a matter for train operators and private sector bus companies," because the consequence is that people are forced off public transport and on to the roads, which is the exact opposite of what the Government say they want to achieve.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Just so that we do not lose this point, will the hon. Gentleman say whether his party would increase the cost of motoring?

Norman Baker: I will wait for my hon. Friend the Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) to speak on party policy: I am here as a local Member of Parliament. I do not wish to be distracted. I want to be constructive and to raise constituency issues rather than to speak on transport policy for my party. I am sure that my hon. Friend will pick up the point. There is a long answer that I could give the Minister, but I do not wish to be driven down that track at this point.

I hope that when the Minister replies to the debate he will address the issues that I have raised about the relative increases in rail and bus fares compared to the cost of motoring. He may know that I have managed to persuade the train operator South Central to decrease by roughly a third the cost of season tickets from the constituency of the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) into Lewes and from Seaford in my constituency into Lewes. South Central tells me that that has led to a significant increase in the number of passengers buying tickets and the cost of the initiative is now covered through increased passenger use.

The scope for such schemes is enormous. The Minister will know that soft measures such as mine that break even can be far more cost-effective than environmentally damaging road schemes that have multi-million pound costs. I would have liked Halcrow to pay more attention to such schemes.

The Minister will also know that 63 per cent. of local journeys in the study area take place in the Eastbourne, Brighton, Gatwick triangle, where there is train capacity. Yet Halcrow has made no effort to identify how that capacity can be accessed. I am afraid that Halcrow has produced a road-building charter, with a coat covering it that reads "integrated transport". I do not believe that that is what the Government want, but it is what they have got from Halcrow in this study.

The study is also flawed in other ways because it makes assumptions about the economy. For example, it says that the Wilmington bypass will

"improve access to priority regeneration areas in East Sussex",

but what does that mean? The report of the standing advisory committee for trunk road assessment produced by the Conservative Government showed that there was no inevitable connection between improved road networks and economic vitality. SACTRA demonstrated that the impact depended on the various factors surrounding that road improvement. A new road to Gatwick, which is already strong, might well result in jobs being sucked into the area. However, a new road to a weak area might lead to jobs being sucked away from it. That naive and foolish connection between new roads and economic prosperity needs to be challenged. The Government have accepted, through the work of the standing advisory committee for trunk road assessment, that there is not such a connection, but here we are with the old fables being repeated by Halcrow.

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I should like to bring the hon. Gentleman on to specifics. What, if anything, would he do about the A27 between Lewes and Polegate, and indeed about the Beddingham bottleneck—where both rail and road use the same junction?

Norman Baker: That is an important matter, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that I shall come to that point in the course of my remarks.

I have mentioned the standing advisory committee for trunk road assessment, but even if one accepts—as I do not—that the new bypass will improve regeneration, one must ask where it will improve it. The answer is that it will open up a big parcel of land at Polegate in my constituency. That will lead to business development. I suggest that a consequence of that might be to take business opportunities away from Newhaven—which I hope that the Government support, as a port—and away from Hastings. There would be not a net increase in economic activity, but a reshuffling of it.

On congestion, the study is technically flawed. Congestion is a new word adopted by the Government, on which they are concentrating, although yesterday's statement was depressing for what it revealed about how congestion is developing. The study refers to congestion between two points and states that improvement of a road in a particular place will reduce congestion between those points—for example, Southerham and Beddingham. That may be true, but the Minister needs to understand that nobody actually travels from Southerham to Beddingham. People go from Eastbourne to Lewes or from Polegate to Lewes, or to Brighton, but they do not go to Southerham. No one goes there: it is a transit point. To be sensible, any assessment of whether congestion will be eased must take into account the access and destination points of any road journey—not just two arbitrary points on the road.

The Minister may know, if his officials have briefed him on the point, that anyone wanting access to Lewes from the A27 must go through a single-carriageway tunnel that joins the A26 at the other end. The Minister is nodding—I am glad that he has been briefed. The tunnel is at capacity. It already has traffic tailing back on to the A27 in the morning and into Lewes in the evening. No amount of improvement of the A27 will deal with that. When the Highways Agency was asked about the matter, it replied that it was not its problem because the road was the responsibility of the county council.

The county council cannot deal with it. There is no physical way to deal with the tunnel. By cutting congestion between Southerham and Beddingham the Minister will add to congestion in the tunnel. People travelling from Eastbourne to Lewes, or Seaford to Lewes, which are the real journeys, will have the same journey as before. Congestion point measurement does not work. It is surprising that Halcrow could fall for such an elementary mistake in its report.

The standing advisory committee on trunk road assessment also stated that when any new road is built or a road is improved, people begin to make longer journeys than they would otherwise have done and to go on journeys that previously they would not have made. They visit people whom they would not have visited; they take jobs that are further away. The spare road capacity that is created is filled up by extra journeys.

People making those extra journeys will also need to use the tunnel in Lewes. The idea that what is proposed will deal with congestion does not stack up.

In any case, Halcrow accepts in its assessment that the only real congestion is westbound in the morning between Lewes and Polegate, and says that a maximum of 11 minutes would be taken off that—I do not believe that it would be anything like that—with three minutes taken off the eastbound congestion. It proposes to deal with that congestion by means of a multi-million pound scheme.

I have concerns about the Southerham-Beddingham proposal to which the hon. Member for Eastbourne referred in his intervention, and more generally about the Lewes-Polegate road corridor. I say road corridor because a parallel railway runs from Lewes to Polegate, although Halcrow appears not to pay much attention to that in its so-called multi-modal study.

I am disappointed that the Southerham-Beddingham proposal has been rushed out in the past three or four weeks because, if the south coast multi-modal study means anything, it means a co-ordinated approach along the corridor, including due deliberation with relevant bodies and consideration of the impact of one scheme on the rest of the corridor. Instead, we are returning to the bad old days that we had under the previous Conservative Government of simply picking a road scheme and banging it in. That does not seem sensible.

There will be a so-called consultation exercise over Christmas, which will take place over two days in a village called Ringmer. Of course, Ringmer is not accessible by train and is nowhere near those affected directly by the A27 scheme. Consultation should have taken place in Lewes. It is unacceptable that there has been no proper consultation there. The Highways Agency merely said that it would carry out the consultation exercise in Ringmer, which mirrors what the south coast multi-modal study suggested about not having an exhibition in Lewes at all. It wanted one in Eastbourne and one somewhere else. It was only after I kicked up a huge fuss that one came to Lewes. When the exhibition was there, I was told that more constructive comments were made in Lewes than anywhere else. But the same problem arises in relation to this issue, with Lewes missed off the physical consultation map. I hope that the Minister will insist that that exhibition is brought to Lewes.

Why has the proposal been brought forward quickly? As the hon. Member for Eastbourne said, there is concern about the level crossing at Beddingham. The railway inspectorate issued a statement suggesting that it is unhappy about the safety of the crossing. I do not underestimate that comment, which needs to be taken seriously. The Highways Agency alleges that there have been 25 safety incidents, as it calls them, at the crossing in the past four years.

The police figures for the same period suggest that there has been one serious and three slight accidents, which does not tally, unless the other safety incidents are people weaving and dodging round the half-barriers. Frankly, anyone who thinks that they can weave round a half-barrier when a train is in sight must want their head examined, but such incidents have happened. I have always stuck rigidly to the highway code instruction, which is that one should always give way to trains at level crossings. That has always struck me as good advice, but others have not always followed it.

That serious matter needs to be dealt with immediately. Some action has been taken. Along with others, I have asked for enforcement cameras, which have now been provided. I hope that notices will accompany them, warning any drivers who weave round the barriers that they will invariably be subject to severe prosecution. They are endangering not only their lives but those of train passengers. I have also suggested as a short-term measure the erection of solid barriers down the middle of the single carriageway either side of the crossing. That would physically prevent such weaving and dodging.

Those measures would deal with the immediate safety issues. The Highways Agency says that the way to deal with the problem is a double barrier that would mean 24 minutes delay per hour. However, it says that we cannot have that, so we must build a flyover. I have just made two suggestions—enforcement cameras and a solid barrier—that would deal with the safety problem of preventing dangerous behaviour. The railway inspectorate has now said that it is concerned about the matter because there is a suggestion in the south coast multi-modal study that the number of trains that go through the crossing will increase. The road schemes may go ahead, but I would be surprised if we had those extra trains, so ironically that may not occur in any case.

The scheme is proposed. I tell the hon. Member for Eastbourne that I do not rule out action either at that crossing or along the A27—I have always been prepared to see action along the A27. However, I am concerned about the scheme: the way that it has been introduced, its contents, and its environmental impact in particular. I am taking slightly longer than I would normally, because there appears to be a shortage of people who wish to contribute to the debate. I hope that you will let me wander on a bit more, Mr. McWilliam.

Halcrow accepts that the scheme would have adverse environmental effects on the landscape, and impose an increased flood risk. It does not recommend the tunnel, although many people have raised that issue with me. However, interestingly enough, in the work that it did with the RAC recently, Halcrow was busy recommending tunnels up and down the country, saying that they were one of the ways forward. Halcrow appears to be out of the line with the advice that it produced for its private sector client.

There are a number of serious worries associated with the scheme, in terms of the environmental impact. It is closest to option SB1, which was produced by Bullens, the consultants in 1993, which is when the issue was last considered. In discussing the option of an online improvement to upgrade junctions at Southerham and Reading—roughly the same as the scheme now under discussion—Bullens stated:

> "The most damaging option to landscape and views by a substantial margin would be Option SB1. If Southerham Roundabout is upgraded in the future to become grade separated, the existing severe intrusion at Southerham would become even worse. The traffic would continue to cross the slope of Ranscombe Hill visible from the floodplain and Mount Caburn. The route would be raised on embankment across Glynde Reach causing high intrusion to the view from Mount Caburn. This option also encroaches on the SNCI at Beddingham Grazing Marsh."

[Norman Baker]

That is essentially the option now before us, produced by Halcrow. How can it be that the option that was discussed and dismissed as the worst possible option in 1993 is now before us for recommendation? It is a funny old world when that can happen in nine years.

I raised the matter with the Highways Agency. I asked why it was promoting the scheme, given the comments made in 1993. It said:

"The flood risk of the previous southern option swings the balance in favour of the northern route currently favoured even though the landscape impact is greater."

Even the Highways Agency says that the option is not the best in terms of the landscape.

I hope that the Minister is familiar with the part of the world to which I am referring, although if he is not, he is welcome to visit my constituency. We would be delighted to see him there—I will show him the route of the Lewes-Uckfield railway line and he will find that Mount Caburn is a fantastically famous and wonderful landmark in Sussex. People love it, not for its height, but for its shape and how it fits into the landscape. It is in an open plain, in a delightful part of the world. People are genuinely concerned about the environmental implications of what is a crude embankment—a cut and paste job—stuck between two roundabouts to get over the level crossing. The South Downs and the national park, which the Minister and his colleagues have been keen to promote, deserve better than that.

I hope that I have demonstrated that there are serious concerns about the environmental implications at the junction. If there is to be a scheme, the one that is proposed is certainly not the best for the environment. It may be one of the cheapest, which is perhaps what has recommended it to the Government, but it is not the best. I also do not believe that it will reduce congestion time at all. It is important to deal with safety issues at Beddingham level crossing, and I have mentioned ways in which that can be done in the short term. In the long term, and in answer to the intervention from the hon. Member for Eastbourne, the south coast multi-modal study should follow the hierarchy that the Government have set down. It should seriously consider and introduce other options. It should introduce cheaper rail fares and improve the bus network, and it should take some of the steps that the Government recommend. Once it has done that, it should follow the Government's advice and make roads the last option. If those methods—and soft measures, such as shared travel-to-work arrangements—cannot resolve the safety and congestion problems on the road, it may be necessary to return to road schemes along the south coast.

However, we have not reached that point yet. Those involved in the study should go back to the drawing board, take on board the Government's advice and consider other options first. Most of my constituents would prefer those options to have been exhausted before we introduce an environmentally damaging road scheme. As Bullens said in 1993, the scheme would be the worst option. It would be built in a sensitive area of the South Downs, at significant cost to the taxpayer. Before that happens, let us look at the other options.

I hope that the Minister will do more than simply answer my questions. On a minute matter, I hope that he will ensure that the exhibition that did not take place in Lewes will now take place. More seriously, I hope that he will reaffirm the Government's commitment to an integrated transport policy and to studying other options, such as rail, bus and soft measures, rather than simply opting for environmentally damaging road schemes. I hope that he will remit his thoughts on the issue to those involved in the study so that they can do their work properly, as I believe he and his colleagues first intended.

11.31 am

Mr. Nigel Waterson (Eastbourne): I commend the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate. Like other colleagues, we have been trying to secure a debate on this important report, and it is splendid that we are discussing it today. The spirit of unanimity may wear a bit thin as my speech progresses, but I join the hon. Gentleman in welcoming the process involved in the south coast multi-modal study. That process is important, and I have made representations to the consultants, as, I am sure, has the hon. Gentleman and many of our constituents. It is a good process.

I part company with the hon. Gentleman, however, in that I think that SoCoMMS reaches a careful, well-argued and balanced set of conclusions. It has tried to strike a balance between environmental and social considerations on the one hand and economic considerations on the other. It has also tried to strike a balance between the needs of private and public transport. It has carefully examined all the cost-benefit analysis issues, and the cost-benefit analysis, certainly for the A27 scheme, is 2.8:1, which is encouraging.

The report is very long, and like the hon. Member for Lewes, I shall focus on a few specific issues. The report is brilliant news for everyone in my constituency and in the rest of East Sussex. I shall deal with the proposed improvements to the A27 in more detail later, but I warmly welcome them, and it is gratifying that they will be given priority.

It is also right to welcome the proposal for more frequent rail services to and from my constituency. The plans for a possible new station at Stone Cross will benefit many of my constituents, particularly those who live in the Langney area.

There will also be better connections with Ashford, and the hon. Gentleman touched on that. If I want to go to Europe on the Eurostar, I often drive back up to London, because the road and rail connections between my constituency and Ashford are pitiful.

It is interesting that the report has attracted such widespread support. The regional assembly debated it the other day and was broadly in favour of it. I have also had a message of support from Anthony Dunnett, the chief executive of the South East England Development Agency, who says:

"The south Coast Multi Modal Study has received the full support of SEEDA as it takes a balanced approach to meeting the varied and pressing transport needs of the South Coast ... Without these measures the South Coast cannot attract the vital investment that is needed to regenerate towns like Eastbourne, Hastings, Brighton and Littlehampton."

Eastbourne borough council, which, incidentally, is controlled by the Liberal Democrats, has always adopted a cross-party approach to the A27. I have an e-mail from Mr. Norman Kinnish, director of planning,

regeneration and amenities. He reminds me that we have been sending deputations to Westminster since the 1990s. He says that Eastbourne council

"supports an off line dual carriageway solution as the most effective method of resolving this road's problems . . . Both parties represented on Eastbourne Borough Council continue to commit their unwavering support for these improvements"

The leader of the Conservative group, councillor Graham Marsden, says:

"The economic progress of this area is being stifled by the lack of an effective transport infrastructure . . . The A27 is dangerous with too many drivers taking risks because of its frequent bends and dips."

There is widespread support for the proposals. The Eastbourne and district chamber of commerce, which covers an area way beyond the boundaries of the borough of Eastbourne, says:

"It is vital for the economy of the whole area that improvements are made to the A27 as soon as possible."

Although the cabinet of East Sussex county council has yet to formally debate the SoCoMMS report, it has long supported the campaign for significant improvements to the A27. In an e-mail to me, Mr. Bob Wilkins, director of transport and environment, makes several points, some of which have already been touched on by the hon. Member for Lewes, but others are slightly at odds with what the hon. Gentleman was saying.

There are two issues here. One is the issue of the A27 itself, and arguments have raged for years about how best to deal with the problems of congestion. The road is a major artery, certainly economically, and is extremely dangerous. There is also the problem of trying to find some division on the rail crossing that crosses the road at Beddingham, which, at times, is a nightmare. Fortunately I was not involved, but I heard on my car radio last Friday that there had been some sort of breakdown at the crossing and that traffic was stacked up for many miles in both directions.

Mr. Wilkins makes the point that the railway currently carries four trains an hour in each direction between Lewes and Eastbourne, causing a stoppage of about 12 minutes in every hour. He says that during the morning and evening peak periods, traffic builds up for five miles back from the crossing. That cannot be good news for the people who live in Selmeston and Berwick—

Norman Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that even if the crossing is bypassed, traffic will simply build up at the Southerham roundabout or in the tunnel into Lewes?

Mr. Waterson: Not necessarily. I would have thought that the SoCoMMS report would have taken that into account. On any view, there should be a significant improvement in the amount of traffic.

At the moment, the traffic flow amounts to almost 30,000 vehicles a day. The SoCoMMS report predicts that that will increase to 39,000 vehicles a day in the next 15 years. On any set of criteria applied by any Government, the road deserves to be a dual carriageway. The clinching issue—this was also touched on by the hon. Member for Lewes, although I think that he skirted around the solution—is the question of train frequency. Every silver lining has a cloud, and one of the benefits of privatisation, at least for my constituents, was that, instead of an hourly service from London to Eastbourne, a twice hourly service was introduced for much of the day. That means that more trains go through Beddingham and there are more stoppages on the road. As I said, at the moment, we have four trains an hour. According to the railway inspectorate, there will be a significant problem, possibly involving closure of up to 30 minutes an hour, because of what can only be described as a high risk of serious loss of life. The hon. Gentleman tried to minimise the risk slightly. One thing that I have discovered about fatalities on the roads is that the statistics collected by people such as the police are slightly unreliable. In any event, Mr. Wilkins says:

"If the barriers were to be changed"—

presumably to make them more difficult to evade—

"the delays would increase to more than 30 minutes in every hour, causing unacceptable disruption to the road network."

Norman Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the Highways Agency estimates delays of 24 minutes, not 30 minutes per hour? Does he also accept that the figure would apply only if a double barrier were put in, not if the strategy that I suggest were adopted?

Mr. Waterson: We should certainly consider the hon. Gentleman's suggestions. I am not a technical man, as you will know, Mr. McWilliam, and if the time can be reduced, that is fine. Our starting point, however, is that there are enormous traffic flows, which are bound to increase, and stoppages of at least 12 minutes in every hour. We must address the existing problems before tackling the new problems that would be caused by a different sort of barrier and longer stoppages.

Mr. Wilkins goes on to say that SoCoMMS recommends

"an increase in rail frequency to 7 trains an hour between Lewes and Eastbourne"

We can all regard that as good news, and my constituents will be delighted. The hon. Member for Lewes was sceptical about whether that increase would ever come about, and I can see how that fits into his overall argument. We should perhaps be sceptical about such promises from any Government. My point, however, is that any increase would significantly add to delays.

There is a much more human level at which the A27 needs to be sorted out. Mr. Brian Stoodley, a leading local surgeon, who is based in Eastbourne, has been one of my strongest supporters over several years. He recently wrote to the leader of the Liberal Democrats to point out that the A27 was not only inefficient and slow but extremely dangerous. He noted that it

"carries over twice the traffic volume of an average 'A' road . . . It has over twice the morbidity and twice the mortality rate"

that one would expect of an equivalent road. To put it in more brutal terms, Mr. Stoodley and his colleagues have had to deal with the consequences of the dangers of the A27 over the years.

As long ago as 1996, Sussex ambulance service wrote to me to make it clear that it was in favour of better road connections in the area. There were problems dealing with patients after accidents because ambulances were unable to get around the area quickly.

[Mr. Waterson]

Since being elected I have lobbied consistently on this issue. I took a deputation to see Conservative Ministers in 1995. Ultimately, the Conservative Government announced schemes to deal with bottlenecks on the A27. I was obviously very quick off the mark because in July 1997 I took a cross-party delegation from Eastbourne to press the case for road improvements with the new Minister with responsibility for roads. I have also secured several debates on the issue, including one in February 1996 and one in November 1997.

There is a massive consensus, certainly in my constituency, that the problem must be addressed. The problem of improving the A27 is linked to that of improving the rail crossing at Beddingham or replacing it with something more up to date.

Schemes were first mooted after the last world war, and after many years, the Polegate bypass and the new A22 route into my constituency were recently introduced. Both are already having a significant effect in drawing traffic from other parts of my constituency and elsewhere.

To be fair, the hon. Member for Lewes has a long and honourable track record on the issue, and I understand his reservations. If I may say so, however, he is being excessively gloomy and critical about the SoCoMMS report, which is closely argued. It is there for debate and, indeed, consultation.

I hope that this will not provoke a furious intervention, but the hon. Gentleman used to be an opponent of the Polegate bypass. He then came to see the benefits—

Norman Baker *rose—*

Mr. Waterson: At least let me finish the point—I knew that I should not have embarked on it. In time, the hon. Gentleman came to see the benefits of the Polegate bypass and, indeed, became one of its most enthusiastic supporters—so much so that one might have thought that it had been his idea. Perhaps the same process will occur in this instance.

Norman Baker: This is a good-humoured intervention, rather than a furious one. To put the record straight, I have always been in favour of a bypass for Polegate. I was not in favour of the dual carriageway bypass that was finally constructed. I have always recognised a difference between a bypass, which may have merit, and a new inter-urban road, which, in my view, is more difficult to justify.

Mr. Waterson: We can argue about the history, but the result is that we have the road, much later than we should have done, and it is, in my humble opinion, working.

Last week I asked the Secretary of State for Transport when he would announce a decision on SoCoMMS and, in particular, the A27 project. He told me, largely out of a fear of lawyers, which I can understand, being one myself, that he wanted to defer the decision to the spring and make a package of announcements. However, I should like to challenge the Minister to consider whether the decision can be brought forward. Whatever else is set out in SoCoMMS—and there is much detailed and interesting work affecting many other areas of the south—what cries out for attention is the need for improvements on the A27 and at Beddingham and the fact that the report concludes that those are a priority.

My constituents and other residents of Sussex have waited too long for those much-needed road improvements. They have the backing of the independent study and the regional assembly, as well as of people, businesses and business organisations in the area. They have the support of the relevant local authorities. Everyone knows in their heart of hearts—even, perhaps, the hon. Member for Lewes—that the status quo is not an option. Of course there must be consultation. The hon. Member for Lewes is right—I never thought those words would pass my lips, but he is right in describing the unique beauty of the area in question. Therefore, it is very important that we develop a scheme or schemes that are sensitive to the needs and concerns of people who live along a possible route for the improvements. I should not want anything to happen with which they would not be brought along, in a constructive and helpful fashion. There will always be those who oppose any new roads. Some people will never be persuaded, but we need to make a major effort.

The road is lethal and slow and is crippling economic development in our area. It is high time that this decision was made.

11.47 am

Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing the debate. He has correctly identified the fact that the report is heavily weighted towards roads—I am afraid that that is also true of the other multi-modal studies. He has calculated that 54 per cent. of the £1.1 billion that has been identified will be spent on roads.

The question of balance is emerging in the Transport Committee's inquiry into multi-modal studies, which we are due to complete shortly. That is disappointing, because it is clear in the guidance relating to multi-modal studies that they are required to identify solutions that include a range of modes of transport, including walking and cycling. My hon. Friend explained his disappointment with the study, and rightly stressed the environmentally sensitive nature of his constituency.

Furthermore, my hon. Friend is right—again, I suspect that this is relevant to the other studies too—to express concern about the low priority that has been given to soft measures. Halcrow has, as he said, been soft on soft measures. Both my hon. Friend and the chairman of the Transport Committee have highlighted the drop in motoring costs and the increase in public transport costs. Let me take this opportunity to respond to the Minister's question. He knows the answer: the Government, after all, are in favour of congestion charges, and have identified the need for local authorities to introduce them—or are expecting local authorities to introduce them. He and I know that one of the effects will be increased costs for motorists. That is Government policy, and we support it: we believe that charging has a role to play in reducing congestion and raising revenue for public transport.

We also support measures that would reduce the costs of motoring for drivers who use the most environmentally friendly cars. Therefore, there would be gains as well as losses for motorists. However, it is wrong for public transport fares to be increasing significantly when motoring costs are reducing; that differential must move in the other direction. The Minister can make whatever use he wishes of that comment in the coming months and years.

Mr. Jamieson: I do not wish to lose sight of that important point. Other than the congestion charges—which, as I am sure that the hon. Gentleman appreciates, will probably be introduced in very limited areas—does his party support an increase in the costs of motoring?

Tom Brake: I have made it very clear that congestion charges—those in London, for instance—will have an impact on motorists, especially if there are incentives with regard to improved public transport. However, if congestion is not reduced, disincentives must also be introduced. I hope that the Minister will be able to use that remark.

The Minister has been invited to Lewes. If he accepts the invitation, he might wish to stop off in Carshalton on his way, because my constituents and I could show him some good examples of local transport improvements that I am sure that he would appreciate.

I disagree with some of the comments made by the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). He said that the report was careful and well balanced, and he quoted the South East England Development Agency saying the same thing. The hon. Gentleman should talk to David Begg, the head of the Commission for Integrated Transport, who has made it clear that the multi-modal studies are not a careful and well-balanced option. He used the same argument as my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes, which is that there is no guaranteed funding for any of the rail or local transport initiatives—that applies to capital and revenue. That is why it is anything but a well-balanced option. However, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes and the hon. Member for Eastbourne agreed about the beauty of the area.

I wish to make some general points about multi-modal studies. Twenty-two studies have been completed or are under way; 15 reports have been issued, and a further five are expected within the next six months; and there are 10 studies that concentrate only on road options. It is disappointing that the only major reference to multi-modal studies in the progress report that was issued yesterday is in the section covering the strategic road network. The Minister will correct me if I am wrong about that, but if I am not, that reinforces my hon. Friend's point about the multi-modal studies prioritising roads at the expense of other modes of transport.

I support the approach taken by the south coast multi-modal study. It is important that it should look beyond transport and address regeneration issues too. There are some interesting proposals in relation to light transit and other rail schemes—with, of course, the caveat about whether they would be funded.

Mr. Waterson: On the regeneration issue, does the hon. Gentleman not recall that the point that SEEDA endorsement made was that these proposals would assist regeneration not only in Eastbourne but in a raft of south-coast seaside towns?

Tom Brake: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I also heard what my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes said about the potential for road improvements benefiting areas that the hon. Gentleman may not have expected to benefit from such improvements.

Norman Baker: Some time ago, when I was chair of economic development at the county council and the A23 to Brighton was made into a dual carriageway, the area of Sussex that performed least well economically for the next three or four years was Brighton, because businesses were able to relocate to Crawley and Gatwick. It was an own goal for Brighton.

Tom Brake: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention. He points to the fact that we cannot reach a rapid conclusion about the impact that schemes may have on regeneration.

One of my worries about the south coast multi-modal study is its statement that

> "Looking ahead to 2030 and beyond, the role of demand management measures is likely to grow, both as a means of funding sustainable transport measures".

That concern was echoed by David Begg, whom the Government presumably listen to and respect. It seems too late in the day to talk about demand management measures by 2030 or beyond. Mr. Begg said that we needed some form of demand restraint and that

> "the best form of demand restraint is some form of road user charging ... a pricing system which varies with the level of congestion".

I hope that the Minister will say something about that and endorse the views that have been expressed by Mr. Begg.

As for the implementation of the multi-modal study and others, it will be useful if the Minister can confirm the exact meaning of

> "complete and act upon the programme of 'multi-modal studies'.

That phrase was used in the progress report, which referred also to the strategy being for the period up to 2010. Will the hon. Gentleman say what schemes he expects to be completed by 2010? If they are not completed by then, by when would he expect them to be completed? Will he also confirm the budget that has been set aside for the multi-modal studies?

I expect the Minister's response will be that such matters are contained within the £180 billion, in which case will he explain exactly what process will be used to prioritise different competing schemes, whether proposed by the SRA or local authorities or identified in the multi-modal studies? Can he confirm whether the cut in the rail budget of £312 million over the next three years is likely to have an impact on the multi-modal studies? I suspect that the hon. Gentleman will say no, because no budget has been set for the rail proposals in the multi-modal studies, certainly not within three years. However, other feasibility studies may be in the pipeline. I should welcome his response to such matters.

Will the Minister comment on Mr. Begg's concerns about the disconnection between the recommendations of regional planning bodies and the ability of the

[Tom Brake]

delivery agencies, especially the SRA, to fund those recommendations? Although the Secretary of State may be making such a response this afternoon, perhaps the hon. Gentleman will refer to Mr. Begg's worry about the lack of clear guidance from the Government on charging and how that has made it difficult for multi-modal studies to make consistent proposals.

Obviously, we need to be able to judge the success of this and other multi-modal studies once the appropriate rail, cycling and other road measures are in place. Will the Minister comment, in a little more detail than is given in section 2.7 of the progress report, on what targets the Government will use to measure the success or otherwise of the study? The targets set out in the progress report are anything but smart; they are totally unquantifiable. They include:

"reduced congestion on inter-urban roads ... road condition maintained at an optimum level".

There is nothing in any of the targets—except that for numbers killed or seriously injured on the roads, on which the Government have done a good job—that anyone can measure. I hope that the Minister can flesh out the targets.

It is nice to see you in the Chair this morning, Mr. Chidgey. I conclude by saying that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes has set out some genuine concerns about the study, and has called for the Government to look again at their hierarchy in relation to the modes of transport that they will use to solve congestion and other transport problems. I hope that the Minister can give us some satisfaction on that important point.

12.1 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): I, too, welcome the opportunity to debate the south coast corridor multi-modal study, although so far the debate has centred around the A27, Lewes and Eastbourne—probably because the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) and my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson) are key participants in the debate. As a former Minister with responsibility for roads who flew by helicopter over those areas more than 10 years ago to look at the transport needs in that corridor, I am impressed by the fact that not much has happened since I left office. I am depressed to think that many of the schemes in the programme that the Government were bequeathed in 1997 and that were put on hold are now the top priorities in the study's recommendations. Five years have been wasted in which next to nothing has been done.

In many respects, the multi-modal studies have been a recipe for delay. The conclusions that they reach are very much in line with many of the conclusions reached by the previous Government, namely that one cannot restrict traffic growth and economic growth by not developing our trunk road network. It is important to remind ourselves that the study says that

"in the absence of any strategy, the number of vehicle km driven within the corridor"—

that is the south coast corridor—

"will grow by around 30 per cent. by 2016 and 45 per cent. by 2030. This is despite a projected increase in rail use of 30 per cent. by 2016."

We know that the hon. Members for Lewes and for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) were at the forefront of the unrealistic campaign in 1997 and 1998, which was led by the Deputy Prime Minister, to make us believe that it would be possible not just to reduce congestion but to have real reductions in the number of vehicles on the road and the number of miles travelled by vehicles on the road. The Government's policy was premised on that enormous fallacy. It is only now that the Government realise what a fallacy it was. They are facing up to the consequences of increased congestion, accidents and damage to our economy as a result of their short-term policies.

The Government have set up the multi-modal studies. The hon. Member for Lewes said that there were 80 pages. I think that he means that the east of Lewes strategy development plan contains about 80 pages. The south coast corridor multi-modal study contains the best part of 700 or 800 pages, although I admit that I have not mastered it all because I anticipated that the debate would be centred on issues relating to Lewes and the A27. It is not reasonable for the hon. Member for Lewes to say that the study should be torn up and rejected by the Government just because its conclusions do not coincide with his prejudices. As my hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne said, the study's conclusions are widely endorsed, and by people in not only the locality but the region.

People in my constituency, which is further west on the south coast, appreciate the importance of a good south coast corridor as a means of enabling people to travel from, for example, the constituency of the hon. Member for Lewes in order to take their holidays in Christchurch, Bournemouth or further west. That would prevent them from being tempted to cross the channel to spend their money on the continent. Likewise, the corridor would enable my constituents to visit the fine landscapes in the South Downs. My hon. Friend the Member for Eastbourne and I have spent enjoyable occasions in the Grand hotel in Eastbourne conferring and discussing strategies. We have benefited from that in the past and will benefit from it in the future.

Tom Brake: I invite the hon. Gentleman to comment on the validity of a study that is clearly meant to be taken as a package, although the Government will guarantee to fund only one component: the roads programme.

Mr. Chope: I do not think that the Government are guaranteeing to fund the roads programme. That would be funded by the Highways Agency because improvements would be made to trunk roads but not local roads. I understand that the railway part of the package would be funded through the Strategic Rail Authority. The hon. Gentleman is making an artificial distinction and he overlooks the fact that a benefit of the study is that the report considers road and rail together. Paragraph 4.33 of the east of Lewes strategy development plan says:

"The objective of reducing delays at Beddingham Level Crossing is particularly important due to the SoCoMMS proposals for increased train frequencies on the East Coastway route (from 4 to 7 trains per hour in each direction)."

That recognises that if the number of trains passing a level crossing is increased, the capacity for road vehicles is reduced, which is a reason why the report recommends strongly that something should be done about that. The present situation is intolerable.

Norman Baker: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that if the frequency of trains was increased and if they were properly priced and consisted of proper rolling stock, the number of vehicles on the road might be reduced?

Mr. Chope: Frankly, we have just been told—I think that the hon. Gentleman accepted this—that even an increase of 16 per cent. in the number of rail passengers by 2016 will not stop traffic on the roads increasing by 30 per cent. I do not believe that increasing rail capacity reduces the amount of traffic on the road. That is the myth that the hon. Gentleman has peddled for so long and it has been proved to be absolute nonsense. There is nowhere in the world where an increased rail capacity has reduced road use. There is significant road use even in London, which has an enormously expensive and well-developed underground and overground rail network. The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington seem to think that the south coast and the South Downs are equivalent environments to central London. Public transport and access to trains play a greater role in London because people live very near stations.

There are vast rural areas in the South Downs—Lewes and Eastbourne are obviously specific towns—in which people have to use their motor cars. The report that the Government produced yesterday confirms that dependency on cars in rural areas is greater than that in urban areas. We ignore such realities at our peril because that leads to increased congestion, more accidents and danger on the roads, and more damage to the economies of the areas served by those highways. I totally reject the strategy of the Liberal Democrats.

It is worth quoting from the Halcrow report, but I hope that in doing so I will not be doing the Government's work for them. The Minister knows that I am, and have always been, a great enthusiast for investment in transport infrastructure. I look forward to the time when we can invest as much in transport infrastructure as was invested when I was the Minister responsible for roads. Almost every day of the week, I would be opening a bypass or a new stretch of road in which the Conservative Government had invested.

Norman Baker: What about railways?

Mr. Chope: I was not opening new railway lines because I was not the Minister responsible for railways. I was the Minister responsible for roads.

The Halcrow report says of the demand for road travel that

"some improvements are essential to the continued economic and social well-being of the region. There is currently severe traffic congestion at many locations along the A27 ... and this is predicted to worsen in the future. This will make it more difficult for business and freight operators to gain access to many of the South Coast towns from the national road network."

The report then deals with the strategy, which has been endorsed by many people. The strategy

"includes a number of measures to improve the current road network's overall efficiency."

The report goes on to say:

"Highway improvements are of particular importance to rural communities. Public transport will continue to serve a relatively small portion of the market and the car will remain the most economically efficient means of providing mobility. Reducing congestion on the approaches to larger towns and improving trunk routes will also reduce the need to divert onto sensitive rural roads, bringing environmental benefits to these areas."

The statements in the report are common sense. I hope that it will soon be on the Minister's desk, that a conclusion will be reached, and that recommendations will be made and accepted to incorporate in the roads programme the highway improvements that the report identifies. As I have said before, many of those improvements were identified by the previous Conservative Government and inherited in 1997 by the Labour Government before being put on the back burner. Had they not been put on the back burner, we would have seen them coming to fruition much earlier, with all the benefits that would have flowed from them.

Let us not forget that the original idea was to have a south coast trunk route between Honiton and Folkestone. Many people going from the south coast to the west country, or from the west country to the channel ports, are diverting their journeys and going along the M25, thereby adding to the problems of that motorway and transferring the environmental burden on to the people who live close to it. Congestion, journey lengths and journey times are increasing.

Norman Baker: Is it Conservative party policy to divert traffic from the M25 on to the south coast route? I am keen to know, so that I can let my constituents know that the hon. Gentleman is trying to encourage extra traffic on to the A27. Is that his policy?

Mr. Chope: We should have a coherent network of trunk roads in this country. If people have to travel many miles out of their way in order to gain access to the major air and sea ports, that is unnecessarily burdensome on the environment. I would prefer to have a proper route between Portsmouth and Dover, as was originally envisaged. That route would be a trunk road and would meet the needs of local people. It would be good for the economy of the south coast and it would help to reduce the burden that is carried by the M25.

This issue is important and I hope that the Minister will accept that there is much support from the Conservative party. There could be a consensus between the official Opposition and the Government on the need to improve road infrastructure along the south coast corridor sooner rather than later.

12.14 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) on securing such an important debate. Several issues have received a useful airing, but I doubt whether I shall get round to responding to them all today. The hon. Gentleman has been in correspondence with the Department and I shall write to him about the matters that I do not cover. I shall try, in the spirit of the season, to be non-contentious. However, I may stray.

[Mr. David Jamieson]

The hon. Gentleman referred to my frequent presence at these Westminster Hall Adjournment debates. This is my penultimate debate this year. For those hon. Members who want to stay around, I should say that I shall be responding to a further debate today. Sadly, in January, debates on transport matters will be held every other week because the House, in its wisdom, decided that certain Departments should respond to debates one week, while other Departments do so the following week. I am sure that that decision will bring considerable relief to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake). I see that the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) and his colleagues who also have to take part in such debates are nodding. The hon. Gentleman's good researcher will only be working once a fortnight on his questions, rather than each week.

If I just refer to "the study", that might be one way to avoid using the awful acronym SoCoMMS. It may help the *Hansard* reporters, too. I wish first to make general points, after which I shall pick up on specific matters that have been raised. As the hon. Member for Lewes will be aware, my ministerial colleagues and I are considering the recommendations of the study, so the debate is particularly timely. The multi-modal studies were set up to examine some of the most difficult problems of the strategic transport network. I am pleased that there has been a general welcome for the approach of the studies. We seem to have cross-party accord.

We are considering the contribution that all modes of transport can play in finding solutions to the problems. Last week, the Secretary of State announced his response to the recommendations of five of the studies, as part of the £5.5 billion package of major national and local road measures. Over the decade, in excess of £180 billion of public and private money will be spent on transport. We are putting in place a programme to tackle years of under-investment in our transport infrastructure, especially rail infrastructure.

We are looking forward to taking a balanced approach between road, rail, public and private transport. Our objective is to improve Britain's road and rail network as well as getting better use out of the existing infrastructure. Our measures are aimed at tackling congestion, improving reliability and making journeys safer. They will also help to improve the environment and the quality of life. The south coast multi-modal study is one of a tranche of two programmes that were identified in "A New Deal for Trunk Roads in England".

Of the full programme for studies, eight have now reported and the Secretary of State has announced his response to the recommendations. The primary purpose of the south coast's study was to recommend a long-term sustainable strategy for transport between Southampton and Margate. I fully understand why the debate has focused on part of that area, but the consultant's recommendations are intended to recognise the need for economic regeneration in the corridor, while aiming to minimise the potential for environmental damage in a sensitive area. Such issues were raised by the hon. Member for Lewes.

The study has been charged specifically with making recommendations on four remitted A27 road schemes: the Arundel bypass, potential bypasses at Wilmington and Selmeston and improvements at Southerham and Beddingham, picking up the long-term issues that were identified from the previous M27 Worthing and Lancing integrated transport studies and the Hastings multi-modal studies. In the past few days, we have received south-east England's regional assembly's views on the study and we are now considering the advice. It raises important issues, some of which have been aired here today, not least because of the environmental impact that the schemes could have. I have been asked to say when we will make decisions, but we must carefully examine all aspects of the schemes—the benefits and environmental impacts. However, I hope that we will have some conclusions by spring 2003.

The hon. Member for Lewes raised several issues. There may be some misunderstanding about the multi-modal study process. Some of the findings coming out of the studies and the consultation, and from discussion between the Highways Agency and the SRA, will need local solutions. Similarly, some of the methods to reduce traffic in the sensitive areas that he described will be delivered specifically in local areas—they are "local solutions for local areas" or however the phrase goes.

The hon. Gentleman also made general points about the relative costs of different modes of transport, including one relating to the time that Labour had been in office, which is why I tried to tease out what his party's view was and how things might be done differently in the unlikely event of the election of a Liberal Democrat Government. When asked about whether they would increase the cost of motoring, the hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington were extremely coy. It is a difficult question that we have to answer.

We must appreciate that many of the issues relating to motoring are not in the direct control of the Government. The price of oil and cars and the efficiencies that car manufacturers are making are bringing private motor cars to a larger number of people. There are many disadvantaged people in my constituency and I am glad that some of them now have access to a motor car.

I am also pleased that my constituents now have access to better public transport. There is huge investment in the infrastructure, especially in the railways. Some of the subsidies mentioned by the hon. Member for Lewes to reduce bus fares are in the gift of local authorities, so perhaps he should make representations to his own.

Norman Baker: The point that I am trying to make is not that the Government are not committed to rail—I believe instinctively and philosophically that they are. It is simply that the SRA will not deliver the schemes. It will not deliver the applications. It does not have the money and says that it has to cut back trains and concentrate on the north-west main line. The Government will deliver the road schemes, but the SRA will not deliver those for rail.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman must appreciate that the Highways Agency, the SRA or any agency operating on behalf of the Government with private as well as public funding must consider priorities. He mentioned priorities in his speech. His own Treasury spokesperson said not only that any spending pledges would have to be funded within current budgets, but that they represented a priority for scarce resources. I agree. They will be prioritised. The hon. Gentleman should appreciate that the SRA is examining the schemes. It can deliver some and some will be delivered by local transport plan funding.

Norman Baker *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I want to talk about the Southerham-Beddingham crossing, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned. It is an important issue that we must get on to. There is no doubt that the junction is dangerous. The police record the incidents that have caused injury, but there have been many other collisions with the barriers that have caused damage and which were extremely hazardous. It is surprising that there have not been more injuries on the crossing.

The hon. Member for Lewes said that we had rushed out the consultation. That is not the case. He suggests that we were anticipating what might have been in the multi-modal studies decision. Hon. Members would agree that, because it is strategic for the road network and for rail, it is important for rail that we get the consultation moving, regardless of the ultimate decisions of the multi-modal study.

The other important issue—the consultation should pick it up—is that if that line is not bridged, the movement of traffic along the A27 will be severely restricted. The hon. Member for Lewes is waving his arms, but he knows that the area suffers considerably from flooding and that tunnelling will present serious engineering problems, not least the cost. He made the point that some of the consultation on the multi-modal study did not take place in Lewes. If I might make a seasonal reference, I think that the inn was full—there were no places in which the consultation could take place at the time. However, I have some extraordinarily good news. As we speak, Highways Agency officials are looking at a place in Lewes that is suitable for the purpose, so he can now look forward to the consultation.

Mr. Waterson: I wonder whether, as there has already been one consultation session in Lewes, the Minister can give some thought to holding one in Eastbourne? It is of enormous importance to people in my constituency. Alternatively, could he invite me to the consultation in Lewes?

Mr. Jamieson: I think that it would be quite in order to invite the hon. Gentleman along. I am sure that he will be welcomed by the hon. Member for Lewes, who will no doubt take him round the fine hostelries of that fine town.

I agree that we should make information more widely available. The point has been made that roads are delivered and rail is not. That is incorrect—there will be a balanced approach, based on priorities.

Tom Brake *rose—*

Mr. Jamieson: I shall give way just once, but I want to answer points made by other hon. Members.

Tom Brake: On the point of road versus rail, is it the case that in the multi-modal studies that have reported to date, the Government have given the go ahead for the road schemes, but have referred the rail schemes to the SRA, which has already told us that it has not budgeted for the multi-modal study rail proposals and will therefore not proceed?

Mr. Jamieson: It is correct for us to refer those to the SRA, which is now considering all the proposals. It will consider those, and the proposals that arise in the next tranche of multi-modal studies, in the light of its priorities. The hon. Gentleman has told us previously that there is no more money in the Liberal Democrat pot. How would his party fund those schemes? Perhaps we shall hear in a future debate.

I move to the hon. Member for Eastbourne (Mr. Waterson). At the risk of embarrassing him, I shall say that he made a well thought out and powerful case for his constituents, and made many of the points that I might have made. He welcomed the study and said that not only was it a balanced approach but that it was brilliant news for his constituents. He made a valid point about rail connections and the problems with the junction. If it is not improved, either the road system or the railway to and from his constituency will be inhibited. He reinforced the important points for the economy about regeneration. Nobody has mentioned that a considerable amount of new house building is planned for the area. The population will increase and that will put pressure on the roads and on the rail system.

It is difficult for me to cover all the points in the time that remains. If hon. Members would like any other answers, I shall deal with them by correspondence. The debate has been helpful, and the hon. Member for Lewes has raised some important points. I am glad that we have found some cross-party accord on at least the method that we have used to bring forward the multi-modal studies.

Eastfields Station

12.29 pm

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden): I am grateful to have secured this timely debate. It seems all the more timely given yesterday's statement on public transport investment by the Secretary of State for Transport. I realise the irony of using words such as timely and public transport in the same breath. However, my intention is serious. I want to make a strong case for a much earlier decision to be made on the siting of a station or halt at the Eastfields level crossing in my constituency. That decision appeared to have been taken, with the station due to open in 2004, but the idea has now been shelved indefinitely.

I am grateful to the Minister for attending to answer the debate. I hope that he can offer some hope to my constituents that they may yet see the opening of the station that they have been waiting for. He may want to make other comments about the future of public transport in less affluent areas such as the Eastfields area of Mitcham, which are disconnected from transport systems enjoyed in much more affluent areas.

I hope that the Minister will agree that the proposal for a station at Eastfields must be treated as a priority by the Strategic Rail Authority, and I urge him to use his good offices to persuade the SRA to bring Eastfields station back up the agenda and to make an early decision.

Eastfields, on the borders of Longthornton, Pollards Hill and Figges Marsh wards in the Mitcham area, has a high-density residential population as well as three schools. It has one of the largest council estates in my constituency, surrounded by streets of typical suburban semis dating from the inter-war years. It also has the two largest derelict industrial sites in the borough.

Eastfields has suffered in recent decades from the sharp rise in antisocial scourges such as graffiti, vandalism, fly tipping and abandoned cars, as well as a decline in close-knit communities and a lack of local facilities. A survey that I carried out in the area last summer, to which hundreds of local residents responded, clearly showed that people desperately want to see more facilities in their area and better transport links. Indeed, almost everyone who responded to my questionnaire said that they wanted better rail links, including a station at Eastfields and access to the Croydon to Wimbledon tram.

There can be no question but that Eastfields has suffered from not having a direct railway link, even though the construction of a station or halt at the level crossing would be straightforward. As such, it has been mooted for many years. Merton borough council is especially keen to develop the station, which would be on the line between Victoria and Mitcham junction, and would open up the area for travel to central London and rail links in Croydon.

The wards surrounding the Eastfields area are among the most deprived in the borough of Merton. It is telling that the seven most deprived wards in Merton are in my constituency, which proves my long-held opinion that Mitcham and Morden has consistently lost out to wealthier places when funds are shared out for public transport, education, health and regeneration projects. I wanted to become a Labour Member of this House to turn over that inequality, and I am here today to speak about the needs of my constituents.

I understand that, in the mapping carried out as part of Merton's neighbourhood renewal project, all the evidence showed that communities in the area that would benefit from a station at Eastfields suffered disproportionately from income deprivation, child poverty, low levels of education and attainment, poor access to health and social care, crime and disorder and low access to public transport for employment. The communities that would benefit from the station include those disadvantaged in many other respects, including elderly people as well as significant concentrations of people from ethnic minorities. As the Minister will be aware, those from ethnic minorities experience disproportionate levels of unemployment and isolation, which adversely affect their opportunities and life chances. Too many people in the eastern part of Merton share such disadvantages.

The problem is much more than the lack of a station—a transport inequality. It concerns financial inequality, health inequality, inequality in education and—plain and simple—social inequality. Eastfields school will increase its intake from 840 to 1,200 pupils per year from 2003. The infrastructure work associated with that, including new paths to and from a possible Eastfields station, is part of the planning conditions for the school's developments. As such, it will be in any plans for Eastfields station.

The proposed location is along one of the longest stretches of railway line in London without a railway station. Elderly residents of the area say that they have been promised a station there since around 1930. It is even obvious to me that the level crossing was constructed because the intention was to build a station to serve the new suburban development. However, that has never happened. People living in the Eastfields area of east Mitcham have some of the poorest access to public transport in the borough. The new station would improve access to jobs and other opportunities for residents in an area of, as I have shown, high deprivation.

The council has always been keen for there to be a station on the site, and has already modified the alignment of the adjacent Grove road to provide a drop-off point for the new station. The council's present proposals have been in existence since the mid-1980s. In the late 1990s, Merton pursued the proposal with more vigour, based on the Government's policy of putting more emphasis on rail improvements. In late 1999, it commissioned Peter Brett Associates, a firm of consulting engineers with expertise in transport planning and traffic engineering, to undertake a demand and engineering feasibility study on a new station at Eastfields. The report concluded that it was feasible to construct a station. The passenger forecast and financial appraisal strongly suggested that the station would be commercially viable, and predicted that some 10,000 people would use the new station each week.

The train operating companies, Connex and Thameslink, said that services using Mitcham junction could call at the proposed station. Railtrack's 2000 network management statement for Great Britain

contained an option to develop a new station at Eastfields in 2006 with Connex, the then incumbent train operator.

On 24 October 2000, the Strategic Rail Authority issued a press release on the outcome of negotiations for the South Central rail franchise, which specified the opening of a new station at Eastfields in 2004. A station at Eastfields has tremendous potential for increasing mobility for my constituents, as well as alleviating congested roads and reducing air pollution. It would also help to reinvigorate the community by increasing access to local facilities and services and to jobs further afield.

Merton council recently informed me that the Strategic Rail Authority had announced its intention to reduce the length of the South Central franchise from 20 to seven years, with the SRA handling major infrastructure investment and upgrading. That has derailed plans for a station at Eastfields, causing huge disappointment to my constituents. The council made representations to the SRA in October, asking that a station be included in the new South Central franchise. It awaits the SRA response. There are two possible stances for the SRA to take: positive, in which case the council would look to joint fund further development work; or negative, in which case the council would need to lobby more strongly. My point in securing today's debate is that the council should not have to lobby more strongly. The needs of my constituents are clear: they need and want an Eastfields station.

In my correspondence on the issue, I have been fobbed off with opaque letters. One letter from James Watson, assistant director of parliamentary and public communications at the SRA, stated:

"the Eastfields proposal was a commitment in the original Heads of Terms—signed in October 2000—for the proposed 20 year franchise. It was not envisaged at that time that the proposal would be progressed before 2008 and 9. As you are aware, we are now negotiating a shorter franchise of up to seven years and no infrastructure works will be taken forward under the replacement franchise. The SRA will reappraise the package of infrastructure proposals from the former proposition and will act as sponsor in taking elements forward. With our other priorities, it will take some time to consider and decide how to proceed."

Eastfields station has been under consideration since about 1930, and I hope that the SRA will not take another 70 years to reach a conclusion.

I can do no more than to quote the eloquent words of my constituent, Mr. Graham Barker of Edgehill road in Mitcham. He wrote:

"I feel that getting into town is a mission as there is no direct rail link, underground, tram or bus that serves the city directly from this area of Mitcham . . . I'm sure I speak for the majority of local residents when I say that we really do need the station built at Eastfields without further delay."

I conclude by asking the Minister to look into the situation with a view to helping to expedite the creation of a station at Eastfields. I ask him to meet me and representatives of Merton council—and perhaps the SRA, if it can find time among its priorities—to discuss the future of the project. Make no mistake: the project must have a future. It is a future that my constituents are depending on and have been half-promised, and it will go a long way to restoring their faith in our transport system.

12.40 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) on securing this debate and on the powerful way in which she spoke up for her constituents. I fully appreciate what she said about inequalities and about wanting to improve life for her constituents. Public transport is important for those who want to get to work, and also for leisure and pleasure. I appreciate that in areas where such a transport system is lacking, people can be left out on a limb.

My hon. Friend raised a number of other matters to do with inequalities, but I shall not be tempted to debate those today. However, I shall try to put into context any decision that may be made about the proposed Eastfields station. I appreciate that a station has been on the cards since the 1930s. I sometimes visit places waiting for a bypass. The longest wait that I came across was 80 years, but it came about at last.

My hon. Friend asked about a meeting. I would be delighted to meet her and to discuss the issues with all the relevant parties to find a way forward.

I shall say a few words about the decision-making process and about how the SRA has to prioritise its spending. The SRA is fully accountable to Ministers and Parliament. Its job is to promote the use of the railway network for passengers and goods, to secure the development of the railway system, and to contribute to the development of an integrated transport system for both passengers and goods.

The authority works to directions and guidance, given by the Secretary of State, that clearly define its roles and duties. The directions and guidance require the SRA to promote efficiency and economy and set 12 main objectives. Its two principal objectives are to work with the rail industry to achieve substantial lasting improvements in performance and to work to deliver the targets in the 10-year plan for transport.

I understand that it is not possible for the authority to confirm whether the proposed station at Eastfields will be progressed. The decision has not yet been made, and other priorities must take precedence, including negotiating the South Central franchise on the new seven-year basis, replacing the mark I slam-door trains and addressing the important issue of the power supply.

It may help if I set out the history of the South Central franchise replacement process to explain how we have arrived at the position that we are in today. There have been significant changes in the rail industry over the period subsequent to the refranchising process.

The South Central franchise was originally let to Connex Transport UK Ltd. in 1996 and, under the instructions of the Deputy Prime Minister, the shadow Strategic Rail Authority began the process of retendering the franchise. At the time, it was envisaged that franchises would be let on contracts lasting between 10 and 20 years, with franchisees making a strong commitment to invest in new projects.

In March 2000, the authority announced that two bidders, Connex and GoVia, had been shortlisted to compete for the franchise. Following submission and review of its best and final offers, the authority

[Mr. David Jamieson]

announced in October 2000 that it had signed heads of terms with GoVia as the preferred counterparty for the new franchise.

Heads of terms were based on a franchise of up to 20 years. An investment programme valued at £1.5 billion was proposed to introduce new trains and to upgrade track and stations. The programme included the proposed new station at Eastfields. GoVia planned that the station and other infrastructure enhancements would be delivered through a special purpose vehicle. It is important to note that, at that time, the scheme was only at the feasibility stage of development, with the final scope and costings yet to be finalised.

Of course, October 2000 was a critical month not only for South Central but for the whole rail industry. The Hatfield derailment on 17 October put the rail industry, particularly Railtrack, under intense scrutiny. The repercussions of the tragedy were widespread and long lasting. An unprecedented number of speed restrictions were imposed across the country as safety checks were carried out. Services were disrupted for many months. Railtrack's competence as custodian of the network infrastructure was widely questioned. The floundering project to upgrade the west coast main line added fuel to the debate. The project was behind time and over budget, largely because, as the company admitted, there was a serious lack of understanding of the state of Railtrack's assets and the scale of work needed to renew them. In the eyes of many, the project became symbolic of the company's mismanagement.

The problems that the industry, especially Railtrack, faced following Hatfield came to a head at the end of 2001. There was a crisis of confidence in the railways, both in the minds of the public and in the industry as a whole. In October 2001, Railtrack was placed in administration, an event that has been debated at length in this Chamber and in the House. In October of this year, the not-for-dividend company, Network Rail, was established in Railtrack's place. That change was essential for the recovery and development of our railways. Let us remember that it is only 10 weeks since Network Rail became the owner of the railway infrastructure. The company envisages an initial 18-month intensive programme to stabilise the business and to analyse the costs and causes of cost overruns in Railtrack. Network Rail intends to complete the process of building a full asset register of the rail network. Clearly, it will take time to turn the business around.

Following Hatfield, arrangements had been made to focus efforts on operations, maintenance and the renewal of the network, and to make the Strategic Rail Authority, which was formally established in February 2001, sponsor of the development of projects to enhance or upgrade the existing network. Network Rail is now taking forward Railtrack's new maintenance programme to improve its relationship with contractors and to enable it to have tighter control over the cost and quality of their work. There will be stability in the industry under the leadership of the Strategic Rail Authority and improved management of the network under Network Rail.

By this time, GoVia had taken over the operation of the South Central services from Connex, while negotiations for a new 20-year franchise continued. The negotiations had to be halted because of the many uncertainties in the industry—most notably, uncertainties arising from Railtrack's administration, but also uncertainties about particular projects such as Thameslink 2000, which had a bearing on South Central. In those circumstances, it was impossible to reach an affordable, value-for-money deal. There were too many contingencies for which allowances would have to be made. Therefore, it was necessary to redefine the commercial basis and structure of the deal.

In August 2002, the Strategic Rail Authority announced that agreement had been reached in principle on a new approach for the South Central franchise. The approach is consistent with the wider policy changes announced on 6 November. A key feature of the policy is that franchises are not the appropriate vehicles for taking forward major capital investment. Infrastructure enhancements will generally be pursued separately by the Strategic Rail Authority in partnership with the private sector, including Network Rail.

The new South Central franchise agreement being negotiated with GoVia is for a term of up to seven years, subject to the absolute right of the Strategic Rail Authority to terminate it after five years. The new franchise will deliver new rolling stock valued at £900 million and depot improvements valued at £60 million. Given the shorter length of the franchise and the new approach to franchising and infrastructure enhancements, the infrastructure upgrades originally planned as part of a 20-year franchise proposition will not be part of the new franchise.

The Strategic Rail Authority will reappraise the package of infrastructure proposals from the former 20-year proposition and take a view on which elements it will progress as sponsor. The reappraisal is not a current priority for the authority. It will be undertaken during the next year. The outcome will depend on the value for money of the proposals compared with others that are competing for limited funds.

Where new stations are proposed, other considerations, such as environmental and planning issues, will have to be taken into account. A Transport and Works Act 1992 order may be required for construction, access and land acquisition. Operational effects also need to be considered. Of course, trains stopping at a new station add time to a journey—typically several minutes. The impact on capacity and performances also needs to be assessed.

I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Mitcham and Morden feels very passionately on this issue. She is right to do so and, as I have said, she spoke powerfully about the need for improved transport links in her constituency. I know that she will find some of what I have said disappointing. However, I hope that she will understand and accept my explanation of why the prospect of a new station at Eastfields is currently uncertain and must remain so until a reassessment can be carried out by the Strategic Rail Authority. I assure her that the authority is currently preparing its next strategic plan for publication in January.

Siobhain McDonagh: In the event that the SRA does not do the job quickly, when we reach the 80th anniversary of the promise of a halt or station, will the people of Mitcham finally get their station as a reward for their patience?

Mr. Jamieson: That will depend on some of the issues that I have outlined in the debate. It will fall within the priorities. However, I hope that in the coming year there will be a full assessment of the scheme, along with the other priorities. I certainly hope that my hon. Friend's constituents will not have to wait as long as 80 years. Still, she will appreciate that there are many competing demands on the budget for infrastructure improvements. If she wants to air the issues in a meeting attended by some of her constituents and other parties, I should be pleased to meet them.

Pension Service

12.52 pm

Mr. Anthony Steen (Totnes): I am grateful that this debate has been selected, because it highlights several issues about which the Government should be concerned, and raises the question of bureaucracy—the civil service—and whether it is accountable to Parliament, its Members and other individuals.

The case in which I am interested involves the possibility of the Treasury being caught unaware by a £1.7 billion debt. It concerns an 82-year-old in my constituency, Mrs. Kathleen Lonsdale, who has enjoyed a quiet life at the Westerlands residential home in Kingsbridge. She is looked after very well and was perfectly content until recently when the Pension Service informed her that she was entitled to a rather large sum of money.

Overnight, Mrs. Lonsdale's life changed when she received her assessment for the minimum income guarantee. She was told in a letter from the Pension Service on 25 July 2002 that she would receive £162,497.94 a week. That was to be backdated to 14 July 1800. That translates to a lump sum payment of around £1.7 billion, and that is without inflation.

Mrs. Lonsdale is an intelligent 82-year-old lady, but she could not quite grasp the figures or the impact on her life of receiving a backdated cheque of those proportions. However, she did work out that it would be enough to buy out the owners of her residential home! On reflection, as many elderly people might be, she became concerned that such an award would not only change her life, but make her the focus of local and national media attention. No doubt she would have been the recipient of begging letters galore. She also harboured a lurking suspicion that there might be some error in her minimum income guarantee assessment.

Mrs. Lonsdale is fortunate enough to have a devoted daughter who lives nearby in Kingsbridge, a Mrs. Patricia Millington. I have discussed the case with her, and she is aware that I am raising it in the Chamber. Indeed, she is happy for me to do so. Once she spoke to her mother, she realised that the letter from the Pension Service was a mistake. Mrs. Millington received three letters on her mother's behalf at the end of July from the Plymouth pensions office. Those letters stated that the records showed that Mrs. Millington had still not returned her mother's income support book, which was why the problem arose. The only snag—the reason why Mrs. Millington had not returned her mother's income support book—was that she had never received one in the first place.

Mrs. Millington went to the Kingsbridge post office to find out whether it, instead of her, had received the income support book. When she arrived, she was told that her mother's book had been impounded and that no more cash orders would be allowed. Mrs. Millington felt deeply embarrassed to be told that, in a crowded local post office. She had never seen the book so, having been told that she should return it, she had some difficulty in doing so. She did not make eye contact with any customer whom she knew, and scuttled out. Then she tried in vain to get some sense out of someone in the Plymouth pensions office.

[Mr. Anthony Steen]

On 2 September, Mrs. Millington managed to get through to someone—a great achievement—who told her that no comment could be made on her mother's case because there were no copies of any correspondence relating to it on the files. That is an Alice in Wonderland situation. Everything then went quiet, and then Mrs. Lonsdale received a reassessment from the Pension Service on 9 September. It told her that it was a dreadful story and a terrible mistake, and that she should never have been offered a backdated payment of £162,497.94 each week from 14 July 1800. The figure was wrong: she should have received only £42,107.52 a week backdated to 21 October 1880. She was to lose 80 years' worth of minimum income guarantee. On my calculations, she was to lose some £120,000 per week for that period. Mrs. Lonsdale was philosophical about the matter. She concluded that she would still be better off and would, on her calculations, get a backdated payment not of £1.7 billion but of £275 million. She thought that that would do nicely before Christmas.

That was when I got involved. I was approached by Mrs. Millington, who did not know whether it was lunch, tea or dinner. I contacted the chief executive of the Pension Service—a Ms Alexis Cleveland—in the hope that I would make some headway. I fear that I did not. I also wrote to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. His office sent me an acknowledgment card. I told the Minister that one mistake was understandable but two was downright inexcusable.

I had heard nothing from the Pension Service two weeks later, so I approached the Minister again. On 3 October, some five weeks after my original inquiry to the chief executive, she responded herself. In her letter, she stated that

"it is clear that neither Mrs. Lonsdale and Mrs. Millington have received the standard of service they have a right to expect".

That was certainly true. I was concerned that nobody was offered any apologies, though that is perhaps not quite right—the chief executive offered apologies not to me but to Mrs. Lonsdale and her daughter, who were grateful. I was also concerned that the chief executive said that the Pension Service's computer system was

"designed to automatically issue letters"

and that local staff were

"unable to alter the information printed on them."

I do not know what local staff do. Perhaps they simply watch the computer.

The chief executive made one concession: she acknowledged that the letters issued to Mrs. Lonsdale were clearly nonsense—she picked that point up. However, the only reason that the letters were nonsense was the overpayment—quite a substantial overpayment. Mrs. Lonsdale was ordered to surrender her income support book because of that mistake, whereby she would have been offered so much money. However, here is the punchline: the chief executive went on to say that after further assessment of Mrs. Lonsdale's case she was entitled to—wait for it—3p a week. That is just over 10p a month.

A further two weeks passed. I again contacted the chief executive, advising that unless she put right the ridiculous state of affairs and considered an appropriate sum by way of compensation, I might apply for an Adjournment debate in Parliament. That was in October. Following my successful application for this debate, amazingly, an official from the Plymouth pensions office contacted Mrs. Millington to discuss possible compensation—quite rightly. She arranged to see that official yesterday, and the official took down extensive details concerning Mrs. Millington's mother's case, as if she knew nothing. The official said that she would have to file and complete a report. She said that whether compensation was paid for all the inconvenience and trouble was not a matter for her, but that it would take up to three months to take a decision, and that many people would have to be involved.

I do not know how many tens of thousands of pounds' worth of people's time the problem has already cost. I do not know how much time Mrs. Millington or I have spent on it. I do not know how much trouble it has caused for the elderly lady herself. I do not know how many officials have been involved. The Minister and Alexis Cleveland have been involved, and they cannot even sort out the compensation issue. There should have been a modest sum by way of compensation.

I had better return to the story, as I know that the Chamber is waiting to hear what happened next. Not only was the computer in Plymouth going wrong, but the chief executive's computer started to go wrong. I received a second letter from her, dated 21 October, which was identical to the letter that she wrote me on 3 October. Both letters were signed by her personally, but neither dealt with the problem. I was, however, relieved to receive another letter from Ms Cleveland on 24 October, telling me that the general conclusion was that there was a fault in the computer system—she is a bright lady—and that it was being investigated. It had taken two months to work out that there was a fault. Until the error was rectified, she said, staff were obliged to use the same computer-generated letter to correspond with Mrs. Lonsdale. A computer was churning out the wrong figures and could not be stopped; neither could letters from the chief executive to Members of Parliament. The chief executive admitted that she found it highly embarrassing to apologise to me again on this matter. I can quite understand her sentiments.

Out of the blue, I received another letter from Ms Cleveland, identical to the one of 24 October, and dated 29 October. This was followed by a telephone call to my office from an official of the Plymouth Pension Service, who apologised for the fact that the computer had sent out further identical letters, but said that the service was powerless to stop it happening. The Pension Service computers appear to be completely out of control, churning out thousands of letters and causing widespread confusion. Surely a simple solution would be to ensure that the computers are not linked to printers. If they are not, and there is no paper in the printers, they cannot do any damage. However, as long as they are linked up, the stuff will continue to be churned out.

I next received a letter from someone else, calling himself the performance director—things were beginning to sound a bit like a Kafka novel by now. He wrote on behalf of the chief executive on 19 November, apologising for sending me two identical letters, and explaining that steps were being taken to prevent its happening again.

Mrs. Millington's approaches to the Pension Service did not fare much better. She heard nothing from the Plymouth Pension Service following her letter of 24 August to the manager, Mr. Gilmartin, until the end of October—a two-month gap. When she received a letter, it was signed not by Mr. Gilmartin but by a Mrs. Theresa Cooke. Just think of the number of staff involved in the case. Mrs. Cooke was called the processing team manager. Thus we had a performance director, a processing team manager and the chief executive—everybody—involved in the case. Mrs. Lonsdale wondered whether she was merely a figment of the computer's imagination or whether she really existed, because with the letter came a cheque—for 45p.

Hon. Members may be interested to know that I learned, by means of a parliamentary question, that the cost of issuing that cheque was £1.47—£1.02 more than the value of the cheque. I can see that the Minister realises the absurdity of this situation. Perhaps hon. Members can imagine how confusing and distressing it was for Mrs. Lonsdale and her daughter. That is quite apart from the waste of public funds incurred in trying to resolve the matter, with so many letters flying backwards and forwards. At the centre of it all was an 82-year-old lady, whose daughter and Member of Parliament were beside themselves with anger and irritation at the debacle.

As if all that were not enough, the Pension Service performance director told me in his letter of 19 November that under current regulations—I knew that there must be some regulations somewhere to provide an excuse—the service was bound to pay Mrs. Lonsdale the amount to which she was entitled. I am advised that where the amount of income support is less than £1 a week the Secretary of State may decide the intervals of payment, but that those intervals cannot exceed 13 weeks. Thus, every 13 weeks Mrs. Lonsdale must receive a cheque for 45p, even though it costs the taxpayer £1.47 to produce it.

I do not understand why the regulation cannot be changed, so that such small sums are administered annually. What of the waste of taxpayers' money? Clearly, this case has got completely out of hand, and change is needed. As I understand matters, other benefits are paid annually. Why cannot the 45p be added to Mrs. Lonsdale's pension, so that she does not need a separate cheque?

The cost of the case will not quite run to the sum of £1.7 billion that was the original forecast for Mrs. Lonsdale's benefit, but certainly a lot of money is involved. Last night an official belted from Plymouth to Kingsbridge, which is a 50-mile round trip, to discuss compensation, only to tell us that it would take three months to sort the matter out. Marks and Spencer would have sorted it out immediately, paid a good will cheque and said that the firm was very sorry. Neither the elderly lady nor her daughter is after money, but they think that the management of any well-run organisation would want to put things right by means of a payment to compensate everyone for their trouble. Indeed, it would be nice if their MP got something, too, because the situation is absurd. What would be an appropriate figure? It would be one that compensated appropriately for the problem. We have an out-of-control computer system that churns out paper with rubbish on it, a chief executive of a public agency who cannot stop sending out the same letter, and an 82-year-old being offered £1.7 billion and £275 million from public funds, only to be sent a cheque for 45p.

This is not just a good Christmas story— although it will be, in one sense, if the Minister, as I hope she will, says that the service will see to it that Mrs. Lonsdale receives a cheque for whatever amount by way of compensation before Christmas—but a story with a serious underlying message. Bureaucracy under this Government is getting too big; it is out of control, unaccountable and just not working properly. Computers are making people's lives a misery. Far from improving our lifestyles, they are creating additional frustration and stress, as this example shows.

I am the MP in this maelstrom, but unlike the apprentice in Dukas's "The Sorcerer's Apprentice", I cannot get the magic to work. In that story, the apprentice gets hold of a book of spells and, as a result of the spell that he casts, the room becomes flooded with water. Just when he is about to drown, the magician turns up. He says the right spell, prevents any more water from pouring into the room and the brooms then pump the water out again. In this case, I cannot get the magic to work; to make the Government put things right, so that the Minister says, "Sorry, but mistakes do happen," and Mrs. Londsdale is paid the minimum income guarantee on her pension annually and receives at least £100 compensation in time for Christmas.

1.11 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): I congratulate the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) on securing the debate. I fully understand why he asked for it. I am grateful for the opportunity to respond to the points that he raised about the unfortunate experiences of Mrs. Lonsdale and Mrs. Millington in dealing with the Pension Service.

The Government are committed to providing a high-quality service for pensioners, although they clearly have not managed to do that in this case. I personally regret that the standard of service provided in this instance has been so consistently poor. The chief executive of the Pension Service, Alexis Cleveland, has already apologised, apparently more than once, although I was not aware of all the duplicate letters to which the hon. Gentleman referred. However, having considered the circumstances of the case in preparation for the debate, I wrote to Mrs. Millington to apologise to her myself, having seen the catalogue of errors that she has had to endure. It is not the hon. Gentleman's job to apologise on my behalf, so I shall not ask him to do so.

Mrs. Millington acts on her mother's behalf and, as the hon. Gentleman said, in March 2002, she made a claim for minimum income guarantee on behalf of Mrs. Lonsdale. In July, Mrs. Millington received a computer-generated letter about Mrs. Lonsdale's entitlement, which was clearly confusing and about as wrong as it could possibly be. It implied that she was entitled to £162,497.94 a week—some minimum income guarantee—and that she was entitled to it from approximately 200 years ago, which would make her a very old lady.

Mr. Steen: And a very rich one.

Maria Eagle: Indeed. The letter went on to say that Mrs. Lonsdale was not entitled to the minimum income

[Maria Eagle]

guarantee from 28 February 1852. It is clearly a computer-generated letter, and clearly completely wrong. I do not know of any benefits that we backdate by 200 years.

Mrs. Millington also had to endure the embarrassment of having her mother's finances discussed publicly in the post office. I am particularly sorry for that. The problem is compounded by the fact that another nonsensical letter was then sent out. That was equally wrong, but not quite as generously so.

I should like to say something about why the letters were issued, because I can understand the frustration that they caused. In this case, they were obviously wrong, but mistakes in letters are not always that blatant and that can cause a problem. The information concerning Mrs. Lonsdale's affairs was correctly entered on to the computer system by the local Pension Service staff. However, something about the way in which the system processed the data resulted in the ridiculous letters. The data were clearly corrupted in an appalling manner during the processing of the claim.

It is normal for computer-generated correspondence to be issued from a computer centre rather than from a pensions centre. Pensions centre staff deal with telephone calls and with clients. They do not have to look after the computer as well, so the case was handled at two different places. The local staff could not have known about the matter and could have done nothing to check the contents or to prevent the letters from going out. The technical fault with the computer system has been referred to our IT specialists and is being investigated so that it can be rectified, Mrs. Millington does not receive any more ridiculous letters and she is kept correctly and fully informed about her mother's benefit entitlement.

This appears to have been an isolated fault—no other such incidents have been reported, although that does not help the hon. Gentleman or Mrs. Millington. We have not been able to identify why the data were corrupted so badly. The income support computer system has 3.5 million live claims on it, which is why we cannot site the computers in the offices of local staff and expect them to check all the letters. Badly corrupted cases such as this account for just 0.007 per cent. of those 3.5 million cases. I know that that is of little comfort to Mrs. Millington, who falls into that 0.007 per cent. category. Nevertheless, I hope that I can give some assurance that what has happened to her is not a regular occurrence. The hon. Gentleman said that computers were making our lives a misery. The rest of the 3.5 million people whose claims are dealt with properly and in a timely fashion week in, week out obviously feel that they benefit from the computer system. I can understand why Mrs. Millington and Mrs. Lonsdale at the moment do not.

I should like to say something about Mrs. Lonsdale's entitlement. It is typical that after this kind of appalling mistake, the correct calculation shows her entitlement to be 3p a week. That compounds the situation. Where the amount of income support payable is less than 10p per week minimum income guarantee, and there is entitlement to another benefit that may be paid with income support, such as retirement pension, it must be paid at an interval that cannot exceed 13 weeks. That is a statutory entitlement and, although the sum is very small, it is not for the Government to say that it is too little to pay. In many circumstances, not necessarily Mrs. Lonsdale's, entitlement to minimum income guarantee can act as a passport to many other, more valuable benefit entitlements, such as a carer's premium or a disability premium. They represent significant weekly sums. That does not apply to Mrs. Lonsdale, but she could, for example, be passported to free NHS dental treatment, if that were of help to her. There can be advantages beyond the small sum.

The hon. Gentleman made some understandable points about the cost of receiving girocheques when the amount payable is so small. Some provisions, known as the de minimis provisions, state that where the entitlement is less than 10p a week, payment is sent quarterly rather than issued in weekly payments, which cost, as the hon. Gentleman said, £1.47 per girocheque.

It is also possible to pay minimum income guarantee in the same book as retirement pension, which is the solution in such circumstances. The customer has to agree, of course, and I understand from the reports of the discussions yesterday between an official from the Department and Mrs. Millington that the idea was put to her. If Mrs. Lonsdale agrees, we can end the nonsense of a quarterly cheque for 45p and the sum can be added to the retirement pension book. That seems the sensible solution.

Mr. Steen: I am grateful for the understanding and sympathy with which the Minister is dealing with the matter, and I await the punchline on the compensation. Many people other than this good lady must have small pensions. Is it not a good opportunity to suggest to those whose benefit every quarter is 3p, or another figure less than the girocheque value, that it should be added to their pension? Perhaps the computer, in its sophistication, might be able to identify those paid modest sums every week and ask them whether they would like it paid annually or on their pension.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman is right. My understanding is that we make that suggestion to people who receive small sums when we can get the letters right and sent to the right place in a timely fashion. He must remember that people's circumstances change. I shall not go into all the details in the Chamber, but I will write to him—

Mr. Steen: Just once.

Maria Eagle: Yes, just one letter. I do not intend to plague the hon. Gentleman too much.

It seems that the visit yesterday has indicated a change in the mother's circumstances that may lead to an increase in her entitlement to minimum income guarantee, which I am relieved about. It would be sensible to combine both payments in the book, whatever the sums, so long as they continue to be small. That may be a way out of the girocheque conundrum.

The hon. Gentleman raised the subject of compensation. There has been a request for compensation, and I understand why. Because we are dealing with public money, and because it is not for Ministers to make decisions about compensation, I

cannot give him the Christmas present that he wants for his constituent this afternoon. However, the arrangements through which officials administer the payment of compensation in ex gratia sums for such appalling levels of service will be gone through as quickly as I can ensure that they are gone through. So far as I can ensure, the request that has been made will be dealt with in a timely fashion and properly under the rules that apply. I do not make the decisions but, having considered the circumstances, I think that there may be a case for an ex gratia payment.

Mr. Steen: I understand that the Minister is choosing her words carefully. I cannot imagine a case that cries out more clearly for compensation, but that is not the interest of my constituents or me. We want Departments that get something wrong, for whatever reason, to do more than simply write letters of apology. Ministers can be fired, and there can be debates criticising the Government on the Floor of the House, but my constituent is an individual. The rights of the individual need to be protected.

When big bureaucracies get something wrong, the system should not take three months. Like any good private company, it should offer compensation to correct services that are not correct. That is what worries me about the case. There should not simply be a committee of officials, all paid quite a lot of money, to consider the matter. The Minister should say, "Please deal with this quickly and suitably." I hope that she might be able to do that.

Maria Eagle: I certainly have no problem giving the hon. Gentleman the undertaking that I shall ask my officials to deal with the matter quickly and suitably.

I understand that Mrs. Millington had difficulty when trying to contact the Plymouth pensions centre by telephone to resolve the matter, as she was unable to get through. The telephone service at the centre is set up to provide a recorded message suggesting, if there is a delay in being answered, that the caller should ring back later. The aim is to prevent long queues of people waiting to be answered, who will all be losing money. Many pensioners have little spare cash; indeed, they are often on fixed incomes. They do not have money to waste on waiting to be put through. The intention is not to prevent callers from getting through; it is to prevent them having to hang on in the hope that they might be put through.

The Pension Service is developing as a customer-focused organisation. It is working to improve its service, which is tailored to the needs of pensioners. In order to achieve that, however, it needs to ensure that the highest standards of service are maintained. Mrs. Millington did not receive anything approaching a high standard of service when she tried to contact the service on the telephone. Again, I regret that and apologise for it.

Many pensioners deal with the service by telephone. For example, more than two thirds of retirement pension claims are now made on the retirement pension teleclaims line. When we can get it to work properly—in this instance, it did not—it provides a good service to pensioners. It is convenient and it means that they do not have to go to buildings in the town centre or some considerable distance away.

We are committed to making it easy to contact the service and to make claims. To ensure that, we are developing 26 modern centres, using the most up-to-date equipment, to deal with queries accurately and efficiently. We are setting those up. It is vital that we provide good-quality service. Once those centres are all operational, we shall make sure, as far as we possibly can, that Mrs. Millington's experience is not repeated in a widespread way. Her inability to get through is a matter of regret. Problems often come in not in ones and twos on social security cases but in great clumps. Unfortunately, that is what happened in this case.

Mr. Steen: There may not be another opportunity, because the Minister will be finishing her speech in a moment, so I want to thank her for the measured approach that she has taken in this debate, and for her remarks and her admissions. I am grateful to her for indicating that she will suggest to the Pension Service that it deals with the matter efficiently, effectively and suitably.

Maria Eagle: The hon. Gentleman has correctly spotted that I am coming to the end of my remarks; one can apologise only so many times in a Westminster Hall debate. I am pleased to be able to say that mistakes of that kind are rare. However, we appreciate that they do occur, sometimes in ways that can cause distress and upset. I am as aware of that as the hon. Gentleman, having spoken directly to his constituent. I reiterate my apology to Mrs. Millington and Mrs. Lonsdale for the less than acceptable service that they received.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that MPs should be given something for having to deal with such issues. I therefore wish him a very happy Christmas.

Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme

1.27 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): In August 1964, the Wilson Labour Government established the state-funded criminal injuries compensation scheme. The scheme is now well established. It is an acknowledgement that society has a responsibility for, and sense of solidarity with, the blameless victims of criminal violence. We in this country can be justifiably proud of our system of compensating such people.

One indication of the generosity of the scheme is the amount of compensation paid. This week, the Institute of Actuaries published a report showing that compensation paid in 2002 under the UK scheme was some €341 million. That compared with criminal injuries compensation of €107 million in Germany, and €148 million in France. The amounts payable in those other comparable jurisdictions are smaller. In Spain, they are much smaller. The disparity in Europe means that it is not surprising that the European Commission Green Paper on the subject does not suggest a harmonised system. Although exact cross-border comparisons are sometimes difficult to make, the figures speak for themselves. We have a generous scheme.

Since 1964, the scheme has been changed on a number of occasions. The most important change made by the previous Conservative Government was the introduction of the tariff scheme. Early last year, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—then Home Secretary—introduced important revisions, primarily an increase in award levels, which are especially significant for those with serious multiple injuries. I congratulate the Government on that uprating.

I acknowledge the value of the scheme. I also pay tribute to the hard work of those associated with the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority and the criminal injuries compensation appeals panel. However, I should like to raise a number of concerns about the operation of the scheme. The concerns were sparked off when one of my constituents, Rod Adams, a former justice of the peace, told me about Mrs. Ramesh Kalia, who runs the Dudley Road post office in Tipton, which is just outside my constituency. The post office was robbed in June 2001, and Mrs. Kalia was seriously injured. She tried to make a claim under the criminal injuries compensation scheme. Early in 2002, she was told that her claim had been rejected because she did not give all the assistance necessary, in that she did not respond to requests for further information.

I was taken aback, to say the least. Mrs. Kalia had been seriously injured and had had no assistance in making her claim. To say that she did not "co-operate" in the ordinary use of the word is a travesty. Subsequently, Mrs. Kalia was told by Sandwell Victim Support that in its experience it would take some nine months for a review of the initial refusal and up to two years for an appeal to be heard. As Mrs. Kalia is not my constituent, I could not take up her case, but I tabled some questions to the Home Secretary, asking him to specify the delays faced by claimants such as Mrs. Kalia in seeking compensation for injuries caused by criminals.

My hon. Friend the Minister answered those questions in volume 389, columns 1505W to 1506W, of *Hansard*. In one answer, he set out the average number of days taken for claims assessment, claims review and claims appeal. Those time periods do not make comfortable reading, especially as they are getting worse. While Mrs. Kalia's claim was being considered, one of my close friends, Guy Dehn, the director of the whistleblowing charity, Public Concern at Work, was viciously attacked by thugs near Angel in north London late last year when cycling home. He lodged a claim in June giving details of the attack. He also set out the dental treatment that he underwent. He is still awaiting a decision.

In order to go beyond those two cases of which I have personal knowledge, I asked three leading law firms to give me details of their experiences of representing claimants under the scheme. Alexander Harris is a well-known law firm specialising in health matters, with branches in the west midlands, London and the north-west. Leigh, Day & Co. is London based, but has built up an enviable reputation for international as well as domestic personal injury work. Clifford Chance is the biggest law firm in the world. As part of its pro bono activity, it funds a unit that assists those making claims for criminal injuries compensation, especially at the appellant level. I am enormously grateful for the help of lawyers from those firms in providing me with information.

What is those firms' collective experience of the scheme? First, there are the delays. Sometimes, they have quite simple causes, such as not responding to correspondence within a reasonable period. One of my informants said that a reasonable period was eight weeks, but the guide to the scheme contains in paragraph 10 a promise to turn correspondence around within two weeks. Then there are delays in processing claims. A typical case from one of the lawyers relates to a claim that was registered in August 2001, and on which there has been no decision on entitlement. That is an extreme case. Another lawyer, however, e-mailed me this:

> "I have two related criminal injury compensation claims (mother and son) that were running parallel to a clin neg"—

criminal negligence—

> "case from 1998 (when we were instructed), following the death of the husband/father . . . The clinical negligence claim settled in June 2001 for £200k . . . However, we are still waiting for a response from the CICA"—

the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority—

> "with the outcome of the two CICA claims. I write periodically (every 2-3 months or so) prodding them and giving them further information they request but little substantive is ever seemingly done. Initial applications were made about February 1999, nearly four years ago. The whole process has been painfully labour intensive and slow, such that the client has virtually given up on it!"

Balanced against that, it is fair to report that lawyers' experience with the appeals panel is better. I am told that its operation has been speeding up and is becoming more efficient. The lawyers who wrote to me about it were especially impressed with the recent operation of the presenting officers.

Thus, my first point is to press the Minister on the delay on the part of the authority.

Secondly, I would like to raise the issue of the obstacles that face victims when making a claim. The authority's latest annual report shows that 6,000 claims were disallowed in 2000 and 2001 because the applicant failed to co-operate with the police in bringing an assailant to justice. Mrs. Kalia was one of those people and it can hardly be said that she did not co-operate, in the ordinary, everyday sense of that word. One of my informants raised his concern at the way in which that prerequisite was being used to filter out claims. I quote his rather graphic language:

"If you are knocked unconscious from behind and never saw the attacker, the police will visit you in the hospital and ask you if you want to prosecute. You then say, 'I didn't see anyone.' They close their note book and that is the end of your claim . . . what you are meant to do is to insist that they investigate . . . in this context they also expect you to go to the police before the hospital, as doing it the other way round is considered a delay and therefore a failure to cooperate."

I am not exactly sure about the last sentence, but I think that that makes the point.

In terms of the obstacles to making a claim, there is also the vexed issue of legal assistance in formulating and advancing a claim. On the scheme's operation, one commentator has told me that it is intolerable that free legal advice and assistance are offered to the violent criminal—the perpetrator of the injury—while the victim must pay for any legal representation from their compensation award, use other private means, or rely on their trade union.

The law firm Alexander Harris told me that solicitors are in a difficult position,

"because . . . cases have to be funded"

on

"a contingency fee basis . . . or . . . on an hourly rate, whichever is the less".

That firm has found that that

"is a real problem on small and moderate value claims",

since it would be entirely inappropriate to take part of a claimant's payment in such cases. Alexander Harris adds that the authority seems inconsistent on whether it will pay disbursements. He says:

"Their approach seems to be that they would entertain the idea if it used the reports in their assessment",

but otherwise it will not. The firm says that that makes it difficult to give clients appropriate advice.

Thirdly, I raise the issue of awards. Personally, I would not advocate an increase in the level of awards at present, although I understand the criticism that despite the 2001 uprating, awards are falling behind in terms of general damages and personal injuries. Nor would I want to argue, at this stage, for an extension of the scheme beyond the victims of violent crime, or those who are injured trying to apprehend criminals or preventing a crime. At present, I would prefer any additional money to be directed to reducing delays and refining the "co-operation" requirement for claims.

One aspect of awards deserves early attention. As one of my lawyers stated, victims are

"unable to claim loss of earnings and other special damages for the first 28 weeks"

after their accident. The lawyer added that that

"is very difficult for the Claimants to accept—this is yet another kick in the teeth for someone who has already been a victim."

Over the past five years, the Government have done much to improve the criminal justice system. Crime is falling, which is a good thing from the point of view of victims. As my friend Guy Dehn wrote in a letter to me:

"I—and I suspect all victims—would far rather forgo the compensation and not be beaten up in the first place. This should not be forgotten. Personally I will gladly give my compensation award to the police if I thought it might increase the chance the guys were caught."

In particular, the Government have done much to move the victims towards the centre of the stage in the criminal justice process. That has been long overdue, and I congratulate the Government on doing it. However, I have identified significant concerns about the criminal injuries compensation scheme. They are not to do with the authority or its staff. My informants said that its staff are generally sympathetic and often very helpful.

I suspect that these concerns are symptoms of a more fundamental cause—that not enough money is being allocated within the Home Office to the scheme. That results in victims being dissuaded from applying through the formal filters; that is also because of a lack of assistance in their claiming. Claims are refused that are then readily overturned on review or appeal, which again suggests a further filtering at the claims assessment level. On a cost-benefit analysis, it would probably be much better to pay up genuine claims in the first place. I have addressed other delays.

We must do better for these people, most of whom, in the words of the authority's latest annual report, have

"suffered a traumatic and violent episode in their lives, some a devastating personal tragedy from which they may never fully recover."

1.42 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): I congratulate my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston) on securing this Adjournment debate. It raises the crucial issue of the criminal injuries compensation scheme, in which he has taken a particular interest. It is a very important scheme for the tens of thousands of victims of violent crime who apply each year for compensation.

I am sorry to hear of the experiences of Mrs. Kalia, to whom my hon. and learned Friend referred, although she is not one of his constituents, and Guy Dehn, whom I know. I was not aware that that had happened to him, and I would be grateful if my hon. and learned Friend passed on my very best wishes to him.

I echo what my hon. and learned Friend said about the nature of the compensation scheme. It is right to describe it as the most generous state compensation scheme of its kind in the world. It receives more applications and pays out more money than all the other countries of the European Union added together. That is a striking statistic.

I think that I am right in saying that it was established in August 1964, which means that credit for the Act that introduced it goes to a Conservative Government; the general election that led to the forming of the Wilson Administration did not take place until October. However, that Administration implemented the new arrangements. Since 1964, the scheme has handled

[Hilary Benn]

nearly 1.5 million applications; it has made getting on for 900,000 compensation awards that total nearly £3 billion. In the past three years alone it has paid out over £200 million each year, and over 120,000 victims of violent crime have received compensation. However, as my hon. and learned Friend stated, that is no reason for complacency, because people who are injured today are less interested in what happened to victims in the past than in how well they and future victims will be treated.

My hon. and learned Friend referred to the history of the scheme. When it was established in 1964, it was non-statutory, and compensation was assessed by the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board on the basis of common law damages. Following a legal challenge in the mid-1990s, major changes to the scheme were made in 1996, when it was put on a statutory footing. The most significant change was that the new scheme broke the link with common law damages and moved away from payment based on individual assessment by lawyers to provide for payment made on the basis of a tariff or scale of awards that groups together injuries of comparable severity and allocates a financial value to them. In the most serious cases, extra compensation can be paid for loss of earnings and the cost of care, subject to a maximum pay-out of £500,000 in an individual case.

The Government of the day gave two main reasons for changing the system, the first of which was that they wanted to do something about the rising costs of the scheme and the issue of sustainability. Secondly, they wanted to provide a better service to claimants, a point to which my hon. and learned Friend paid particular attention. The new scheme was easier to administer and simpler for victims to understand. Following a public consultation exercise during 1999 and 2000, the current Government made several significant improvements to the scheme, to which my hon. and learned Friend referred.

It may be helpful if I briefly draw attention to the important differences between the old and the new scheme, because they are relevant to the particular delay raised by my hon. and learned Friend. Under the old scheme, claims were assessed individually by members of the board who were all senior lawyers, and applicants who were dissatisfied with the initial decision of the board could appeal. Their appeal would be considered at an oral hearing before other board members who had not been involved in the original decision. That sometimes led to the accusation that the board was both judge and jury.

When the tariff scheme was introduced in 1996, it was decided that it should be administered by a new non-departmental public body, the new authority, and claims are now determined by claims officers who are civil servants on secondment from the Home Office and the Scottish Executive; it is a joint scheme. The tariff scheme, approved by Parliament, sets out several criteria that must be satisfied before the award of public money can be justified. That means, in practice, that the authority must make inquiries of the police, asking, for example, whether the victim was the blameless victim of a reported crime of violence, and of the appropriate medical authorities to establish the extent of any injury and whether it was caused during the incident for which compensation was being claimed.

In more complex cases, inquiries may need to be made of employers to verify loss of earnings, for example, of social services to see what benefits may have been claimed and local authorities to see what care facilities they may be providing. All such agencies and authorities have other work to do and, despite reminders from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority, the process of dialogue, gathering of information and chasing it up means that the information is not always supplied as quickly as the authority would wish when assessing claims on behalf of people who have approached it.

Under the tariff scheme, there is a two-stage appeals process. It may be helpful if I say, in relation to the case of Mrs. Kalia, that if a claim is not entertained, the individual has the right of review and then appeal. There is a mechanism for determining whether the initial decision of the authority not to entertain a claim for compensation was right. If an applicant were dissatisfied with the initial decision—the first decision—he or she can request a formal review. That is undertaken by a more senior claims officer, and if claimants are dissatisfied with the formal review, they can appeal to a new independent appellant body, the criminal injuries compensation appeals panel.

Ross Cranston: I was not directly involved in the case, but I gained the impression that, because of the adverse effects of the injury, Mrs. Kalia was dissuaded from pursuing the case further. Having been knocked back and still suffering as a result of the injury, she did not want to pursue it.

Hilary Benn: If that is the case, I am very sorry. I simply wanted to say on the record for the purposes of the debate that that is not the end of the matter and that individuals are free to use the review and then the appeals mechanism.

I shall touch on the factors that have created some of the delays to which my hon. and learned Friend referred. First, when the tariff scheme was introduced in 1996, 110,000 cases were outstanding under the old scheme. Those all had to be cleared under the old rules, so the authority has been running two systems in parallel: the old scheme, to try to clear the backlog, and the new scheme.

By March 2000, the rump of old scheme cases had been reduced to fewer than 10,000, at which point the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board was formally wound up. By definition, as the number of old cases decreases, one is left with the most difficult and complex cases at the bottom of the pile. By definition, those cases have not been able to be resolved previously because of their complexity, and they absorb considerable staff effort and resources that would otherwise be applied to operating the tariff scheme. None the less, over the past couple of years, the authority has been working very hard on that group of 10,000, and today only about 800 are still outstanding. The authority is doing its best to try to resolve those cases.

Other factors have added to problems with swifter administration. One was the judicial review in the Leatherland case, which required the authority to bring forward the arrangements that it had already decided to put in hand in due course to give fuller reasons for its decisions at both the first decision and review stages.

The authority decided to do that when the IT systems were upgraded to make it easier. However, because of the judgment, it had to implement the decision earlier. That meant that individually tailored letters had to be produced, which took more time.

It is also fair to say that, as a result of the new data protection requirements of the past couple of years, difficulties have arisen in gathering all the required information from the police, the health service and others. Some people have not been entirely sure that they are permitted to release the information under the new data protection arrangements, so the authority has had to persuade them that that is perfectly in order. The authority is working closely with the information commissioner and the police, through the Association of Chief Police Officers, to minimise delays.

I can also tell my hon. and learned Friend about many positive things. In 2001–02, the authority finalised almost 77,000 cases, which was 5 per cent. more than in the preceding year. The backlog at review stage has been reduced, from a peak of 36 weeks—that being the time taken to assign a new review application to a case-worker—to 11 weeks at the end of March this year, and to the current waiting time of just four weeks. That represents real progress.

The number of outstanding tariff scheme appeals has been reduced from a peak of almost 8,000 in 2000 to just over 5,000 currently. That is despite new appeals arriving at an unusually high rate this year due to the successful efforts to clear the review backlog.

I understand that, as a result of the improvements that the authority has made in explaining its decisions, the proportion of applicants who accept decisions under the tariff scheme has risen markedly. Two years ago, some 25 per cent. of applicants asked formally for the assessment of their claim to be reviewed; now, the figure is 21 per cent. That suggests that the authority is doing a pretty good job of getting it right. Giving better and fuller explanations, which the authority was keen to do, has helped in that process.

In a customer survey conducted by the authority last year, 72 per cent. of respondents were satisfied or more than satisfied with how their decisions were explained—as a result of the new arrangements—compared with 60 per cent. in a similar survey conducted two years earlier. That shows that providing fuller explanations for decisions adds slightly to the time taken to complete a case, but that there are clear benefits in those circumstances. The authority has also introduced a free telephone helpline to advise potential claimants on the rules of the scheme, and simple leaflets. Next month, it will provide a new improved guide to the scheme's provisions and procedures. All those publications have been entered for, and received, a Plain English Campaign crystal mark award for clarity. The authority is also looking to upgrade its website.

Another point relates to the latest data from the authority on the average time taken to settle cases, in which it compares the first eight months of this year with the first eight months of last year. The average time taken for the claims assessment, which is the first decision, was 306 days last year, and 305 days this year—a very marginal improvement. The review stage took 277 days last year, compared with 269 days this year—also a slight improvement. At the appeal stage, there has been movement in the other direction from 407 days last year up to 446 days this year. However, that reflects the fact that more cases are being put into the review system, which is the product of work done earlier. We very much hope that that will be a temporary glitch, and that once that bundle of pent-up appeals is dealt with, the delays will be reduced. It is worth pointing out that, overall, outstanding cases are down from 109,000 in 1995–96 to 95,000 this year.

I wanted to make a final point about the compensation awards. It might be helpful to point out that the average award was £3,177 in current prices in 1981–82, and in the current year, the average award has been £5,459. The award is therefore increasing in real terms. I cannot comment on how that compares with other compensation claims elsewhere.

I repeat that I am grateful to my hon. and learned Friend for having raised this important matter. The authority and its staff are working hard, and I am sure that they will appreciate the thanks that he asked to be conveyed to them for their efforts. We need to do more to deal with the problems of delay that he raised, and we will continue to do all we can to provide as good a service to claimants as possible now and in future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at three minutes to Two o'clock.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 9 December 2002

TREASURY

Container Security

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): Her Majesty's Customs and Excise and the United States Customs Service signed a Declaration of Principles to implement the Container Security Initiative today, 9 December. Detailed guidance on how the Initiative will be implemented and on deployment of US Customs Officers at UK ports will be agreed in the New Year. A copy of the Declaration has been placed in the Library.

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

National Non-domestic Rates

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): On Thursday 5 December 2002 I presented the draft Settlement for 2003–04. Included in the announcement was the amount available of non-domestic rates in England for 2003–04 to be redistributed to local authorities. This statement details the calculation of the Distributable Amount and announces the non-domestic rate poundage (multiplier) for 2003–04.

The multiplier will be 44.4 pence. The amount of non-domestic rates in England for 2003–04 to be redistributed to local authorities will be £15,600 million.

The calculations for 2003–04, and the prior-year figures, on which this is based, are set out in the following table.

National non-domestic rates—calculation of Distributable Amount for 2003–04

£ million

	2000–01 Provisional Outturn	*2001–02 Provisional Outturn*	*2002–03 Provisional Outturn*	*2003–04 Estimated in-year contribution*
1. Income from local lists				
Multiplier *(p)*	41.6	43.0	43.7	44.4
Gross Yield	16,190	16,955	17,230	17,471
(i) Reliefs				
(a) Net Transitional Relief	-943	-499	-209	-193
(b) Empty Properties	-970	-1,045	-1,054	-1,070
(c) Charitable	-539	-582	-600	-609
(d) Rural Shops & Post Offices	-2	-5	-6	-6
(e) Discretionary	-34	-43	-39	-39
Net Yield after reliefs	13,701	14,781	15,323	15,554
(ii) Collection Costs/reductions to contributions				
(a) Cost of collection	-85	-84	-84	-84
(b) Losses on collection	-116	-93	-134	-140
(c) City of London offset	-7	-7	-7	-7
Total contribution in respect of year	13,494	14,598	15,099	15,324
(iii) Repayments/interest payments	-615	-345	-311	-342
Total adjustments	12,880	14,253	14,788	14,982
Net Local Yield				
2. Income from Central List				
Net Central List Yield	868	1,049	1,063	1,081
3. Income from Crown List				
Contribution in Aid	9	12	12	12
Net Crown Yield				
Total NDR Yield	13,757	15,313	15,862	16,075
4. Exchequer				
Total Exchequer Contributions	415	262	41	111
Total NNDR pool payments (1+2+3+4)	14,172	15,575	15,903	16,186
5. Adjustments				
Surplus brought forward	929	-302	137	-586
Combined total	15,101	15,274	16,041	15,600

National non-domestic rates—calculation of Distributable Amount for 2003–04

£ million

	2000–01 Provisional Outturn	2001–02 Provisional Outturn	2002–03 Provisional Outturn	2003–04 Estimated in-year contribution
Distributable Amount	15,402	15,136	16,626	15,600
Surplus Carried Forward	-302	137	-586	0

Notes:

For 2001–02 and 2000–01 the amounts shown are those recorded in the post end-year (NNDR3) returns. For 2002–03 the amounts shown are the provisional outturn for the year based mainly upon authorities' provisional contributions to the non-domestic rating pool. For 2003–04 the estimates are based on:

1. Item 1: The gross calculated rate yield represents the total value of non-domestic hereditaments on local rating lists times the multiplier.

2. Item 1(i)*(a)*: The transitional decrease adjustment includes the estimated amount of rates that will not be recouped from local list ratepayers under the transitional arrangements made by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the transitional relief scheme, announced by written PQ on 25 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 770W.

3. Item 1(i)*(b)*: The empty property relief adjustments include voids and partially occupied hereditaments. The 2003–04 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.

4. Item 1(i)*(c)*: Charitable rate relief. The 2003–04 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.

5. Item 1(i)*(d)*: Rural Shops and Post Office relief. Figures include mandatory relief for general stores and post offices under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Figures for 2001–02 onwards includes mandatory relief for petrol filing stations and public houses under the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Houses and Petrol Filling Stations) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001/1345) and mandatory relief for new enterprises on former agricultural premises under the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001. The 2003–04 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.

6. Item 1(i)*(e)*: Discretionary relief granted to charities, non-profit making organisations and for other reasons including discretionary relief for village shops and post offices under the Local Government and Rating Act 1997. Figures for 2001–02 onwards include discretionary relief for petrol filing stations and public houses under the Non-Domestic Rating (Public Houses and Petrol Filling Stations) (England) Order 2001 (SI 2001/1345) and discretionary relief for new enterprises on former agricultural premises under the Rating (Former Agricultural Premises and Rural Shops) Act 2001. The 2003–04 figure includes an allowance for the increase in the gross rate yield.

7. Item 1(ii)*(a)* and *(b)*: The allowances for the costs and losses incurred by authorities in collecting non-domestic rates from ratepayers.

8. Item 1(ii)*(c)*: City Offset—the amount which the City of London will not be required to pay into the non-domestic rating pool. It is the amount which will be retained by the City to meet its own expenditure.

9. Item 1(iii): net adjustment in respect of appeals and other amendments to the rating list affecting liability for previous years rates settled in that year.

10. Item 2: the rateable value of non-domestic hereditaments on the central rating list times the multiplier, less the net effect of transitional arrangements, and adjusted for appeals and other changes in respect of previous years.

11. Item 3: Almost all properties included in the crown list in previous years are included in the local list figures at item 1.

12. Item 4: the contribution from central government to onset the amount of the Secretary of State's estimate of income forgone as a result of transitional arrangements established by regulations under section 58 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 and the transitional relief scheme, announced by written PQ on 25 November 1999, *Official Report*, column 770W.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Science Budget

The Minister for Women (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I have pleasure in announcing the allocations of the Science Budget for the period 2003–04 to 2005–06, following the announcement in July this year by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer of the outcome of the spending review. The spending review reaffirmed this Government's commitment to a healthy and vibrant science and engineering base at the heart of the life of the nation. The Science Budget, already growing at an average of about 7 per cent. in real terms year on year will now accelerate to a growth rate of 10 per cent. real terms year on year.

Details of the allocations are set out in a document I am publishing today, "Science Budget: 2003–04 to 2005–06". Copies have been placed in the library of the House and are also available on the website of the Office of Science and Technology at www.ost.gov.uk/.

The allocations which I am announcing today focus on the new resources which are being made available to the Research Councils and other funded bodies for the pursuit of science, engineering and technology research. As a result of these allocations, the Research Councils

will receive significant new funding to increase the volume of top-quality research. I have also allocated funding to enable the Councils to take forward specific new projects in the following key areas of research:

Stem cells—£40 million over two years

Sustainable Energy Economy—£28 million over two years

Rural Economy and Land Use—£20 million over two years

In addition to this, I have provided the Councils with contributions to enable them to fund programmes in other key areas such as brain science, animal infectious diseases and gravity waves and planetary exploration.

The Councils will also continue the cross-Council programmes in genomics, e-science and basic technology begun following the previous spending review. The Genomics programme is being expanded to include research into the important area of proteomics. The Basic Technology programme will also be expanded in response to the very high level of demand generated in the first year.

The Research Councils will receive funds to allow them to implement some of the recommendations of *SET for Success*, the review of science, engineering and technology skills carried out by Sir Gareth Roberts. These are:

An increase in the minimum Research Council PhD stipend to £12,000 by 2005–06

The provision of better training in transferable skills for PhD students and postdoctoral researchers supported by the Research Councils.

The implementation of other aspects of the Roberts review recommendations which were funded in the spending review will be announced next year.

The Science Budget settlement included funding for the top-priority large facilities projects identified on the large facilities road map, including the Diamond synchrotron. Funding for these projects will be released as each one reaches the necessary state of preparation.

I am allocating limited capital funding to those Councils which operate institutes, centres and surveys of their own to enable them to address the most serious capital investment backlogs as soon as possible. I have also indicated that I will allocate further funds for this purpose in due course on receipt of robust business plans which indicate how the funding of institutes will be put on to a long-term sustainable footing.

A key feature of the allocations booklet which I have referred to above is the inclusion of a suite of objectives for the management of the Science Budget. These objectives support my Department's Public service Agreement target for science, exploitation and innovation, namely:

> To improve the relative international performance of the UK's science and engineering base, the exploitation of science and the overall innovation performance of the UK.

I am grateful to the Director General of Research Councils for his advice on these allocations and to the members of the RCUK Strategy Group for their part in the successful outcome of the allocations process.

The Government's commitment to science is unwavering. We believe that excellent science delivers the advances we will need as a nation if we are to improve productivity, improve the quality of life and so deliver greater prosperity for all.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 10 December 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Election Pilot Schemes

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government are looking at many ways, including e-voting, to modernise our electoral system and to increase the opportunities that people have to vote. To test the robustness of the new options and to build public confidence in them, we are promoting an extensive programme of pilot innovations at local elections.

In September we, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association, published a prospectus inviting applications from English and Welsh local authorities to apply to run electoral pilots at local elections in 2003. The closing date for applications to run pilots in the May 2003 local elections was 29 November 2002.

I am pleased to announce that we have received 63 applications from authorities wishing to participate in this pilot round. Of these, 19 are proposing to hold e-voting trials, seven other applications include e-counting, and 37 involve all-postal ballots. Seven authorities propose testing other variations to the normal electoral process, including extensions to the voting hours.

The May 2003 pilot applications cover nearly 6.8 million electors. In comparison, the May 2002 pilots covered 2.5 million electors.

The level of interest and enthusiasm shown by authorities is very encouraging. The widespread readiness to pilot new and innovative approaches to holding elections will benefit voters by testing ways to make elections more straightforward and accessible. Our electoral pilot programme is an important step towards achieving our aim of an e-enabled general election post–2006.

Following consultation with the independent Electoral Commission, we expect to announce our decision on which non e-voting pilots have been approved later this month, and the decision on the remainder by mid-January 2003.

With this high level of interest shown by local authorities, our focus in the early part of 2003 will be on undertaking with the successful applicants the extensive groundwork necessary for them to hold their pilots. As a result, we do not anticipate giving approval to any requests for piloting at local authority by-elections that are to be held between 1 January and 31 March 2003.

Outside that period, our general approach on local authority by-election pilots is that we would be minded to approve proposals, including e-voting, for pilots only in certain circumstances. These are when the proposals meet the standard criteria set out in our September 2002 prospectus and contain innovative features or are from authorities that had run pilots before and are seeking to apply the same scheme to another election. We will, of course, consider carefully any application that is made.

In all cases, it is important for local authorities to make any application as early as possible given the tight timetable for by-elections. Local authorities may wish to submit outline proposals in advance of an application for a specific by-election.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Jobcentre Plus

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): The Government are committed to rolling out the new Jobcentre Plus service between now and 2006. By spring 2003 we expect to have around a quarter of the network of offices providing the new Jobcentre Plus services.

Despite having record levels of employment, we cannot afford to be complacent about our labour market performance, or about working with our partners to deliver opportunities to a wider group of people than ever before. I am pleased therefore to be able to provide the House with further details of our plans to introduce the Jobcentre Plus service across Great Britain between now and March 2006.

Early planning for the next three years of the work programme is going well and I am now able to provide an indicative list of the remaining districts detailing in which financial year we expect those sites to be transformed.

There is still much to do to develop the local service delivery plans for each district and to prepare the sites for final delivery of the new services. We must be satisfied that a new office provides an environment in which the remodelled service will work and which is safe for staff and customers.

For these remaining sites, planning for delivery of the new services will be a locally driven process. As local plans begin to emerge, district managers will be involving local MPs and other local partners. District managers will be writing to local stakeholders to invite comments and seek views. A key priority for district managers is to ensure that the new services are developed and tailored to meet the needs of the community they serve.

The following tables indicate when Jobcentre Plus plans to introduce the new Jobcentre Plus service into the remaining Jobcentre Plus districts. As detailed planning work is undertaken at district level, changes may be made to this schedule.

2003–04 (27 districts)

District	*Region/Country*
Norfolk*-	East England
Lothian and Borders*-	Scotland
Cheshire and Warrington*	North West
Halton & St. Helens*	North West
North East London*	London
Dorset*-	South West
Northumberland*-	North East

2003–04 (27 districts)

District	*Region/Country*
Sussex*	South East
Surrey*	South East
Wakefield*-	Yorkshire & the Humber
Bedfordshire	East of England
Glasgow	Scotland
Tayside	Scotland
Lancashire West	North West
Liverpool	North West
Cumbria	North West
Berkshire	South East
Central London	London
West London	London
Cornwall	South West
Tees Valley	North East
Cardiff & Vale	Wales
North West Wales & Powys	Wales
South Humber	Yorkshire & the Humber
North Yorkshire	Yorkshire & the Humber
Birmingham & Solihull-	West Midlands
Northamptonshire	East Midlands

Note:

Districts marked* are planned to introduce the new service in the first half of 2003–04.

All other districts are grouped by region/country; within each region/country the districts are listed in the planned order for roll-out.

For example, looking at the districts in Yorkshire and the Humber in the 2003–04 table above; Wakefield is planned to introduce the new service in the first half of the year followed by South Humber and finally North Yorkshire.

In districts marked - some work may begin in 2002-03.

Roll-out in North East London District is split between 2002–03 and 2003–04.

2004–05 (24 districts)

District	*Region/Country*
Hertfordshire	East England
Cambridgeshire	East England
Edinburgh	Scotland
Fife	Scotland
Lanarkshire	Scotland
Oldham and Rochdale	North West
Salford and Trafford	North West
Bolton & Bury	North West
Stockport and Tameside	North West
Wigan	North West
Kent	South East
South London	London
South East London	London
West of England	South West
City of Sunderland	North East
Eastern Valleys	Wales
Swansea Bay	Wales
Leeds	Yorkshire & the Humber
Hull and East Riding	Yorkshire & the Humber
Doncaster	Yorkshire & the Humber
Hereford & Worcester	West Midlands
Staffordshire	West Midlands
Greater Nottingham	East Midlands
North Nottinghamshire	East Midlands

2005–06 (15 districts)

District	*Region/Country*
Forth Valley & Dumbarton	Scotland
Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway	Scotland
Highlands & Western Isles	Scotland
North London	London
City & East London	London
Gloucestershire	South West
Wiltshire	South West
County Durham	North East
Wrexham & North Wales Coast	Wales
West Wales	Wales
Barnsley & Rotherham	Yorkshire & the Humber
Bradford	Yorkshire & the Humber
Dudley and Sandwell	West Midlands
Wolverhampton and Walsall	West Midlands
Lincolnshire and Rutland	East Midlands

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Sovereign Base Areas

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): There has been very substantial progress on agreeing the relationship between the Sovereign Base Areas (SBAs) and the EU after Cyprus' accession. Our hope is that the final agreement will be in line with the policy set out in Baroness Symons' answer of 5 December 2001, that the SBAs should remain outside the EU but with some technical adjustments to ensure the continued smooth functioning of the relationship between Cyprus and the SBAs. To that end, a clearly defined and limited part of the acquis would apply to the SBAs. These arrangements would be compatible with the 1960 treaty of establishment and with the undertakings which we made at that time in relation to the SBAs. In order to give effect to these arrangements we intend to sign two memoranda of understanding, on implementation and on co-operation on asylum seekers.

The final agreement should take the form of a protocol which will be part of the terms of Cyprus' accession. A Bill will be introduced to enable ratification of the enlargement accession treaty.

Biological Weapons Convention

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): There was a successful outcome to the recent 5th review conference of the biological weapons convention in Geneva. The agreement that was reached there on a set of practical measures will now be the focus for active consideration by the international community. It was of crucial importance that there should be unanimous agreement on the way ahead in meeting the pervasive threat from biological warfare, particularly in light of the growing menace of international terrorism.

The Green Paper on the threat from biological weapons, which I laid before the House in April this year, set out a range of practical measures that could be adopted for dealing with this issue. I was particularly glad to see that a number of the proposals in that Paper

have been incorporated into the international programme of work that has been agreed for the next three years.

The first round of meetings in 2003 will see discussion of penal legislation to bolster the prohibitions of the convention and also of stricter regulations on the handling of dangerous pathogens. In 2004 states parties will study ways of better responding to and investigating cases of alleged use of biological weapons, and suspicious outbreaks of disease. There will also be an examination of ways to strengthen the worldwide surveillance of disease as it affects humans, animals and plants. Finally, in 2005 there will be discussion, and I hope adoption, of a code of conduct for scientists working in this area.

I believe it was vital that agreement on this programme should be reached by consensus among all states parties to the biological weapons convention. It was for this reason that we conducted extensive consultations throughout 2002 to try and establish a basis for compromise. Those efforts clearly bore fruit.

The seriousness and immediacy with which all countries view the BW threat is evident from this outcome. The programme of work won unanimous approval from the United States, our EU Partners and other western countries as well as Russia, China and members of the non-aligned movement. This broad support is vital and will help ensure that the international community brings its full authority to promoting and taking effective action on the potential dangers posed by the proliferation of biological weapons.

The United Kingdom has played a leading role in the search for ways of reinforcing the biological weapons convention. So this positive outcome to the review conference is all the more welcome. We will remain fully committed to seeing practical results emerge from this process which will help address an ever present threat both to international stability and the well being of humankind.

EU Enlargement (Free Movement of Persons)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The Government have decided to extend to citizens of the new EU member states, from their accession on 1 May 2004, the full rights to work in the UK as enjoyed by existing EU citizens.

Under the terms of the accession treaty, the new EU citizens will automatically have full free movement rights for all purposes other than work. But it is up to each member state to decide whether to extend working rights from accession. Ireland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden and Greece have already stated their intention to do this.

We have made this decision because it is in the UK's interest. It will attract workers we need in key sectors. It will ensure they can work without restrictions and not be a burden on the public purse. It forms part of our managed migration agenda. It makes sense financially, as we can focus resources on the real immigration problems, rather than trying to stop EU citizens enjoying normal EU rights. And it makes sense for UK citizens. Already thousands work in the future member states under work permit systems. They and others will have full rights to work in the new member states, free of controls.

The decision has been taken after careful analysis of successive independent studies which show that there is unlikely to be a large influx of workers to the UK after accession. Forthcoming research commissioned by the Home Office also suggests that the numbers that will migrate to the UK after accession will not be significant. This confirms the experience of Spanish and Portuguese accession when there were no major influxes. Indeed, the evidence is that emigrant workers return to their countries after they have joined the EU, thanks to the increased stability and prosperity which EU membership brings.

We will provide safeguards. These will allow us to reintroduce restrictions in the event of an unexpected threat to a region or sector in our labour markets. This is the right thing to do. The citizens of the new member states should enjoy the same rights as British, French, German and other citizens within the EU. Enlargement will ensure stability on our continent: the EU was founded to anchor peace and stability in Europe and enlargement is spreading that stability across our continent. It will provide a boost to our prosperity, as have all previous enlargements. And enlargement will improve our environment and security as we will be able to work together to tackle such problems as pollution, drug trafficking and international crime within the enlarged Union.

The UK has been a champion of enlargement from the start. We look forward to the conclusion of negotiations with 10 candidate countries this week in Copenhagen, and to welcoming them as equal citizens in the EU in 2004.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): Section 8 of the Criminal Justice (Terrorism and Conspiracy) Act 1998 requires the Secretary of State to lay before both Houses of Parliament at least once in every 12 months a report on the working of the Act. The reporting requirement applies to the whole Act but, following the repeal of the terrorism provisions (sections 1–4) consequent on the coming into force of the Terrorism Act 2000, the conspiracy provisions (sections 5–7) are now the only extant provisions. They are unrelated to the anti-terrorism sections and their review is a free-standing exercise.

Section 5 of the 1998 Act—which, by sections 6 and 7, is applied to Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively—provides that agreements in England and Wales to commit acts that would amount to criminal offences triable in a foreign jurisdiction can be tried as criminal conspiracies in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, though ordinarily there would not be jurisdiction to try them in the United Kingdom (UK). The purpose of the review of the conspiracy provisions is not so much to determine the extent to

which the provisions remain necessary (which is the purpose of reviewing the terrorism provisions) as to assess how, and in what circumstances, they have been used.

Lord Carlile of Berriew QC, who acts as reviewer of the conspiracy provisions of the 1998 Act, has made enquiries into the operation of those provisions and reported his findings to me on 22 August 2002. He found that there has to date been only one use of the provisions, in April 2001, in the case of Pravin Patel and others in the Leicester Crown court. The conspiracy in that case was to supply false UK passports in Gujarat, to facilitate illegal immigration into the UK and illegal tourist entry into the USA. Two of the eight defendants—who received sentences of 15 months' imprisonment suspended for two years and five years' imprisonment—were prosecuted under the provisions of the 1998 Act without which these offences would not have been triable in the UK. This case indicates a proper use of the Act on sound evidence and in the public interest; and that the legislation worked well for the purpose for which it was intended.

On Lord Carlile's recommendation, I intend to abolish the requirement for annual review of the extant procedures of the 1998 Act when a legislative opportunity occurs. The terrorism provisions of the Act having been subsumed in the Terrorism Act 2000; there is little point in continuing to have a separate review of the remaining provisions, particularly when they are so rarely used, are not confined to terrorism and no other conspiracy or extra-territorial jurisdiction provisions are subject to such review.

Lord Carlile's report has today been laid before Parliament and copies have been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Baton Rounds Review

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): Today I have received a report on the military use of baton rounds in Northern Ireland from Jim McDonald, the independent assessor of military complaints procedures in Northern Ireland.

I am grateful for this work, which has been carried out in addition to the assessor's statutory tasks, and look forward to considering his report in detail.

I have placed a copy of the report in the Libraries of the House.

Oversight Commissioner's Report

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): In his written statement in this House on 25 November, my right hon. Friend the Member for Torfaen (Mr. Murphy) reported on progress on the review of policing arrangements in Northern Ireland and looked forward to the Oversight Commissioner's forthcoming report.

As it is being published today, in accordance with Section 68(4)*(a)* of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, I have today laid a copy of the Oversight Commissioner's third statutory report for the year 2002 before this House.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 11 December 2002

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Access Radio

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I have agreed with the Radio Authority that the current pilot access radio stations should be allowed an extension to their licence, subject to frequency availability and to satisfactory performance to date, for as long as is necessary in order to allow for the possibility that the pilot stations would not be stopped from broadcasting in the event that an access radio regime is set up following the completion of the Radio Authority's evaluation and the passage of the Communications Bill.

Current access radio licence holders are aware that they will not automatically be awarded a licence if a new tier of access radio is introduced; they will need to be considered alongside other applicants at the appropriate time.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Audit Commission announce the outcome of comprehensive performance assessments (CPA) for London boroughs, unitary, metropolitan and county councils on 12 December. These assessments will provide the basis for better local decision making, inform relations between central and local government, and give local people a clear understanding of how well their council is serving them. It is a key stage in one of the most ambitious exercises in performance management ever undertaken by central and local government. But CPA results are not the end of the process, they are the starting point for improvement planning that will demonstrate the Government's public sector reform agenda in action.

The services included in CPA have a significant impact on the quality of all our lives: education, social services, housing, transport, welfare benefits, waste, planning and library and leisure facilities. CPA also delivers a picture of the council as a corporate entity, recognising the importance of councils as community leaders, forging effective partnerships and delivering on national and local priorities. We will build on the connections CPA has made through a collective central Government response, applying the measures announced on the 26 November to devolve power, increase support where it is needed and work directly with councils to ensure local people receive the quality of services to which they are entitled.

We want to see all councils aiming to be "Excellent". Our vision is one where local government takes ownership of the improvement agenda, with those who do so successfully encouraged to innovate by the removal of controls. There is a great deal that can be learned from the best performing councils, and it is vital that we build on as well as celebrate their achievements.

We are reducing red tape and unnecessary controls that distract councils from improving services. For the very best councils we are going further. These are councils with a strong focus on improvement who are delivering high quality services. They come in all shapes and sizes, including councils working in the most challenging circumstances. For high achievers CPA will bring new flexibility to expand or to change the way they deliver services, and significant additional freedoms to go much further and trailblaze innovative and new practices.

We are making it clear that "getting by" will not be enough. There is no room for those in the middle to simply stay there. They will have to raise their game or fall behind. CPA will clearly identify the service priorities for the underperforming and the corporate "obstacles" to innovation and better services. It will indicate where these councils will have to focus their efforts and where central Government should be prioritising support. Government are working with the LGA to identify a range of support and improvement activities in response to CPA. But it is clear that the skills needed to realise continuous improvement will be found primarily within local government. Securing long term and sustained improvement will only be achieved through building a greater capacity across the whole local government sector. There will be an immediate focus on the poor and weak councils, informed by the corporate assessment element of CPA.

Government will work in a spirit of co-operation with those councils who are doing poorly. Wherever possible an authority should be given the opportunity to tackle its own problems and weaknesses. The Government will nevertheless seek to engage directly with poor performers and provide appropriate support. We recognise that even overall poor performers have some good services, and we are determined to build on good practice. CPA will deliver the challenge that some councils have needed to address complacency and take a radical look at the way they currently work. For others it will initiate the process of identifying the measures needed to turn around failing services. In all cases the message will be that we will not tolerate poor performance or failing councils. They let down the people they are elected to represent and serve. They tarnish the reputation of the rest of local government. Where necessary, Government will not shirk from taking decisive and tough action.

CPA scores will be the launch-pad for action for central and local government. The overarching aim is to secure the foundation for genuine and long-lasting improvement in council services. Freedoms and flexibilities will enable the highest performers to do more. They will also provide a strong incentive for others to change. Where improvements are needed CPA will be the basis for better focused and more determined improvement planning. Ownership of improvement planning and strong local leadership at member and

officer level will be vital, as will delivering against realistic but challenging targets. We expect CPA and the improvement planning process to deliver rapid and tangible benefits to local government and to the people they serve.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Local Housing Allowance

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): In October, my Department invited 10 local authorities to become Pathfinders.

So far, we have had acceptances from:

London Borough of Lewisham

North East Lincolnshire Council

Due to other commitments, Tendring are unable to participate in the scheme. We have been approached by Blackpool Borough Council to become a Pathfinder. Blackpool meets the criteria set by the Department to become a Pathfinder and I am pleased to inform the House that I have today accepted Blackpool's offer.

The other authorities invited to the pathfinders are:

Brighton and Hove City Council

Conwy County Borough Council

Coventry City Council

Edinburgh City Council

Leeds City Council

Middlesbrough Council

Teignbridge District Council

My hon friend the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks) is in the process of visiting each of these authorities before Christmas to discuss the invitation.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Guatanamo Bay Detainees

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): British officials paid a fourth visit to Guantanamo Bay between 11–15 November. The purpose of the visit was to ask questions relevant to national security, to check on the welfare of the seven British detainees last seen in May, and to establish the identity and nationality of two further detainees believed to have British nationality. As a result of these inquiries, one was identified as British. The other detainee did not have British nationality. The officials were from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Security Service.

The FCO official met the detainees individually. US officials were able to observe the interviews. The official saw no visible signs of mistreatment. Some detainees reported minor medical problems, and the official subsequently raised a number of these with the camp authorities.

The official passed to the camp authorities some personal letters for some of the detainees and was able to give oral messages to others. We have passed on to the families oral messages which where received and have briefed them on details of the detainees' circumstances. For reasons of privacy these details are not disclosed in this statement. Detainees continue to be able to send and receive letters through the camp authorities and through the ICRC, although there is some concern about delays.

All the detainees continue to be housed in accommodation which includes individual sleeping, washing and toilet facilities. They continue to be able to practise their religion freely, to take exercise, and to have access to reading material.

The visiting officials found the US camp authorities to be open and co-operative.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Northern Ireland Departments

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): In light of the consultation exercise on the draft Programme for Government and the Draft Budget launched by the Northern Ireland Executive in September 2002, we are today setting out policies, priorities and spending plans for the Northern Ireland Departments for 2003–04 and beyond.

When devolution was suspended we made clear our determination to do two things. We pledged that we would work tirelessly to rebuild trust across political parties and to bring about an early return of devolved government. We also explained that for as long as direct rule continued we would govern in an open, active and fair way.

The Northern Ireland Office ministerial team is determined to build on the progress that was being made by the Executive and continue the good work they had started to improve public services in Northern Ireland.

In setting priorities and plans for 2003–04 and beyond, we have considered carefully the challenges, policy issues and priorities identified in the draft Programme for Government. Many of these remain very relevant and we have decided to continue with these priorities as the basis for action over the coming year. These priorities are:

Growing as a Community

Working for a Healthier People

Investing in Education and Skills

Securing a Competitive Economy

Developing Relations—on a North/South, East/West and International basis

We have also retained, at the centrepiece of our policies the emphasis on the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative (RRI) which was agreed between the Prime Minister, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the then First Minister and Deputy First Minister in May 2002. This was the focus of the draft Programme for Government and draft Budget agreed by the Northern Ireland Executive in September. The plans we have agreed recognise that investment in Northern Ireland's infrastructure is hugely important to both economic and social development. Roads and public transport, hospital and school buildings and the water and

sewerage system all need significant new investment if they are to be capable of sustaining the quality of life that everyone wants to see, to correct the pattern of under-investment which we also found in other parts of the UK when we came to office in 1997.

As a key part of the RRI, we are moving towards the appropriate use of Public Private Partnerships. In doing this we believe that there are areas where such mechanisms are the best way to draw the expertise and resources of the private sector into the delivery of public services, bringing new skills and ideas into this important work.

In order to achieve the best balance of investment, using traditional public expenditure, borrowing and PPPs, we are pressing forward with the development of the Strategic Investment Board (SIB), subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary legislation—which has recently been issued in draft for consultation. The proposal is that the SIB should be an expert body to advise in future both the Executive as a whole and Departments and agencies individually on both the best means of financing and organising major projects and on their successful implementation.

To take forward the process of re-investment, we have taken some initial steps to access the borrowing power which was agreed as part of the Reinvestment and Reform Initiative. This is triggered by actions which increase the relative levels of revenue raised in Northern Ireland: such self-financed borrowing can be used for investment over and above the Departmental Expenditure Limit for the Northern Ireland Departments. In the short term we are making a start on this by introducing rating of vacant properties and by phasing out industrial derating. In the longer term we have indicated our intention to replace the existing domestic regional rate with a new scheme based on the capital value of properties. All these changes arise from the Executive's Review of Rating Policy.

These measures will provide the vital additional resources necessary to support our policy priorities and plans. In due course proposals will also be developed to ensure that the water industry becomes self-financing.

By bringing together mainstream capital expenditure, borrowing and the use of PPPs in this way, we have been able to announce today a Strategic Investment Programme that will enable around £2 billion of new investment in schools and colleges, hospitals, road transport and water services to start in the next three years. I am placing a table in the Library today which sets out an indication of the plans that we are now developing. We will be looking to the new Strategic Investment Board to advise on priorities and value for money and to work with all Departments to take the programme forward so that it makes the best possible use of all available resources, and addresses the top priorities for investment as effectively as possible.

Aside from these major increases in capital investment, we have been able to confirm all the proposals in the Executive's draft Budget, and make some improvements, on a relatively modest scale (about 1 per cent. of the resource DEL in each year). We have been able to make greater provision for some mainstream services at a better level than in the draft Budget, as well as augmenting the capacity to build up the investment programme. In total we have been able to allocate an additional £76 million in 2003–04, £106 million in 2004–05 and £76 million in 2005–06 beyond what the Executive had planned in the draft Budget.

We have used this to meet some essential new issues which have emerged since the draft Budget was agreed, and to provide for the development of services in some priority areas.

We have allocated some additional provision to enable DHSSPS to develop services in the acute, community care, children, mental health and disability sectors. We have provided for increased support for university research. Elsewhere in the education sector, further provision has been made to improve pupil performance in schools, to provide additional youth workers and to support a cross-border initiative to provide better support for children with special educational needs.

Other allocations will promote arts and sport; deliver new targeted initiatives recommend by the Employability Task Force and enhance concessionary fare schemes for the disabled. For social development we are increasing provision to reduce fuel poverty, promote neighbourhood renewal and to develop better community relations.

In agreeing the spending plans we have sought to strike a balance between allocating resources so that public services may be properly planned and delivered, while leaving flexibility and scope for revised decision making by the devolved institutions when they return.

The spending plans fully reflect our determination to see a radical change in the approach to investment in public services, with new funding linked to strategic reform, and with an emphasis on using private sector finance and expertise where that can help deliver better services.

I have placed copies of the "Building on Progress" document, the accompanying Budget for 2003–04 to 2005–06 and details of the Strategic Investment Programme in the Library.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Technetium-99

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): We have, today published the joint decision that the Secretary of State for Health and I have made in response to the Environment Agency's Proposed Decision on the Future Regulation of Technetium-99 Discharges from British Nuclear Fuels plc's Sellafield site into the Irish sea.

At the request of Ministers, the Environment Agency has carried out a review of technetium-99 (Tc-99) discharges from Sellafield in advance of the review of other radioactive discharges from that site. Our request for a faster track review was in response to the concerns raised by other countries that Tc-99, which is very mobile in the marine environment, had been detected at

low levels off the coast of Scandinavia and further afield. The dominant source of Tc-99 discharges from Sellafield is the reprocessing of spent Magnox reactor fuel. There is no evidence that Tc-99 at these levels, or the levels found in UK waters pose any credible threat to human health or that of marine organisms. Nevertheless, its presence has been a source of concern to a number of our international partners.

In September of last year, the Environment Agency published its proposal for the future regulation of Tc-99. It was then for the two Ministers with responsibility under the Radioactive Substances Act 1993, the Secretary of State for Health and I, to consider whether we wished to direct the Agency to take some other course of action.

In the response that we have published today, we see no reason to direct the Environment Agency to take a different course to the one it has proposed, but we do propose to go further. The details of our decision are set out in the published document, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. It will also be available via my Department's website.

In essence, the Agency has proposed two types of abatement technology that would allow the Tc-99 discharge limit to be reduced from 90 TBq per year to 10 TBq per year by 2006, or possibly sooner. Two different types of abatement technology are required because of the chemical differences between newly produced Medium Active Concentrate (MAC)—a liquid mixture produced during Magnox fuel reprocessing—which contains Tc-99 as well as other more dangerous radionuclides, and stored MAC.

We expect that, subject to HSE agreement and the technology proving to be successful, newly produced MAC will be diverted into a different waste stream early next year. Treatment of MAC in the process designed to deal with the much more radioactive "Highly Active Liquor", will lead to the MAC (containing Tc-99) being converted into glass blocks which will be suitable for long term storage. There would, therefore be no further Tc-99 discharges arising from newly produced MAC and the discharge limit could be reduced to 10 TBq/year by 2006.

Because it is chemically different, MAC that is in store cannot be dealt with using the "MAC-Diversion" approach. That source of MAC could, potentially, lead to Tc-99 discharges above 10 TBq/year until 2006. Theoretically, stored MAC could be treated with a chemical called tetraphenylphosphonium bromide (TPP) which would cause it to solidify and allow it to be removed from the treatment plant along with the other more dangerous components of MAC, which are already solidified prior to removal by a separate process. The solid mixture produced would not be suitable for conversion into glass blocks, but it could be mixed with cement and stored in steel drums. The technology behind the use of TPP is, however, not as proven as in the case of MAC-Diversion. The further research work identified by the Environment Agency in its proposed decision would need to be completed successfully to be sure that TPP itself would not pose an unacceptable risk to the marine environment; that workers were not to be subjected to unacceptable risks; and that the presence of TPP in the stored waste would not facilitate leaching of not just Tc-99 but other, more radiotoxic chemicals from the stored waste to create unacceptable risks for future generations.

The potential problems surrounding the use of TPP are not necessarily insurmountable, but they will take time to address. The simple expedient of continuing to store MAC in the tanks and building in which it is currently housed, to allow time for TPP research to be carried out, is not available. That building and tanks were constructed during the 1950s/60s; they were not built to modern standards; and they have already exceeded their expected lifetimes. The HSE keeps the storage facility under continual review and its advice is that while the facility is currently safe for use, that may not be the case beyond 2006. Under these circumstances it would be irresponsible to plan for MAC to still be in those tanks beyond that date. There is, however, another approach that could be taken.

I am consulting on my proposal to direct the Environment Agency to consider whether it would be possible to impose a moratorium on the discharge of Tc-99 from the Sellafield site whilst TPP research is being carried out. As part of their consideration, I would expect the Agency to review the storage options for Medium Active Concentrate (MAC) beyond 2006, particularly considering work which has been done by BNFL on the practicalities of refurbishing the storage tanks and building. If a moratorium were to be introduced and, in the worst case scenario the research shows that TPP abatement cannot be made to work, the remaining Tc-99 contained in the MAC storage tanks would need to be discharged into the Irish sea quickly, depending on the judgment of Nuclear Installations Inspectorate inspectors about the integrity of those tanks.

The Secretary of State for Health and I have also considered whether the two types of practice which generate Tc-99—namely, the processing of spent Magnox fuel and the reprocessing of spent oxide fuel—are justified. We consider that both of these practices are covered by the requirements of Article 6(2) of Directive 96/29/Euratom and that the question whether to undertake a review of justification under this Article should be considered at a later stage.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 12 December 2002

LORD CHANCELLOR

Transsexual People

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): I will tomorrow announce the Government's plans for implementing the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in Goodwin v The United Kingdom and *"I"* v The United Kingdom, following collective Ministerial consideration of the recommendations received from the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. Copies of the announcement will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office. The announcement will also be made available on the LCD website at www.lcd.gov.uk.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Employer's Liability

The Minister for Work (Mr. Nicholas Brown): In the Pre-Budget Report of 27 November my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that:

"Premiums for Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) have increased substantially in recent months, affecting many businesses, and especially Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in high-risk sectors. Following a request from the Government, Fhe Association of British Insurers (ABI) and trade associations are working to ensure that affordable cover is available. The Government has engaged with a wide range of stakeholders including the CBI, TUG and ABI to discuss the long-term issues affecting ELCI. The Department for Work and Pensions will now undertake a formal review of the operation of ELCI. Full details of this review will be announced shortly."

I am pleased now to announce the start of that review and its terms of reference.

The terms of reference of the review are to:

Survey the operation of ELCI, taking into account any relevant aspects of the state benefits systems;

Assess the scale and nature of the current difficulties being experienced in relation to ELCI, in particular the extent to which these difficulties are likely to be short-term only, repeated in the future or permanent;

Make recommendations to Ministers as to the case or otherwise for reforming ELCI; and

If a case for reform is found, make recommendations as to the objectives, principles and high-level options for such reform.

The review will be led by the Department for Work and Pensions, but will have the close involvement of a number of other Government Departments including HM Treasury, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Lord Chancellor's Department. It will report to Ministers in Spring 2003.

Written contributions to the work of the review are welcomed. Any such contributions should be sent to the ELCI REVIEW TEAM at the Department for Work and Pensions, The Adelphi, Level 2, 1–11 John Adam Street, London WC2N 6HT by Monday 17 February 2003. I have arranged for further details to be made available on the Department of Work and Pensions web site at: www.dwp.gov.uk/publications/2002/index.htm.

International Labour Conference

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): The 89th Session of the International Labour Conference adopted a new Convention 184 on Safety and Health in Agriculture and a Recommendation 192 supplementing the Convention. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has today laid before Parliament a White Paper entitled 'International Labour Conference' (Cm 5703), copies of which have been placed in the Library.

PRIME MINISTER

Council of Europe and WEU Assembly

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): The United Kingdom Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Assembly of Western European Union is as follows:

Tony Lloyd Esq MP (Leader)

Full Representatives
David Atkinson Esq MP
Malcolm Bruce Esq MP
Sir Sydney Chapman MP
Tom Cox Esq MP
Terry Davis Esq MP
Bill Etherington Esq MP
Paul Flynn Esq MP
Lord Judd
Jim Marshall Esq MP
Chris McCafferty MP
Kevin McNamara Esq MP
Eddie O'Hara Esq MP
Lord Russell-Johnston
Sir Teddy Taylor MP
Robert Walter Esq MP
John Wilkinson Esq MP
Jimmy Wray Esq MP

Substitute Members
Tony Banks Esq MP
Baroness Billingham
Peter Bottomley Esq MP
Lord Burlison
Ann Cryer MP
Jane Griffiths MP
Michael Hancock Esq CBE MP
Baroness Hooper
Rt Hon Lord Kilclooney
Baroness Knight of Collingtree DBE
Khalid Mahmood Esq MP
Humfrey Malins Esq MP
David Marshall Esq MP

Alan Meale Esq MP
Gordon Prentice Esq MP
Geraldine Smith MP
Lord Tomlinson
Dr Rudi Vis MP

TRANSPORT

National Travel Survey Data

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Statisticians in my Department have discovered errors in the urban/rural coding of the National Travel Survey data. A statistical release issued today presents revised data for key analyses for 1996–2001. Copies of the document have been placed in the Library of the House. The effects of the revisions are in general small, but they do affect the 10 Year Transport Plan indicator of rural bus service availability.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Margaret Beckett): I am pleased to report to the House that Government are today launching a Strategy for Sustainable Farming and Food. Later today, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and I will meet farmers and leaders of the food industry, rural, environmental and consumer bodies to discuss the new strategy and hear examples of good practice from across the food chain.

The strategy is further evidence of this Government's commitment to help deliver innovative and practical solutions to the challenges faced by those involved in the food chain. We do not underestimate the scale of these challenges: farm incomes remain under pressure and the foot and mouth disease outbreak also added to the momentum for change.

This strategy builds on the invaluable work conducted by the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food to chart a way through these challenges. It sets out how industry, Government and consumers can work together to secure a profitable and internationally competitive future for our industries, whilst contributing to a better environment, improving nutrition and public health and prosperous communities.

The strategy is backed by £500 million from Government over the next three years. Subject to clearance under the usual EU procedures, this will provide:

a new entry-level agri-environment scheme: developing a simple scheme, suitable for all farmers which will pay them to farm in a more sustainable way, a core Curry Commission recommendation. Subject to successful piloting, this would be rolled out nationally in 2005.

Continued expansion of premium rural and environmental schemes like Countryside Stewardship: further work to improve the targeting of these schemes and make them simpler to applicants.

A new 'whole farm' approach to management and regulation: helping farmers plan their business as a whole to meet commercial and regulatory needs. The Government also plan to develop an audit-based approach to identify a farm's strengths and weaknesses as a basis for cutting red tape and the number of inspections required.

The new Agricultural Development Scheme: to improve competitiveness and marketing, including the priority areas of co-operation, farm assurance and spreading best practice.

New funding to assist small regional food producers: extra money channelled through Food from Britain will enable it to work with Regional Development Agencies and the Regional Food Groups to expand this sector.

More money for skills and training: knowing how to make a profit is fundamental, but respecting the environment and marketing require different skills and knowledge. We are reviewing training and advice services to help farmers develop and to exploit new opportunities.

A Food and Health Action Plan: led by the Department of Health, to build on existing work to improve diet and nutrition, working with industry and consumers. The Plan will address food production and access as well as consumer information.

A network of demonstration farms: in early 2003 a pilot network of farms will open their doors to share best practice and experiences.

Improving animal health and combating diseases: government is drawing up a new animal health and welfare strategy, has strengthened our emergency preparations and efforts to combat illegal meat imports.

In addition, the Government will ask the Institute of Grocery Distribution, in conjunction with the Food Chain Centre to undertake analysis of the impact of nutrition initiatives such as the National School Fruit Scheme and the five-a-day programme, on the food chain. This will highlight the commercial opportunities for English farmers and growers and other sectors of the food industry.

The strategy—which builds on the work of the Curry Commission—also underlines the need for farming to reconnect with its markets, better cooperation with the food chain, investment in people and technology and the adoption of environmental best practice. There are many examples of good practice to build upon:

More than 25,000 farm holdings in existing government environmental schemes.

More than 400 farmers' markets offering producers the opportunity to sell direct to their markets.

Over 78,000 farmers and growers are already members of farm assurance schemes with their produce branded under logos such as the Red Tractor and a number of industry initiatives being taken forward as part of the strategy:

The Food Chain Centre is working to improve the efficiency of the food chain through the provision of information, analysis and training and promotion of benchmarking and best practice.

The Red Meat Industry Forum is working to improve efficiency and information flow in the red meat supply chain.

English Farming and Food Partnerships, established by the industry with Defra support, will promote co-operation between farmers and between farmers and the rest of the food chain.

Assured Food Standards is working to broaden support for farm assurance within the food chain and to consolidate and develop assurance standards.

The Government have already announced that an independent Implementation Group, led by Sir Don Curry, will oversee the delivery of the strategy by both Government and industry.

Across England, regional delivery plans will be drawn up between government offices, Regional Development Agencies, local farmers, Rural Affairs Forums, Regional Chambers and a range of stakeholders, assisted by Sir Don Curry's Implementation Group.

The strategy is being laid before Parliament at 11.00am today and copies of this and the strategy related documents will be available in the Vote Office and the Libraries of the House at that time.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Monitor

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I have now received a copy of the first interim report prepared by the Race Monitor, Mary Coussey who was appointed this year to the post created under Section 19E of the Race Relations Act 1976, as amended by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000.

The report is based on Ms Coussey's short time as Race Monitor and describes the visits to ports she has made so far and also gives an indication of her work programme for the rest of this financial year. She has not on this occasion made any recommendations.

Under the terms of her appointment, the Race Monitor will be submitting a full annual report to Parliament in March next year.

A copy of the interim report has been placed in the Library.

Prisons (Hostage Incidents)

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I have considered the current arrangements on the use of intrusive surveillance of prison cells during hostage incidents and have concluded that the current arrangements do not assist the Prison Service in bringing a hostage incident to a safe conclusion. As things stand, the Prison Service Incident Commander is required to obtain my authorisation of any hostage incident where he considers it necessary to use surveillance in the management of the incident. This can take an hour or more, which could be a dangerous delay.

It makes no sense that the Prison Service is hampered in its safe management of the incident through concerns about the hostage-taker's privacy. The Prison Service has taken advice of the Chief Surveillance Commissioner, who concluded that a hostage-taker forfeits his right to privacy by engaging in this activity. I agree with this approach and I have instructed the Prison Service to alter procedures accordingly.

This will mean that in future the Director General or Deputy Director General will authorise applications for covert surveillance in hostage incidents. The Prison Service will however be required to maintain an audit trail of each authorisation demonstrating that the use of surveillance was necessary, proportionate and consistent set out in the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA).

Should the Prison Service require the use of intrusive surveillance of a prisoner's cell for any other purpose, those applications will still come to me, as they are likely to raise issues of privacy.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): Nicholas Hardwick has been appointed by Her Majesty as Chairman of the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which will replace the Police Complaints Authority on 1 April 2004 under the provisions of the Police Reform Act 2002. The Commission will exist in shadow form from 1 April 2003.

The appointment will be for five years in the first instance, and Mr Hardwick is expected to take up post on 1 February 2003.

Nicholas Hardwick has been Chief Executive of the Refugee Council for the past eight years. Prior to this, he was Chief Executive of Centrepoint, the charity and Housing Association, from 1986 to 1995.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

National Professional Qualification for Headship

The Minister for School Standards (Mr. David Miliband): The Department for Education and Skills, in conjunction with the National College for School Leadership, carried out a wide-ranging consultation exercise earlier this year on our proposals to make the NPQH mandatory for first time headteachers. Over 650 responses were received from individuals, LEAs and the main teachers' professional associations. Respondents were in favour of the NPQH being made mandatory for first time headteachers. Following this consultation, I have taken the decision that from 1 April 2004, all those appointed to their first headship post in the maintained sector, including nursery schools, and in non-maintained special schools, will be required to hold, or be working towards, the NPQH.

Working towards NPQH means that appointees must have at least successfully applied for a place on the course prior to their first headship appointment. The working towards arrangement is a transitional measure that will be in place for five years until 31 March 2009. After this date, the requirement to hold the NPQH will be a pre-appointment requirement for those appointed to their first headship post.

Those currently serving as headteachers will not be required to gain the qualification.

The NPQH provides aspiring headteachers with practical, professional training and the introduction of the mandatory requirement will give governing bodies a choice of qualified, well prepared new candidates for headship, in addition to any applications from experienced headteachers. We have carried out

extensive modelling work and we are confident that there will be enough holders of the NPQH by April 2004 to meet demand.

DEFENCE

Project Aquatrine Package A

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Ministry of Defence has appointed Brey Utilities as the Preferred Bidder for Package A of Project Aquatrine, the MOD contract to provide water and wastewater services for the first package of work in the Midlands, Wales, and South West England. Project Aquatrine, one of the leading Public Private Partnership projects in the MOD, will transfer the responsibility for the maintenance and operation of all the Department's water and wastewater assets and infrastructure in Great Britain to private sector providers.

This project will enable the transfer of environmental risk to those in the private sector who are best placed to manage it.

It is anticipated that Contract signature for the first package of work will be achieved in March 2003, following a three-month Preferred Bidder negotiation period. On this basis, it is expected the Contract will go live in December 2003. The Reserve Bidder for Package A is C2C.

Training Estate

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The competition announced in May 2000 has resulted in the selection of a preferred partner, Landmarc Support Services. Detailed negotiations will now take place to secure a contract to provide support services to the Army Training Estate with effect from 1 April 2003.

This will result in the transfer of approximately 1,400 Ministry of Defence civilian personnel to the private sector. The full protection of the Transfer of Undertaking (Protection of Employment) will apply. The departmental trades unions will be fully consulted in the normal way.

This contract will maintain existing command and control arrangements together with safety and public relations under MOD whilst introducing best commercial practice in all areas of non-core business. It will also lead to a more cost-effective professional and relevant means of service delivery.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Standard Board for England

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I have today placed in the Library of the House the Standards Board for England's Annual Report and Accounts for 2001–02.

The Report and Accounts cover the period when the Standards Board for England was being established and was putting in place its basic procedures. Since May 2002—shortly after the period covered in this report—all local authorities in England have been required to adopt a new Code of Conduct and it has been open to anyone to make an allegation of misconduct to the Standards Board.

The Annual Report sets out very clearly the role of the Standards Board and describes the approach which the Board is seeking to take to handling complaints and to working with other regulators. Importantly, the report emphasises very strongly that the Standards Board will seek to work in partnership with councils, offering support and advice in a joint effort to promote high standards and confidence in local democracy.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Radiocommunications Agency

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Stephen Timms): The Agency currently charges £50 per hour plus VAT to provide advice and undertake remedial work at the request of business users where problems are identified in the own radio systems. The charge, which has not been increased since 1997, will be increased to £57 per hour plus VAT and the charge for the use of the Agency's specialist mobile laboratory which is accredited to the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (ACAS) will be increased from £1140 to £1293 plus VAT per day with effect from 1 January 2003. The Agency does not charge business users for enforcement work which is carried out as part of its regulatory duties. The charge only applies for remedying problems which can be dealt with by filters and improvements to site and equipment.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Ambient Noise Strategy

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): I am pleased to announce that today we have published a summary of the results of the consultation, Towards a National Ambient Noise Strategy.

There was very clear support for the Government's proposals for the development of an ambient noise strategy and I am pleased to confirm that we are taking the next steps to develop the strategy. These include: continuing the mapping already underway across England, the establishment of an expert working group to address the effects of noise and to establish cost-effective techniques to take action to improve or preserve noise levels, as appropriate.

A significant number of respondents indicated a need for a more strategic approach to neighbour noise. I agree that there is a need for a separate Neighbour Noise Strategy and as a first steps towards developing this I am pleased to launch a study to examine neighbour noise, both from the point of view of the noise makers and their victims. The research will generate appropriate and realistic options for action both to raise awareness and

to influence behaviour and, with many of the proposals identified during the consultation, should provide us with a solid basis to also develop a more strategic approach to the control of neighbourhood noise.

HEALTH

Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority's 11th Annual Report and Accounts 2002 were laid before Parliament today.

Copies have been placed in the Library.

Generic Medicines

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The Government have decided to roll forward, unchanged, the maximum price scheme for generic medicines used in National Health Service primary care. This follows consultation with stakeholders that concluded on 29 November 2002.

The scheme was introduced in August 2000 as a result of price increases in the generics market that started in 1999. It was rolled forward in October 2001. The scheme has restored stability in the generics market and the NHS has saved some £330 million annually as a result. The continuation of it will ensure that this stability continues and that the expenditure savings are maintained.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Security Vetting (Northern Ireland)

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy): In order to ensure that security vetting is up to date and appropriate to current circumstances, and in view of recent events, I have asked for a review to be conducted of security vetting arrangements operating in Northern Ireland. This review will be led by the Northern Ireland Office, and includes senior representatives of the Northern Ireland Civil Service and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. The review will report to me with recommendations, and a plan for their implementation. I will inform the House of the outcome.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 16 December 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bain Review

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The Independent Review of the Fire Service was announced on 12 September 2002 under the chairmanship of Sir George Bain. The review considered UK-wide arrangements for the future organisation and management of the Fire Service. I have today placed copies of the final report in the Vote and Printed Paper Offices and Libraries of the House.

Parliamentary Constituencies (Wales)

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986, as amended by the Boundary Commission Act 1992 requires that the Commission undertake a general review of constituencies in Wales. The Commission is required to submit a report to the Deputy Prime Minister, not less than twelve years from their last report. The previous report was submitted on 16 December 1994. The next report must be submitted by 16 December 2006. The Commission expects to take about two years to complete the review.

I have been notified by the Boundary Commission for Wales that they will start their 5th general review of parliamentary constituencies today. The review will include consideration of Assembly Electoral Regions, as required by the Government of Wales Act 1998.

The Commission expects to take about two years to complete its review.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Employability and Long-Term Unemployment Taskforce

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): I am today publishing the Report of the inter-Departmental Taskforce on Employability and Long-Term Unemployment, which was established to consider and drive forward action to increase employability and reduce long-term unemployment. The Terms or Reference committed the Taskforce to report and make recommendations on how current actions might be improved and to prepare an Action Plan which integrates actions across Government Departments and Agencies. That Report, which contains some 40 recommendations and 12 action points affecting most Government Departments, is launched today, 16 December.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Entry Clearance

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): I have arranged for copies of the second annual report by Rabinder Singh QC, the Independent monitor for Entry Clearance Refusals to be laid before the House today. I welcome Mr. Singh's report and note his comments and suggestions, which will receive careful consideration.

Mr. Singh has not sought to extend his appointment beyond 30 november 2002 and I thank Mr. Singh for all his hard work and dedication during his two years as Independent Monitor for Entry Clearance.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Offenders on Licence

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): In September, the Home Secretary asked Stephen Shaw, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, to look at the case of Malcolm Rourke. This was a disturbing and shocking crime and I extend every sympathy to the victim.

Instances where an offender on licence supervision commits an offence of similar gravity to the original one are thankfully few in number. However, because of the devastating effect these crimes can have on the lives of their victims there can never be any room for complacency among those whose task it is to supervise such offenders. That is why the Home Secretary asked Stephen Shaw to undertake this inquiry. This work has now been completed.

I am grateful to Stephen and his team for conducting such a thorough investigation and for producing a detailed analysis of how the arrangements for managing and recalling dangerous offenders can be further enhanced. Although the report concluded that there was no evidence of negligence or incompetence, it did make a number of constructive recommendations as to how these arrangements might be strengthened in the future. These have been accepted in full and will now be implemented.

It is a sad reality that there are no guarantees with this type of work. It is not always possible to foresee and prevent crimes committed by people on licence any more than it is possible to do so for those without previous convictions. We can however learn lessons and make sure that every effort is made to protect the public. In particular the most important change is that, in future, recall decisions will be taken by the local probation service which is supervising the offender.

In addition the Criminal Justice Bill currently before parliament includes provisions to enable the courts to pass an indeterminate sentence on those who continue to present a danger to society, and ensure that they remain in custody until it is considered safe to release them.

We will not be publishing the full report as it would place individuals, who have been exonerated from any suggestion of wrongdoing, in an unfair position. A summary of the case, terms of reference and key findings are as follows:

Following the conviction of Malcolm Rourke in August 2002 for the offences of rape and robbery, committed whilst he was subject to licence supervision, the Home Secretary asked Stephen Shaw, the Prisons and Probation Ombudsman, to conduct an inquiry into the handling of the case. The terms of reference were:

"To examine the way in which the Prison Service and the National Probation Service managed the case of Malcolm Rourke following his release from custody on 14 June 2002; to consider whether, in light of this case, any changes need to be made to the arrangements for managing the post release supervision and recall of dangerous offenders; and to make recommendations."

The key findings of the inquiry are:

Action Plan

All of the recommendations have been accepted and work is underway to implement them:

The right to recall dangerous offenders will rest with the Assistant Chief Probation Officer in the area concerned, subject to Parole Board review, not with the SEU.

The National Probation Service is planning introduce the electronic version of the Offender Assessment System (OASys) by 31 December, 2003. This will provide a single case assessment which staff in each area will have access to.

The introduction of OASys and the development of its application to include supervising officers case notes will further enhance communication between hostels and probation staff.

The National Probation Directorate will establish a recall forum with representatives from the Home Office's Sentence Enforcement Unit, the National Probation Directorate, the Parole Board and other agencies who might have an interest in this process. This forum will:

review the collation of recall management information across the agencies, identify gaps; and

ensure more effective information sharing systems are put in place.

New guidance on recalls, in the form of a Probation Circular, will be issued to NPS staff.

Representatives from NPD, SEU and Parole Board have already met with legal advisers to address the status of MAPPP documentation and this will be clarified as part of further guidance to be issued on MAPPA early next year.

Internal restructuring within SEU will include responsibility for overseeing and regularly updating guidance on these issues.

Leicestershire and Rutland Probation Area will consider what further training requirements are needed in the light of this case.

The review of the serious incident reporting system has led to the piloting of new arrangements in two Probation Areas. In evaluating these pilots consideration will be given to strengthening the service's investigatory arrangements.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Transsexual People

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): On 11 July the European Court of Human Rights delivered its judgments in the cases of *Goodwin v The United Kingdom and "I" v The United Kingdom*. The Court found that the United Kingdom had breached the Convention rights of these two transsexual people, under Articles 8 and 12 (the right to respect for private life and the right to marry). In answer to Questions before the Parliamentary recess, colleagues and I made clear the Government's commitment to announce later in the year how we proposed to implement the rulings.

The Interdepartmental Working Group, whose initial report the then Home Secretary presented to Parliament in July 2000, had recently been reconvened to give further consideration to the implications of giving transsexual people full legal recognition in their acquired gender. In light of the *Goodwin* and *"I"* judgments, the Group's terms of reference were expanded and it was tasked to report in October. Ministers have now collectively considered the recommendations received from officials.

We will aim to publish, in due course, a draft outline Bill to give legal recognition in their acquired gender to transsexual people who can demonstrate that they have taken decisive steps towards living fully and permanently in the gender acquired since they were registered at birth. That will make it possible for them (if otherwise eligible) to marry in their acquired gender.

The Government are committed, therefore, to legislating as soon as possible to give transsexual people their Convention rights. Whether Parliament at Westminster should legislate for the whole of the UK on this matter is under consideration, particularly in view of the inter-relationship between devolved and reserved policy aspects.

Except where limited exceptions will be created in the legislation, we propose that formal recognition in the acquired gender will bring with it the rights and responsibilities appropriate to that gender—normally, from the date that the change is recognised. It is expected that rights and obligations previously incurred will continue, in most areas; a parent, for example, who changes gender, will not lose his or her obligations—and rights—as father or mother to the child.

Provision will be needed for disclosure to be requested in certain circumstances. For example, insurance and pension companies, whose decisions on cover and premiums depend on gender and medical history, may need to continue to require full disclosure, where relevant and subject to data protection and other legislation. The Criminal Records Bureau must be able to demand full disclosure for clearance to work with

children and other vulnerable people; but I am pleased to announce that modifications have been made to their procedures, so that the privacy of transsexual people in relation to their former identity is fully respected. Procedures have been similarly modified in Scotland.

Changing legal identity is a serious step, with significant consequences. It is important that no-one should embark upon formal recognition in the acquired gender without convincing evidence. We will therefore propose that applications should be scrutinised by an authorising body, given legal powers to assess medical evidence before the transsexual person is allowed to register in the new gender. In some cases, where the person undertook gender reassignment years earlier, and has lived successfully in the acquired gender, that assessment may be straightforward. In other cases, the authorising body will need to be assured that, in addition to meeting medical criteria, the transsexual person has lived successfully in the acquired gender for at least two years. The medical criteria may include medical treatments to modify the person's sexual characteristics, but the Government will not require surgery as a condition of registration in the acquired gender.

We do not intend history to be re-written. Original birth records will remain in existence, unamended, and will continue to be made available when needed. But the authorising body will empower the Registrar General to create a new record in relation to the transsexual person, from which a new certificate stating acquired name and gender may be drawn. This certificate will be indistinguishable from a birth certificate, in order to remedy the breaches of Article 8 identified by the European Court of Human Rights. The link between the original and the revised record will remain confidential within the Registrar General's office.

We are committed to facilitating, as fully as possible, transsexual people's assimilation into the gender to which they feel they belong. We share the Court's view that society may reasonably be expected to tolerate a minority of individuals living in dignity and worth in accordance with the identity they are driven to assume. We do not seek, however, to erase all trace of their former identity. We have concluded that there is no need for transsexual people to be given new National Insurance numbers on registering in their acquired gender. NI numbers give no indication of gender, and employment and data protection legislation should give adequate protection against careless or malicious disclosure in the rare instances where the number enables a link to be made between former and current identities.

Our aim is to ensure that in future transsexual people will be better protected from having constantly and unnecessarily to reveal their history. Our legislation will enable transsexual people confidently to take up those rights which have been denied to them in society—including the right to marry in their acquired gender—while preserving other obligations entered into in the original gender. We will be pleased to receive comments on our proposals, which deserve the support of all who have in the past expressed concern at the lack of legal recognition of transsexual people in the United Kingdom.

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 17 December 2002

TREASURY

Departmental Investment Strategy White Paper

The Chief Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Paul Boateng): I am today publishing a White Paper, Departmental Investment Strategies: A Summary, which sets out the Government's investment strategy over the next three years.

As announced in the 2002 Spending Review, the Government will raise public sector investment by £12 billion over that period, including:

£3 billion for improved buildings and equipment for our schools;

£2.5 billion for the NHS to modernise our hospitals and health care facilities;

£2 billion to invest in transport infrastructure; and

£1 billion to improve our housing stock.

The White Paper complements individual departmental investment strategies, to be published shortly by departments themselves, which set out more detailed plans. The purpose of the strategies is to set out:

the public service outcomes that will be achieved with the new funding committed in the 2002 Spending Review;

the progress that has been achieved since the last strategies were published in 2000;

the improvements that departments have put in place to improve the management of the assets they own; and

the reforms of procedures and systems put in place to get best value for money from the extra spending.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Departmental Scientific and Regulatory Agencies

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I announced a review of the three science laboratories, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA), the Central Science Laboratory (CSL) and the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science (CEFAS), and the two regulatory agencies, the Pesticides Safety Directorate (PSD) and the Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) on 26 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 839W The Review has concluded that overall, the five agencies have performed well and that at present, there is no case for changes to their ownership or structure. The Review makes a number of recommendations with the aim of strengthening the relationship between Defra and the agencies by:

giving them greater strategic direction for planning and investment, and the systems and freedoms to run their businesses more effectively;

linking their work more closely and overtly with Defra's new agenda as a science evidence based department delivering a sustainable development agenda; and

establishing clearly Defra's corporate ownership role.

I am making copies of the Report available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Biological Diversity

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Section 74 (2) of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 placed a duty on the Secretary of State to list those habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in England, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity 1992.

I have sought advice from English Nature, our statutory nature conservation advisers on the lists as required by the Act. On the basis of this advice I have today published a list of the habitats and species which the Government considers to be of principal importance for the conservation of biological diversity in England. Copies of the list are available in the Library of the House. Action Plans under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan are already in place or under preparation for all the listed habitats and species.

'Working with the Grain of Nature—A biodiversity strategy for England' published on 24 October and also available in the Library of the House, sets out the means by which the Government will comply with its duty under Section 74 to take or promote the taking by others, of steps to further the conservation of the listed habitats and species, including through the continued implementation of the Action Plans.

The list will be kept under review and a report on any necessary revisions will be made as part of the first report on progress on the Biodiversity Strategy for England in 2006.

Environment Agency

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): I have today published the revised statutory Guidance to the Environment Agency under Section 4 of the Environment Act 1995. The Guidance covers the Agency's activities in England. It sets out the statutory objectives which the Agency should pursue over the next few years, advises on its role in contributing to the achievement of sustainable development, and lays down the principles it should follow in deciding its priorities. The Welsh Assembly Government is responsible for issuing guidance to the Agency covering its activities in Wales.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

New Millennium Experience Company

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Further to the Prime Minister's response to the Member

for South Suffolk on 8 July, *Official Report* column 749W, Lord Rooker has full responsibility as Minister for the New Millennium Experience Company. The Member for Harrow East (Tony McNulty) will provide support in this House, although without any executive responsibility.

The shareholding remains with Lord Falconer of Thoroton for the time being, while outstanding litigation is being resolved. It is the intention that the shareholding will transfer to Lord Rooker as soon as the litigation has been resolved. In the meantime, Lord Rooker has been granted power of attorney and any decisions in relation to the Company are being taken by him. Lord Falconer no longer has any Ministerial responsibility for the New Millennium Experience Company.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Lockerbie

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): I explained to the House on 11 July that I did not see a case for a public inquiry into the Lockerbie disaster, but that I was going to look into whether other arrangements for scrutiny could be established.

In considering what options might be available to us, we have taken the view that, to be of value, any scrutiny should be able to deliver new and useful conclusions despite the passage of time and the investigations that have already taken place.

Those previous investigations have been extensive. They include a Fatal Accident Enquiry, the US President's Commission on Aviation Security and Terrorism, a Transport Select Committee Enquiry, various internal Department of Transport reviews of aviation security, and the trial, conviction and unsuccessful appeal of al Megrahi.

We have concluded that, given the absence of any significant new information, the fact that the key issues have already been extensively explored, and action taken, including substantial changes to airport procedures, it is most unlikely that any further form of enquiry would unearth further lessons to be learned, 14 years after the event, which had not already been identified by earlier investigations.

The Government have therefore decided not to initiate any further form of review on Lockerbie.

I explained this decision to the Lockerbie relatives at a meeting in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on 17 December.

Ian Stillman

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): Ian Stillman was arrested in India on 28 August 2000 and charged with possessing approximately 20 kgs of drugs. He was convicted on 2 June 2001 and sentenced to 10 years imprisonment. The Indian government offered Mr Stillman clemency and he was released on compassionate and health grounds on 7 December 2002. A condition of his early release was that he leaves India. It is a matter for the Indian government whether he is allowed to return.

We have been extremely active on Mr Stillman's case and raised it with the Indian government at every available opportunity. Over the last year I have discussed his case with the Indian Ministers on at least six occasions. Recently I raised it with the Indian Deputy Prime Minister, L K Advani on 21 August 2002 and the Indian Foreign Minister on 31 October 2002. Mr Advani said that if Mr Stillman submitted a clemency plea he would consider it sympathetically. I met members of Mr Stillman's family to discuss next steps in the case on 19 November 2002.

The Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Mike O'Brien (FCO Minister responsible for India) have also raised Mr Stillman's case with the Indian government. Recently the Prime Minister discussed Mr Stillman's case with Prime Minister Vajpayee on 12 October 2002 and subsequently wrote to him expressing the hope that Mr Stillman be released soon.

Our consular staff in New Delhi and London have done all they can to help Mr Stillman and his family. We have been in close contact with the latter both in the UK and from time to time in India. Baroness Amos (FCO Minister responsible for consular matters) has taken a close interest in the case and met members of Mr Stillman's family twice this year.

We took all proper measures to ensure that the Indian authorities were meeting Mr Stillman's welfare requirements during his imprisonment. Consular staff monitored his welfare closely through consular visits (generally every three months) and by keeping in regular touch with his family. We were instrumental in ensuring improvements to many aspects of his detention. These included helping him to be transferred to a prison with better conditions and facilities, ensuring that he was provided with a wheelchair and had better lighting in his cell. Consular staff arranged for a Board of Medical Consultants to examine him at a hospital in May 2002 and also helped secure permission from the prison authorities for medical and prosthetic specialists to visit him in prison. Recently they helped arrange for a diabetic specialist to visit Mr Stillman on 4 November.

I am very glad that Mr Stillman's case has been resolved. I hope his early release will result in a significant improvement in his health. When I met the Indian Foreign Minister, Yashwant Sinha, in London on 11 December, I expressed my thanks to him and his colleagues in the Government of India for the compassionate action they had taken in securing Mr Stillman's release.

Sanctions Regimes

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell):

Recent Changes to Sanctions Regimes

Angola (UNITA)

With the support of Her Majesty's Government, the UN Security Council on 18 October 2002 unanimously adopted UN Security Council resolution 1439(2002). The resolution lifted the travel ban on members of UNITA and their immediate families listed in paragraphs 4a and 4b of UN Security Council resolution 1127(1997) from 14 November 2002. The travel ban had been suspended since May, pursuant to UN Security Council resolutions 1412(2002) and 1432(2002).

Resolution 1439 (2002) also committed the Security Council to review all remaining measures imposed on UNITA by 19 November 2002. Following the review with the support of Her Majesty's Government, the Security Council voted unanimously to adopt United Nations Resolution 1448(2002) on 9 December 2002. This resolution lifted all remaining sanctions measures on Angola (UNITA). This is in recognition of the considerable progress made in Angola since the formal cessation of hostilities on 4 April 2002, and the broad fulfilment of the tenets of the Lusaka Peace Protocol by UNITA.

Sierra Leone

With the support of Her Majesty's Government, the Security Council voted unanimously to adopt resolution 1446(2002) on 4 December 2002. The resolution extended the embargo on the export of rough diamonds without a Certificate of Origin, controlled by the Government of Sierra Leone. This extension will allow the Government of Sierra Leone to extend and consolidate their authority over the diamond-mining fields in the country.

Democratic Republic of Congo

With the support of Her Majesty's Government, the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 22 October agreed Council Common Position 2002/829. The European Union introduced an embargo on the export of arms to Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of Congo) in 1993 pursuant to an EU declaration of 7 April 1993. The Common Position (2002/829) amends the scope of that arms embargo by providing that the arms embargo does not apply to temporary exports for personal use of United Nations personnel; and does not prohibit the export of non-lethal military equipment with a legitimate humanitarian use to representatives of the media and humanitarian and associated personnel, or equipment to be used for the clearance and destruction of anti-personnel landmines.

Burma

With the support of Her Majesty's Government, the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 22 October agreed Council Common Position 2002/831. The Common Position extends EU sanctions against Burma for a further six months. The Common Position and the accompanying Council Regulation also update the list of individuals subject to EU sanctions to take account of recent changes to the Burmese military regime.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Legacy

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): A summary of the responses has been published in line with the White Paper commitment to openness and transparency. Copies are available in the Library and on the DTI website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/nuclear/index.shtml. The responses show strong support for the approach set out in the White Paper and, in particular for the Government's commitment to driving forward work on legacy clean up. As announced in the Queen's Speech, draft implementing legislation will be published in the Spring.

Small Business Support

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): The Small Business Service (SBS) is today publishing a new policy framework for small business entitled 'Small Business and Government—the Way Forward'. I am placing copies in the Libraries of both Houses.

The framework represents a focusing of the Government's small firms policy on seven core themes: building an enterprise culture; encouraging a more dynamic start-up market; building the capability for small business growth; improving access to finance for small businesses; encouraging more enterprise in disadvantaged communities and under represented groups; improving small businesses experience of Government services; and developing better regulation and policy. These will be built into seven national strategies to make a reality of the Government's vision for the small business sector. The Government wants more people to have the ambition of starting their own business, and for all those who take that step to have every chance of succeeding. Our aims are:

> Ma[illegible] more people, regardless of their background, having the desire, skills and opportunity to start a successful business;
>
> Everyone with the ambition to grow their business being helped and supported;
>
> A supportive business environment with all small businesses finding it easy to respond to Government and access its services.

The framework is designed to ensure a coherent engagement between the whole of Government and the small business sector. It stresses that small businesses are the responsibility of all of Government and not just one Department. All parts of Government will have contributions to make to the seven strategies.

The framework envisages a strong role for the SBS as a centre of expertise on small business issues based on its experience of delivering services to this particular community and its extensive research base and network of contacts. This expertise will be used by the whole of Government in developing policies and services which affect small businesses.

The policy framework follows on from the joint Treasury and SBS paper, 'Enterprise Britain: a modern approach to meeting the Enterprise Challenge' published in November 2002.

ECGD Trading Fund

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): I informed the House on 22 July 2002, *Official Report* columns 779–780W, that Ministers had decided that ECGD should proceed to Trading Fund status. I also reported that I had asked ECGD to improve its customer care for new customers and make it easier for them to access its support.

I am pleased to be able to announce that work is well underway between ECGD and HM Treasury to agree the policy and objectives, financial and regulatory frameworks and operational details of a Trading Fund, with a view to an effective operational structure being put in place as soon as possible.

The aim is to complete this work by the summer recess, which will enable a consultation paper to be launched in September 2003 to ensure that the views of ECGD's customers and other stakeholders are fully taken into account. A pilot Trading Fund will also be launched in September, or as shortly thereafter as practicable, which will provide valuable operational experience which, together with responses to the consultation, will inform the final decisions on a statutory Trading Fund framework.

Subject to these decisions, it is planned to effect the formal establishment of the statutory Trading Fund by no later than April 2005.

ECGD established a dedicated New Customer Service Team in November. This is already providing a valuable point of contact between ECGD and exporters who had never previously used its services by helping them through the export finance process.

ECGD is committed to providing a first class service to UK exporters and investors. I want it to offer a service that puts it amongst the best export credit agencies in terms of innovation, flexibility and product quality. Proceeding to Trading Fund status should provide a robust platform for ECGD to achieve both its business and financial objectives and secure its future as an important provider of support for UK exporters and investors.

British Electricity Trading and Transmission Arrangements

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): Licensing of the GB system operator cannot take place until the necessary legislation has received Royal Assent. I am minded to accept the recommendation of the GB system operator Selection Panel, that The National Grid Company plc's application for the role of GB system operator should be accepted.

DEFENCE

Missile Defence

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): I have today received a letter from United States Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, requesting UK agreement to upgrade the Early Warning Radar at RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes.

As set out in the discussion paper published on 9 December, the Government believes that the developing ballistic missile threat is one that we must take very seriously. We assess that at present there is no immediate significant threat to the territory of the UK from ballistic missiles. However, intentions can change quickly, and the proliferation and development of weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles is continuing. We could not wait until a specific threat became clear before determining how to defend against it.

The US is looking to work closely with friends and allies in developing defences which enhance global security in the face of this potential threat. As well as improving US defence, an upgraded Fylingdales radar would be a key building block in the extension of missile defence to Europe, should we and other European Allies so desire. In this context, Mr Rumsfeld's letter contains the undertaking that, if Fylingdales were to be upgraded, and should we desire it, then the US would be prepared to extend missile defence coverage and make missile defence capabilities available to the UK as the evolution of the US system permits, subject to agreement on appropriate political and financial arrangements.

RAF Fylingdales has operated since 1963 as one of several sites which provide early warning of ballistic missile launches against this country, Western Europe or the United States. The station is under UK operational command, and the data it produces is shared between the UK and US military authorities. The upgrade requested would enable the system to track ballistic missiles more accurately, so that they could be engaged by interceptors, in addition to the radar's existing role. I understand that a parallel request has been made to the Danish Government for upgrade of the radar at Thule, Greenland.

The US propose no change to existing arrangements for data-sharing and operational command at Fylingdales, maintaining the long-established principle of joint decision-making relating to the use of US strategic assets based in the UK. It is expected that the work would involve installation of new computers and software, and an additional communications link. No material environmental impact would be expected, but this will need to be confirmed in further discussions with the US and local planning authorities. The US would hope to start work later next year, and will accordingly make contingency provision in their defence budget.

Mr Rumsfeld's letter also proposes the early conclusion of a new bilateral Research, Development, Test and Evaluation Memorandum of Understanding, to ensure that the UK, both government and industry, have the fullest possible insight into, and opportunity for involvement in, the missile defence programme. I

believe this represents an important industrial and technological opportunity for the UK regardless of our response to the US request.

The decision on Fylingdales upgrade will be an important one, and the Government is keen for it to be informed by public and Parliamentary discussion. We shall ensure that this House has appropriate opportunities to discuss the issues in the New Year.

The Government will now consider the US request very seriously, agreeing to it only if we are satisfied that it will ultimately enhance the security of the UK and the NATO Alliance. I will make a further statement in due course.

Depleted Uranium Pilot Study

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I announced on 1 May 2002 (*Official Report*, column 792W) to my hon Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr Palmer) that contracts had been placed with five independent laboratories to carry out a pilot study to examine different methods of determining the Depleted Uranium content in urine. This study, which was to be carried out under the auspices of the independent Depleted Uranium Oversight Board (DUOB), would examine a number of different methods and establish whether a suitably, accurate, precise and sensitive test was available. Subject to its outcome, I hoped that a test could be made available to serving personnel and veterans in October 2002.

The pilot study is now complete, and has unfortunately produced inconclusive results. This is likely to be as the result of inadvertent contamination of the spiked urine samples used in the study. The DUOB has decided that a second stage of the pilot study is therefore required. This will involve the three laboratories whose results in the first phase were most consistent.

A detailed protocol for the creation of the spiked samples has been produced by the technical experts of the DUOB in consultation with these three laboratories, designed as far as possible to avoid contamination in the second stage.

We expect to place contracts for the second stage in January 2003, with the results of the study expected in April. Subject to satisfactory results from the pilot exercise, we expect to be able to make the test available towards the end of the first half of 2003.

LORD CHANCELLOR

Data Protection

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): The Data Protection (Processing of Sensitive Personal Data) (Elected Representatives) Order 2002 comes into force today. The Order allows Members of this House and other elected representatives to deal with constituency cases involving individuals' sensitive personal data without having to seek the individuals' explicit consent. The Order does not otherwise remove the duty to comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. The Order applies to information about individuals' racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, trade union activity, health, sex life and criminal activity. I understand that officials of the House are preparing guidance on the Order.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Race Equality (Scotland)

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): An Order under Section 71C of the Race Relations Act 1976 (as amended) has today been laid before Parliament. The Order brings into effect, the Code of Practice on the duty to promote race equality in Scotland. It offers practical guidance to Scottish public authorities on how to meet their duty to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful racial discrimination and promote race equality and related duties.

The Statutory Code of practice on the duty to promote race equality in Scotland will come into effect on 19 December 2002.

Women's Royal Voluntary Service Office Premises Ltd.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): WRVS (Women's Royal Voluntary Service) Office Premises Ltd currently owns 147 properties (valued by WRVS at £2,904,089) and other assets derived from the proceeds of the sale of properties and other assets (£6,222,436) (mainly the proceeds of the earlier sales of properties) on trust for the Home Secretary.

An independent review of WRVS in 1997 identified that WRVS' financial dependence on Government and restrictions on its property holdings were major barriers to its goals of modernisation and independence.

I gave Parliament 14 days notice on 4 November 2002 by means of a Departmental minute that to help WRVS achieve these goals I will give the reversionary interest in the properties and other assets held on trust to WRVS Office Premises Ltd absolutely (total value £9,126,525) and subject to annual Parliamentary approval gradually reduce the grant-in-aid received by WRVS in 2002–3 of £4.2 million to £1 million a year by 2007–08.

TRANSPORT

London Underground

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): This statement is in response to Early Day Motion 285 which expressed concerns about the contingent liability in respect of the London Underground PPP notified by my Minute of 4 December.

The contingent liability would crystallise only in the event that the Mayor of London proceeds with his legal challenge to the plans, and in the event that any successful challenge has a material adverse effect on an Infrastructure Company. Significant risk is transferred

to the private sector under the London Underground PPP. Should the contingent liability materialise, the amounts payable will in large part be attributable to paying for the investment that has already been undertaken under the PPP contracts and has gone into the Tube.

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 18 December 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fisheries

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): From 1 January 1999 all British registered fishing vessels over 10 metres in length and catching more than 2 tonnes of quota stocks have had to demonstrate an economic link with fisheries-dependent communities in the United Kingdom. This link can be demonstrated in a number of ways, for example by vessels landing at least 50 per cent. by weight of their quota catch into the UK or by employing a crew of whom at least 50 per cent. are normally resident in a UK coastal area.

In 2001, 1,438 vessels caught more than 2 tonnes of quota stocks and in each case achieved a satisfactory economic link, primarily through landings into the UK. The arrangements have resulted in UK-registered but foreign-owned vessels continuing to land and incur expenditure at UK ports. Additionally some 500 tonnes of quota was made available for re-distribution to the UK fleet.

A full report by the Fisheries Departments in the United Kingdom on the operation of the economic link measures in 2001 and their impact has been placed in the Library of the House.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

National Languages Strategy

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): Today we are publishing our National Languages Strategy.

To date the focus for language learning has been targeted at secondary schools, when for many it is too late to excite and motivate the desire to learn another language This has resulted in a declining number of people post-16 studying languages and a shortage in the number of language teachers at both primary and secondary level.

We want to increase flexibility in the curriculum at Key Stage 4 to give pupils the opportunity to pursue additional vocational routes, and therefore we have decided that Modern Foreign Languages should be an entitlement at Key Stage 4 and not a compulsory subject. We must recognise that our current system is not delivering the language learning system that is required in the 21st Century. It is our responsibility as a government to take steps to reverse this trend and re-build the capacity to deliver language learning at all levels, starting in primary schools and continuing to adult learning.

The strategy that we are publishing today looks beyond the classroom in order to maximise and promote language learning opportunities. Our strategy will be geared towards both motivating individuals to learn—the push factor—while at the same time ensuring that high quality and appropriate opportunities are available—the pull factor. Creating the appetite for learning while at the same time broadening and enriching the options available, are the two key planks of our languages strategy.

The starting point of this strategy is to provide a flexible system of language learning for all, to develop the capacity of the system so that every pupil at Key Stage 2 has the opportunity to study at least one foreign language by the end of this decade, and ensure that language learning has a key place in the transformed secondary school of the future.

Our strategy therefore has three overarching objectives: to improve teaching and learning of languages, including delivering an entitlement to language learning for Key Stage 2 pupils by 2010, making the most of e-learning and ensuring that opportunity to learn languages has a key place in the transformed secondary school of the future; to introduce a national, voluntary recognition system, to complement existing qualification frameworks and give people credit for their language skills; and to increase the number of people studying languages in further and higher education and in work-based training by stimulating demand for language learning, developing Virtual Language Communities and encouraging employers to play their part in supporting language learning.

We face a number of challenges, but we are committed to improving language learning. Our strategy proposes a number of measures to address these issues.

First, we recognise that there is a shortage of modern foreign language teachers at secondary level, and relatively few primary teachers have been trained to teach languages. We will work with the Teacher Training Agency, with teachers and with other professionals and language experts to build a new pool of primary language teachers and other language specialists who can support language learning.

But we must also recognise that our strategy alone is not enough to deliver our ambitions. We will extend and revitalise the Language Assistants programme and there will be more opportunities and incentives for language undergraduates to work in schools. But even this is not enough. We must, and we will, draw on the diversity of skills of language speakers within the community and other education institutions. We will do this by providing a short "Teaching a Foreign Language" qualification, to give people the additional teaching skills and recognition to work with teachers in the classroom.

Secondly, there is little provision that targets individual learners, enabling them to learn at their own pace, and few opportunities for recognition at various stages of their learning either in school, further education, higher education or the workplace. We will introduce a new voluntary recognition system to

complement existing national qualification frameworks and the Common European Framework. This will give people credit for their existing as well as newly-acquired language skills and form a ladder of recognition from beginner level to a standard which sits alongside GCSE, A level and NVQ national qualifications.

Thirdly, we are aware that too many schools and teachers are working in isolation, without access to support networks. LEAs will have a key role to play in supporting schools in the implementation of the strategy. We propose that LEAs should be the co-ordinators of primary language learning programmes, ensuring that every primary school has a language co-ordinator and that by the end of the decade every Key Stage 2 pupil is offered the opportunity to study at least one foreign language.

LEAs will provide expertise, commitment and a strong co-ordinating role drawing together headteachers; local Specialist Language Colleges; the Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT) Comenius Centre networks; other schools with language strengths; Higher Education Institutions; business; and language speakers within the community and other education institutions.

Finally, we acknowledge that whilst more schools are using ICT in language teaching, its use is underdeveloped in over three-quarters of primary schools and a third of secondary schools. We will continue to work with public and private sector providers to raise the quality and widen the range of online teaching and learning materials. We are determined to make the most of opportunities to collaborate with other countries by looking at how twinning can add to the learning experience.

We will appoint a National Director for Languages to champion language learning and drive forward our strategy which will run alongside the Government's overall Primary Strategy to raise standards of literacy and numeracy in primary schools.

Our strategy will be supported by direct investment, which will rise to £10 million per year by 2005–06. It will also benefit from our broader programmes to support the school workforce, invest in school improvement, and raise standards of teaching and learning, and from programmes managed by our key partners.

Languages should take their proper place at the heart of initiatives and activities to further the wider social, economic and political agenda. To do this we must recognise the limitations of the current system and build the capacity to deliver a more flexible, responsive system of learning which embeds learning in primary schools and provides provision tailored to the needs of individuals of all ages, throughout their lives.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Proceeds of Crime Act

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): I am pleased to announce that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has appointed Mr Andrew Clarke as the Appointed Person under section 290 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. He will act as an independent person to oversee searches conducted under new cash seizure powers where no prior judicial authority is obtained. He will also prepare and submit an annual report on the operation of the search power to the Secretary of State, a copy of which will be laid before Parliament. Mr Clarke's appointment will commence on 30 December 2002 to coincide with the introduction of the cash seizure powers under the Act.

Youth Offending Teams

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Hilary Benn): To provide regular external scrutiny of youth offending teams (Yots) a new joint inspection programme has been developed by Her Majesty's Inspectorates of Probation, Constabulary and Prisons, the Social Services Inspectorate (England and Wales) and the education inspectorates, (OFSTED for England and ESTYN for Wales) in consultation with the Home Office and the Youth Justice Board.

The programme is expected to start in April 2003. Its purpose will be to:

> 'report to the Secretary of State and through him, Parliament and the public, on the effectiveness of Yots in fulfilling their statutory duties to prevent offending by children and young people and thereby protect the public, whilst safeguarding their rights and promoting their welfare'.

It will assess the impact Yots and partner organisations have on offending, help to improve their performance and inform the further development of the YJB's effective practice and quality assurance strategy.

Led by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Probation, the inspection team will include representatives from the full range of inspectorates concerned with Yots' work. They will aim to inspect all Yots in England and Wales over a five to six year cycle.

TRANSPORT

Blue Badge Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I have considered the Disabled Persons Transport Advisory Committee's (DPTAC) recommendations on the scheme which were based on the responses to the discussion paper circulated to key disability organisations and others earlier this year. I have also discussed those recommendations with my colleagues in the devolved administrations and the Northern Ireland Office who have responsibility for the Scheme.

We are proposing to take forward most of the recommendations that were made. A summary of our responses on each of the recommendations has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

There are a number of areas in which we have undertaken to look at amending primary legislation, in particular to ensure that the tools needed for effective enforcement are available to local authorities and the police. We will be seeking opportunities to introduce those changes as soon as possible.

We recognise the need to ensure that badges are only issued to those who most need them but we are not yet convinced that criteria for eligibility need to be restricted by law. With the devolved administrations and the Northern Ireland Office, we would prefer to see much clearer and stronger guidance issued to local authorities, as the issuing bodies, on how they should undertake that function. If, after a period of monitoring the impact of that guidance, it is clear that there are still problems with the policy on issuing, we would consider legislation at that stage. We will, in co-operation with the devolved administrations, be setting up a working group shortly to help us draw up common guidance that each administration will use.

Further research is required in a number of areas, for example, to consider the setting up of a national database of badge holders. My Department will be taking that forward, in collaboration with the devolved administrations and the Northern Ireland Office, as part of our research programme.

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

NATO Parliamentary Assembly

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): The hon. Member for Chesham and Amersham (Ms Gillan) has replaced the right hon. Member for North East Hampshire (Mr Arbuthnot) as a member of the United Kingdom delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Oversight Commissioner

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Paul Murphy):

AIM

1. The Oversight Commissioner is being appointed in order to provide independent scrutiny of the implementation of the changes in criminal justice arrangements and structures flowing from the Government's decisions on the Criminal Justice Review and the provisions of the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. These changes will be set out in the revised Implementation Plan to be published by early 2003.

FUNCTIONS

2. The Commissioner will monitor and review progress achieved in implementing change; receive information, as required, from the agencies responsible for progress; and provide public assurance about the implementation process.

3. In pursuit of these functions, the Oversight Commissioner will:

be provided with information, including objectives and timetables as appropriate, on the implementation of the changes to the criminal justice system. This information will be provided by the Department of the DPP(NI), the Court Service, the Probation Board (PBNI), the Prison Service, the Police Service (PSNI), and the Northern Ireland Office (NIO), and in respect of issues covering the criminal justice system as a whole will be co-ordinated by the Criminal Justice Board (which comprises the heads or senior representatives of the agencies listed above). Information may also be provided by other bodies as appropriate.

Conduct progress review meetings with the agencies and, as appropriate, the Criminal Justice Board on the implementation of the criminal justice changes. Meetings may also take place with Ministers and officials and with other office-holders and bodies as appropriate. These meetings will be a forum to discuss issues arising from implementation and to enable the written information to be supplemented.

Provide a report to the responsible Ministers (the Secretary of State, Lord Chancellor and Attorney-General) every six months. The Ministers will place these reports before Parliament and publish them (subject to the omission of any parts whose laying or publication would, in their opinion, be against the public interest or which might jeopardise the safety of any person). Such reports will include:

an account of the progress which has been achieved in implementing the planned changes; and

the Commissioner's observations on how any delays in implementation have arisen and how they might be addressed.

Meet (at the Commissioner's discretion) with other relevant organisations or agencies, including the political parties and community leaders, to discuss progress in the implementation of the criminal justice changes.

ACCOUNTABILITY

4. Nothing in these terms of reference should be taken as affecting the responsibilities of the Secretary of State, the Lord Chancellor or the Attorney-General; or encroaching on the independence of the judiciary, the DPP(NI), or the Chief Constable in controlling and directing the Police Service; or the responsibilities of any other agency or the Policing Board.

APPOINTMENT

5. The Oversight Commissioner will be appointed by the Secretary of State, in consultation with the Lord Chancellor and the Attorney-General, for an initial term of three years, at which point the continuing need for the office will be reviewed. A separate note on the Terms and Conditions of Appointment will be agreed with the Commissioner.

STAFF

6. Appropriate staff to support the Commissioner will be provided by the Secretary of State, on terms determined by the Secretary of State.

VARIATIONS

7. These terms of reference may be varied at any time by the responsible Ministers [following consultation with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister]. Details of any changes will be published.

DEFENCE

Review Board for Government Contracts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): I am pleased to announce that the Government has accepted the findings of the Review Board Report that the existing Profit Formula should be retained pending the outcome of the next general Review which is expected in the second half of 2003. I am arranging for copies of the Report to be placed in the Library of the House.

Tri-Service and Army Training

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): On 17 October (*Official Report*, column 571) I announced that a special appraisal of the initial training of non-Officer recruits of all three services would take place. This review was to be conducted independent of Service and commands and to report directly to Ministers. The work is nearing completion and I now plan to make findings public in January next year.

Surrey Police continue their investigation into deaths at Deepcut and it would be inappropriate to comment on this area until their inquiry is complete.

Royal Air Force

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): Her Majesty The Queen has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the Battle Honour "Kosovo" to the Royal Air Force as listed below. Squadrons which were required to operate under constant threat of attack and had demonstrated gallantry and spirit during the allied air campaign over Kosovo during the period 24 March and 20 June 1999 have been awarded the battle honour "Kosovo" with the right to emblazon the honour on their Squadron Standards. Squadrons which provided direct support to the air campaign have been awarded the honour "Kosovo" without the right to emblazon the honour on their Standards.

With the Right to Emblazon "Kosovo" on Squadron Standards

Number 1 (Fighter) Squadron	Harrier GR7
Number 9 Squadron	Tornado GR1
Number 14 Squadron	Tornado GR1
Number 31 Squadron	Tornado GR1

Without the Right to Emblazonment

Number 7 Squadron	Chinook
Number 8 Squadron	E3D
Number 23 Squadron	E3D
Number 51 Squadron	Nimrod
Number 101 Squadron	VC10
Number 216 Squadron	Tristar

Defence Intelligence and Security Centre

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Stage 1 Report of the Quinquennial Review (QQR) of the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) Defence Agency has today been published and copies of the report placed in the Libraries of the House.

I announced terms of reference for Stage 1 of this review in the reply I gave on 20 July 2001 (*Official Report*, column 710W) to my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow Maryhill (Ms McKechin).

In line with central guidance on QQRs, the principal question addressed during Stage 1 has been whether the Ministry of Defence continues to require an in-house intelligence and security training capability The clear conclusion from Stage 1 is that the provision of defence intelligence and security training is essential; the events of September 11 and subsequent operational activity has confirmed this. Following careful analysis of the current arrangements for delivering this training and taking into account the requirements and views of training sponsors and customers, it is clear that the DISC remains a cost effective means of delivering this function.

The study concluded that the Agency performs this function well, but identified two issues that have reduced its overall effectiveness. These relate to the dual role of the Chief Executive (who is also Director of the (Army) Intelligence Corps) and to a lack of clarity around the margins of the Agency's function concerning the provision of operational manpower and of policy type advice. The study has clarified that the core role of the DISC should be the provision of intelligence and security training The QQR team addressed this in its Stage 2 work and identified a range of specific solutions to these issues.

In relation to the issue of dual-hatting, the Agency's Owner has already taken steps to mitigate diversion of the Chief Executive's (CE) efforts. A separate study has been commissioned to review the Command and Control arrangements for the DISC and for Intelligence Corps units, and to develop a framework for the command and control of the DISC that will separate the appointments and thereby de-conflict the various responsibilities of the CE. This will provide a clear distinction between the CE as a customer and as a provider, removing any confusion or conflict between the two roles. The study will report in February 2003 and its findings will inform both the DISC Key Targets for Financial Year 2003–04 and bids for funding.

In relation to a lack of clarity around the margins of the Agency's function, the Owner is also taking steps over the next few months to transfer the Agency's operational role. The precise timing and nature of this will be determined as part of implementation of the recommendations of the Strategic Defence Review New Chapter. Additionally, the Owner has taken action to constrain the extent to which the DISC provides advice on intelligence matters to a level that is commensurate with its training role.

The study also noted that the central issues affecting the core role of the DISC must be considered in the context of implementing the pan-MOD Defence Training Review (DTR) and the two strands of work co-operated closely throughout the QQR. DTR will rationalise the provision of individual education and training in MOD, including intelligence and security

training and is thus approaching the functions of the DISC from a broader perspective. Recent decisions on the early implementation of DTR at Chicksands have increased the significance of this work The proposed joint Security, Languages, Intelligence and Photography (SLIP) Defence Training Establishment (DTE) that will subsume the DISC is to be implemented with effect from April 2003 as an early demonstration of the progress towards rationalisation that DTR will bring.

We have concluded that the DISC should remain an Agency within MOD, in view of the benefits of rationalised training and increased visibility and accountability this has already delivered. In addition to the Stage 2 work described above, additional work has been completed on improving the Agency's Key Targets and on investigating the potential for increasing the application of E-Learning to intelligence and security training, which is consistent with recommendations of the Defence Training Review. This will enable the Agency to achieve its full potential as a centre of training excellence.

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Mr. Adam Ingram): The Key Targets proposed for the Defence Intelligence and Security Centre (DISC) Defence Agency for Financial Year 2002–03 have been agreed, following consideration of the recommendations of the Quinquennial Review of DISC, the findings of which have now been announced to Parliament. These are the targets the Agency has been working to throughout this year.

The role of the DISC is to train the Armed Forces and other Intelligence agencies in intelligence and security disciplines, and conduct after capture; to maintain an operational capability; and to contribute effective and timely advice to the Armed Forces on appropriate intelligence and security training matters. The Key Targets for the Agency for the 12 months from April 2002 are:

Key Target 1—Training Output—Quantity

To deliver, within the resources available, the agreed Training Programme and to establish an accurate baseline of the number of successfully completed Man Training Days (MTDs) within the Systems Approach to Training (SAT) process, to be used for comparative measurement in Financial Year (FY) 2003–04.

Key Target 2—Training Quality

To ensure that at least 80 per cent. of Training courses complete Internal Validation, to introduce a programme of External Validation, and to complete at least 10 per cent. of External Validations within FY 2002–03, through the application of the Systems Approach to Training (SAT) methodology.

Key Target 3—Efficiency

To reduce the current cost of delivering the average training place made available by 2 per cent. (£3 per day) in FY 2002–03, and to establish the average cost of a successfully completed MTD to be used as a measurement from FY 2003–04.

Key Target 4—Operations

To satisfy the operational tasking of the Defence Debriefing Team (DDT) and the Field HUMINT Team (FHT).

Service Accommodation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The contract for the first phase of the £1 billion Single Living Acommodation Modernisation (SLAM) programme was awarded today.

The contract is being awarded to Debut services, a Birmingham based consortium led by Bovis Lend Lease and Babcock Support Services, who will work in close co-operation with Defence Estates (an Agency of MOD) and Service Client representatives to achieve the delivery of the project.

The contract comprises new build and refurbishment projects across the country and will deliver primarily single room en-suite accommodation. This will meet the aspirations of our single servicemen and women for improved living conditions that meet modern standards and is the result of extensive consultation of service personnel. This is particularly relevant, as one of the main reasons for personnel leaving the Services is the current poor quality of living accommodation.

The Project is planned to upgrade progressively the worst accommodation to Grade 1 physical condition over a five-year period. This will involve in the region of 16,000 bedspaces and ancillary accommodation across all ranks of single servicemen and women in the three services.

The contract is being awarded on "Smart Procurement" principles and contains an innovative incentivised condition to encourage the Prime Contractor to work more efficiently.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Greater London Authority

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): I am today issuing a consultation paper on proposed changes to the rules for London Mayoral and Assembly elections. This consultation follows from recommendations which were made by the Greater London Returning Officer earlier this year. Copies of the consultation paper will be placed in the House Library.

Electoral Pilots

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government is looking at many ways, including e-voting, to modernise our electoral system and to increase the opportunities that people have to vote. To test the robustness of the new options and to build public confidence in them, we are continuing to promote an extensive programme of pilot innovations at local elections.

In September we, in conjunction with the Electoral Commission and the Local Government Association, published a prospectus inviting applications from English and Welsh local authorities to apply to run electoral pilots at local elections in 2003. The closing date for applications to run pilots in the May 2003 local elections was 29 November 2002.

Today I am able to announce that I have accepted 41 applications to hold non e-voting pilots at the May 2003 local elections. The names of the successful local authorities and the type of pilot that they are planning to hold are listed at the end of this statement. The next step will be for us, working with authorities and in consultation with the Electoral Commission, to draw up the statutory orders authorising the pilots.

I am pleased that, following consultation with the independent Electoral Commission, we are able to take forward so many applications. The standard of applications demonstrates the commitment of local authorities to meeting the Government's exacting requirements. These pilots are an important step towards making elections more relevant, straightforward and accessible for voters.

Of 41 applications accepted, 33 involve all-postal ballots. Five applications include e-counting, three in combination with an all-postal ballot. Three authorities plan to extend the voting hours, including voting on a number of days before the main polling day of 1 May. The other 4 applications are to pilot changes to ballot papers and their administration. Altogether, these pilots will cover 4.8 million electors.

We expect to announce in mid-January which of the applications to hold e-voting pilots at the May 2003 local elections have been accepted.

All-Postal Pilots *Total: 30*

Blackpool Borough Council
Blyth Valley Borough Council
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council
Brighton & Hove City Council
Chesterfield Borough Council
Corby Borough Council
Darlington Borough Council
Doncaster Borough Council
East Staffordshire Borough Council
Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council
Guildford Borough Council
Herefordshire Council
Hyndburn Borough Council
Borough Council of King's Lynn & West Norfolk
City of Lincoln Council
Newcastle City Council
North Lincolnshire Council
North Shropshire District Council
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Rushcliffe Borough Council
Rutland County Council District Council
City of Salford Council
Sedgefield Borough Council
St. Edmundsbury Borough Council
Stevenage Borough Council
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
Sunderland City Council
Borough of Telford & Wrekin Council
Trafford Borough Council
Wansbeck District Council

All-Postal & E-Counting Pilots *Total: 3*

Derwentside, Chester-le-Street, and Wear Valley District Councils (joint application)
Redcar & Cleveland Council
St. Helens Council

E-Counting Pilots *Total: 1*

Broxbourne Borough Council

Other Pilots (with traditional elections) *Total: 7*

Borough of Charnwood Council: Watermark on ballot paper
Manchester City Council: Automated issue of postal ballot papers
Medway Council: Extended voting hours
North Kesteven District Council: Ballot paper changes and limited mobile voting
North West Leicestershire District Council: Watermark on ballot paper
South Oxfordshire District Council: Extended voting hours and limited e-counting
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead Council: Extended voting hours and early mobile voting

Local Government Bill

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): Last year's Local Government White Paper announced that each best value parish or town council would be paid a grant of £30,000 per year when legislation permitted. This sum would cover audit costs and the corporate costs of carrying out work relating to best value, such as the preparation of performance plans and the management of reviews.

Provision has been made in the Local Government Bill, published last month, to enable these grants to be paid. Subject to Parliamentary approval, we expect to make the first payments in 2003–04, providing councils with a grant of £45,000, comprising £30,000 for 2003–04 and £15,000 for 2002–03.

We have also agreed that, on an exceptional basis, the Audit Commission will not charge their fees for auditing best value town and parish councils' 2003–04 performance plans, and will reimburse the fees paid by these councils for auditing their 2002–03 performance plans. This should amount to a total saving of approximately £10,000 for each best value town and parish council.

Building Regulations

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): Too many people experience noisy neighbours, whether late night parties, or loud television. This can have a significant impact on quality of life. It is also one of the things councils get the most complaints about. At a time

when we are encouraging the construction industry to build to greater densities, this issue is even more important.

That is why I am publishing official guidance on new amendments to the Building Regulations, which will be available this week. The amendments and guidance will improve standards of sound privacy between homes, and will go further to improve the sound insulation of walls and floors within the home, as well as between rooms in hostels, hotels and residential homes.

The scope of Part E of the Building Regulations will extend beyond separating walls and floors in houses and flats, to deal with reverberation in the common parts of blocks of flats, and also acoustic conditions in schools. The new requirements for Part E come into force on 1 July 2003.

We are also addressing the need to remove barriers to trade in construction products by providing guidance on new European fire safety testing measures for those products. This will enable manufacturers to more easily comply with European Standards as well as existing British Standards.

Amendments to the Approved Document for Part B of the Building Regulations come into effect on 1 March and will facilitate harmonisation between our existing national test procedures and those which have been produced in support of the Construction Products Directive (CPD).

Boundary Commission for England

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I have today appointed, for a second term, Mr Robin Gray as a member of the Boundary Commission for England. His appointment is effective until 31 December 2006.

HEALTH

Plasma Supplies

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ms Hazel Blears): On the evening of Monday 16 December, the Department of Health completed its purchase of the largest remaining independent US plasma collector, Life Resources Incorporated. This will secure long-term supplies of non-UK blood plasma for the benefit of NHS patients, and ensure that the current global plasma shortage will not reduce the availability to National Health Service patients of life-saving plasma products. An independent option appraisal conducted by KPMG concluded that this purchase was the most cost-effective way of achieving these objectives.

Plasma is used to manufacture products for the treatment of a wide range of conditions. Every year the NHS uses:

5,000 kilos of albumin for the tens of thousands of patients treated for burns, shock and major trauma.

2,000 kilos of intravenous immunoglobulin for patients with immune disorders. This includes 1,800 patients with primary immune deficiency who require an injection every 2–3 weeks throughout their lives to protect them against infection. Thousands more patients are given intravenous immunoglobulin to treat neurological and other conditions.

120,000 bottles of Anti-D immunoglobulin to protect unborn children suffering from haemolytic diseases of the newborn. This affects roughly 64,000 pregnancies a year and, in a small number of cases, can cause stillbirth, severe disability or death after birth from anaemia or jaundice.

400,000 bottles of Factor VIII to treat around 3,000 haemophilia patients.

Around 45 per cent, of the plasma products needed by the NHS in England and Wales are manufactured by the NHS-owned Bio Products Laboratory. The remainder are purchased by the NHS on the open market from third party commercial suppliers. In 1998, the Government instructed BPL to stop using UK plasma to make these products because of concerns about the theoretical risk from variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease. Since then, BPL has purchased plasma from the United States. The US has no reported cases of Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy and is the only country able to supply the quality of plasma that BPL needs in sufficient quantity. The US collects 60 per cent, of the world's plasma and supplies between 35 per cent.–45 per cent, of the plasma products used in Europe alone.

Up to now these supplies have been dependent on contracts with US plasma collection companies. Over the past two years most of these companies have been purchased by commercial manufacturers wishing to secure their own plasma supplies. This radically reduced the amount of US plasma that BPL could buy under contract and threatened our ability to supply sufficient non-UK plasma products to NHS patients.

Without continuing secure supplies of US plasma, BPL faced shutdown by 2004 with a consequent removal of massive volumes of plasma products from the NHS market. Independent market analysis by KPMG demonstrated that commercial suppliers would not be able to provide sufficient, secure supplies of plasma products to the NHS if BPL closed. Immediate action was therefore needed to secure long-term supplies of high quality, US plasma for BPL.

The Department of Health has purchased the trade and assets of Life Resources for an up front payment of £48.8 million with a further £21 million tied into the performance of the company up until the end of 2006. The Department has paid a commercial price for the business assets based on same analysis as a private sector purchaser would have undertaken.

Life Resources has supplied BPL with plasma since 1999. It has extremely high quality and safety standards overseen by the US Food and Drugs Administration and the UK Medicines Control Agency. All the company's collection centres are inspected by BPL on a rolling two year programme. BPL's team also inspected every centre prior to the purchase.

An effective corporate governance regime has been established for the ongoing management of Life Resources. The company will be run by its existing US management team and report to a US parent company, DCI Biologicals Incorporated. DCI Biologicals will

report to a UK parent company, Plasma Resources Ltd. The Board of Plasma Resources Ltd is chaired by Richard Douglas, the Department of Health's director of finance and investment.

The Government has appointed Mr Philip Gushing as non-executive chair of DCI Biologicals. Mr Gushing is highly qualified for this role. His previous positions include Chief Executive of Inchcape (1996–9) and Chief Executive of Vitec Group PLC (2000–1). He is also currently Chairman of Paragon Print and Packaging Limited, Spalding, Lincs, and a non executive director of Ikon Office Solutions Inc, Philadelphia, USA. He was appointed to Chair DCI because of his extensive international business experience, including a career involving American operations since 1977. He also has extensive international acquisitions experience built up over 20 years.

This deal is a logical extension of the existing relationship between the NHS and an established US plasma supplier, Life Resources, and is a pragmatic solution to the problem of securing supply.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The Forty-eighth Report of the Reviewing Committee on the Export of Works of Art for 2001–02 has been published today and copies have been laid before Parliament. The Reviewing Committee provides independent advice to the Minister for the Arts on the pre-eminence of cultural objects seeking export licences, using the Waverley criteria. During the year, following recommendations from the Reviewing Committee, temporary bars were placed on the export of 34 objects, including paintings, drawings, photographs, sculptures, furniture and manuscripts. Of these, 20 items valued at £2.7 million were purchased by institutions in the UK. The report contains the Reviewing Committee's comments on policy matters relating to the operation of the export control and the protection of cultural objects, and details of each case considered during the reporting year 1 July 2001–30 June 2002.

LORD CHANCELLOR

King Edward VIII (Abdication)

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Ms Rosie Winterton): In an answer to a written Question on 11 June 2002, I stated that official papers relating to the abdication of King Edward VIII would need to be re-reviewed by Departments before release and that it was hoped that the results of the review would be known and put into effect by the end of the year. I am pleased to announce that the review has now been completed; the papers have been identified and are now being prepared for release. It is expected that they will be made available at the Public Record Office during January.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 19 December 2002

CABINET OFFICE

Cabinet Office Report

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Cabinet Office Performance Report 2002 has today been published and laid before Parliament. Copies have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Civil Service Sickness Absence

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The report 'Analysis of Sickness Absence in the Civil Service 2001' prepared for my department by Aon Limited shows that by applying the same methodology as in previous years the average level of sickness absence was 9.2 days per staff year. This represents a 7 per cent. decrease over the equivalent figure of 9.9 days set out in the report for 2000. The report contains a comprehensive analysis of the 2001 figures.

Calculated on the basis of absence per person, the figure for the Civil Service was 8.0 days. According to the CBI survey for 2001, this compares favourably with a figure of 10.1 days for the public sector as a whole and is only slightly more than the average rate of 7.1 days for all sectors.

Departments have published Service Delivery Agreements which contain their individual targets for reducing sickness absence. Overall the Civil Service has been targeted to reduce sickness absence by 30 per cent. (to 7.2 days per staff year) by 2003 against the 1998 baseline. My department is continuing to work with other departments and agencies as they take forward their plans to reduce sickness absence.

I have placed copies of the Aon report in the Libraries of the House.

Open Government Initiative Figures

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The number of records released under the Open Government Initiative since its introduction in 1992 now stands at over 124,000 and relates to releases up to 31 December 2001. The breakdown of releases is as follows:

Department	*Total*
Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	6,163
Cabinet Office	8,113
Office of National Statistics	401
Crown Prosecution Service	1,054
HM Customs and Excise	1,008
Ministry of Defence	12,052
Department for Education and Sills	3,802
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	22,277
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	18,600
Department of Health	2,122
Department for Work and Pensions	3,322
Home Office	3,553
Board of Inland Revenue	2
Lord Chancellor's Department	6,448
Court Services	3,521
Metropolitan Police	1,151
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	0
Northern Ireland (NI and Depts, Northern Ireland Office and NI Court Services)	11,808
Department for International Development	749
Scottish Executive	4,928
Department of Trade and Industry	651
HM Treasury	995
Wales Office, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales	983
Government Communications Headquarters	9,083
Security Service	1,332
Total	124,118

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Higher Education

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): The level of support available to students in the academic year 2003–04 will be 2.4 per cent. higher than for 2002–03, in line with forecast price increases. I am placing a Memorandum in the Library giving details of the new loan, grant and fee rates for 2003–04. These rates will be incorporated in the Education (Student Support) Regulations, which cover support for eligible students under the current arrangements, and in the Education (Mandatory Awards) Regulations and the Education (Student Loans) Amendment Regulations, which cover the decreasing number of students who are still receiving awards and loans under the pre-1998 arrangements. These regulations will all be laid before Parliament in due course.

Departmental Spending Plans

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): On 9 December I set out, *Official Report* col. 22, our outline investment and reform plans for the education and skills sector, except for higher education. This statement gives the House some further details of spending, within the totals already announced, in a number of key areas. I also attach a table which sets out in detail the allocations I have made. I will announce our plans for Higher Education in January.

SURE START

A strong early start for children is vital to longer term educational success, particularly for children from poorer backgrounds. And a sound educational start in life is the best foundation from which to lift children out of poverty. We have already announced that the new, expanded Sure Start Unit will transform childcare, early years education and family and health support services with total funds, including Education Formula Spending (EPS), of £850/1223/1510 million over the three years to 2005–06. By that year, this represents over a third more than was available for 2002–03. These sums will be supplemented by using £203/103/129 million of accumulated End Year Flexibility from Sure Start programmes.

Some 50 per cent. of the total budget each year (£620/689/788 million) is already earmarked to go direct to local authorities in support of this work. I can now set out in some detail how that resource will be invested.

(a) Nursery Education

£344/327/345 million. As I made clear on 9 December, I will be transferring £319/322/340 million to Education Formula Spending to enable local authorities to provide universal provision for three year olds. As a result, all three year olds will have a free nursery education place in their area by April 2004, six months earlier than originally planned. In 2003–04 £20 million of capital grant will help local authorities whose physical infrastructure might otherwise prevent them reaching universal provision. And as part of our commitment to early education £5 million is being made available in each of the three years to develop maintained nursery schools.

(b) Disadvantaged Areas

£471/615/843 million. These funds will allow us to deliver 524 Sure Start programmes, to continue the 9 pilots to test how best to mainstream Sure Start methods and 50 programmes covering rural and small areas. £83/99/138 million of these funds will extend the neighbourhood nurseries programme, specifically to add 28,800 more places by March 2006 to the 45,000 we aim to set up by March 2004. We shall spend £5/63/181 million on children's centres in disadvantaged areas to reach at least 650,000 children by March 2006. This funding also pays for the 100 Early Excellence Centres by March 2004 (£25/15/13 million) promised in our 2001 Manifesto.

(c) Other childcare places and support funding

£136/216/258 million. Within this amount £19/30/40 million will develop Out of School Childcare places in order to achieve our target of 250,000 places by March 2006. It provides funding for childminders' start up costs and support for childminder networks. Some £20/29/35 million will also be available to support advice, support and training to enable children with special needs to access and benefit from services. To manage the increasing demand brought about by the expansion of the programme, local authorities will receive £62/85/87 million to support the work of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships.

(d) Training and workforce development

£52/63/76 million. We want to develop a workforce of highly competent childcare workers, and for all sectors to benefit from staff trained in Foundation Stage curriculum and potentially progression to Qualified Teacher Status. These funds will support workers in achieving level 2 and 3 qualifications through childcare workforce training (£7/14/27 million), provide local authorities with funds to support training in Foundation Stage curriculum and practice, for practitioners in maintained, private and voluntary sectors (£36/37/37 million) and support the newly launched progression route to a higher level qualification and then to Qualified Teacher Status (£9/12/12 million).

(e) Central Support

£50/105/117 million. This will cover a range of activities key to the success of the programme including Criminal Record Bureau checks (£5/6/7 million) to pay for checks for childcare workers to avoid this being a disincentive to registration, recruitment and advertising campaigns (£4/9/9 million) and research and evaluation (£6/6/6 million). Funding will also provide for Business support (£3/9/9 million) as well as work with voluntary sector and other organisations (£7/8/8 million) with an active interest in children's well being. An unallocated provision of £0/33/44 million provides money for new projects to be developed over the later two years.

SECTOR SKILLS COUNCILS (SSCs)

I have already announced that we will be investing over £10 billion a year in skills by 2005–06. If that resource is to be used effectively we need to engage employers at all levels, including enabling them to work with others in their business sector. I am encouraged by early progress being made to establish the UK wide network of Sector Skills Councils. SSCs offer employers the opportunity to articulate the skills needs of their sector clearly, influence decisions by education and training providers about skills supply and deliver sustained improvements in productivity and service delivery. I am announcing today a substantial increase in funding to the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) to enable the completion of the 'Skills for Business' network of Sector Skills Councils and to help address skills issues across the economy. The total planned funding for SSDA will rise to £427 457 48 million. This represents a doubling of the Agency's funding over the period from 2002–03.

PRISON EDUCATION

The Prisoners' Learning and Skills Unit, which is managed jointly between my Department and the Home Office, will increase dramatically both learning opportunities and learning outcomes in prisons. In fulfilment of our manifesto commitment and with particular focus on provision for 18–21 year olds, we are providing £85/110/125 million over the spending review period compared with the £66 million invested in 2002–03. These funds, together with the Capital Modernisation Funding agreed in April that we have begun investing, will help deliver a tailored coherent programme of learning for prisoners from induction and assessment on arrival in prison through to resettlement in the community on release.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

ICT is at the heart of universal access, educational transformation and preparing children, young people and adults for the knowledge economy. It has the potential to

Raise standards

Widen access to lifelong learning

Engage poor performers, and

Build the skills needed for work and life.

Our investment in new technologies since 1998 has already produced significant achievements. These include NGfL in schools; the National Learning Network, UK Online Centres and Ufi/learndirect in post-16 learning; and the eUniversities project, and the high speed teaching and research JANET network in higher education.

The 2002 Spending Review allocations which I have already announced will enable us to build on these achievements and reap the benefits of ICT for teachers and learners across all sectors. Our further investment in developing ICT infrastructure, content and skills means that we will support ICT programmes totalling, once matched funding from LEAs is included, over £820/858/920 million across the next three years on top of the investment by institutions themselves. For schools, Spending Review funding means that we will

Connect all schools to the Internet at broadband speeds

Deliver digital resources into the classroom through Curriculum Online

Ensure that even more teachers have personal access to ICT, and

Further embed the use of ICT across the curriculum to help deliver our standards and re-modelling agendas.

The majority of funding will go to schools through the Standards Fund and, including LEA matched funding, spending on ICT will have increased to £660 million by 2005–06.

In post-16 learning, the high speed JANET network will be extended beyond FE colleges to adult and community institutions, enabling access across the LSC sector. Additionally, a post-16 equivalent of curriculum online will make high quality digital content and resources for e-learning available to lecturers and students. £14 million of additional resources will be provided in 2005–06 to ensure we continue to have a sustainable network of UK Online Centres. In higher education, further investment in the high speed network will bring even greater capacity and resilience for this world-class infrastructure, and enable a smooth transition to the new Super JANET by 2006.

SCHOOLS STANDARDS FUND

I announced last week that around £1.5 billion would be made available in each of the next 3 years to the schools standards fund to enable schools to galvanise reform on standards, behaviour and choice. Details of the Standards Fund grants available to schools and LEAs for 2003–04 were provided to LEAs on 29 November. This included the allocations to individual LEAs of most grants; some allocations, where the data needed to calculate LEAs1 allocations is not yet available, will be made later. The Department also circulated to LEAs on 10 December a forward indication of the sums planned to be made available, nationally, through the Standards Fund in 2004–05 and 2005–06.

Copies of both these documents have been placed in the Library.

OFSTED

I have allocated £203/206/215 million to support OfSTED over the next three years. We recognise that it has an important role to play in monitoring and reporting publicly on what goes on in schools and elsewhere, The extra resources take account of OfSTED's increasing role in the regulation of childcare and post 16 inspections as well as school inspections in the maintained and independent sectors. We look forward to working with OfSTED as they help us to identify where improvements can be made in our continued drive to raise standards.

RUNNING MY DEPARTMENT

I am determined to ensure that the Department for Education and Skills continues to look at ways it can become more efficient in the way it operates and remains at the forefront of public service reform. I am allocating £231/246/245 million to Departmental administration costs. In 2003–04, the Department will also use around £16 million of its accumulated end year flexibility for administration costs. In real terms this allocation represents a 1.7 per cent. reduction in my Department's administration costs between 2002–03 and 2005–06. Over the same period programme expenditure will increase by 17 per cent.in real terms. By 2005–06, for every additional £1 we spend on administration, we shall be spending an additional £500 on programmes.

I am allocating a further £29/35/32 million in programme funds to support evaluation, research, advertising, publicity, communications and ensuring the Department's services can be accessed on-line.

The table attached shows the full allocations I have made. It includes a number of other allocations to support school-age education, in particular for initial teacher training, Academies and City Technology Colleges, and the National College for School Leadership as well as small but important allocations to continue to develop the Connexions Card, to support

joint work with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport to foster creativity in schools and to encourage innovation in schools including through the development of Federations.

I will be vigilant in ensuring that these substantial resources for education and skills are used efficiently and effectively over the next three years and are applied in order to meet the ambitious targets we have set for children, young people and adults. If resources are not being used to best effect, I will not hesitate to ensure they are switched to where they are most needed, and will notify Parliament of any significant movements.

Allocation of DfES SR2002 settlement

£ millions

	2003–04	*2004–05*	*2005–06*
Total allocation [1]	*49,632*	*53,039*	*57,965*
Of which			
Resource[2]	21,143	22,286	24,143
Capital	4,061	5,023	5,753
EFS	24,428	25,731	28,069
Breakdown of Allocation			
Sure Start	*850*	*1,223*	*1,510*
Of which			
Sure Start spending	*734*	*1,005*	*1,299*
Planned use of Sure Start EYF[3]	*-203*	*-103*	*-129*
Assumed spending through EFS	*319*	*322*	*340*
Schools allocations	*31,597*	*33,492*	*35,984*
Of which			
EFS (excluding assumed spending on Sure Start	24,109	25,410	27,729
Schools Resource—Standards Fund	1,567	1,398	1,631
Schools Resource—Leadership Incentive Grant	175	175	175
Schools Resource—School Standards Grant	799	849	872
Schools Resource—Threshold and Performance Pay	742	844	0
Schools Resource—National College for School Leadership	77	87	92
Schools Resource—Academies and CTCs	126	184	245
Schools Resource—Innovation	10	10	10
Schools Resource—primary Modern Foreign Languages	4	8	10
Schools Resource—Creativity	5	5	10
Schools Resource—Initial Teacher Training[4]	345	375	415
Schools resource—Music and Dance Scheme	14	16	18
Schools Resource—Assisted Places Scheme	30	10	3
Schools Resource—Gifted and Talented [5]	8	8	8
Schools Resource—other Central spending	186	154	264
Leadership Reserve	0	50	100
Schools Capital—School Buildings[6]	3,016	3,487	3,959
Schools Capital—ICT	384	422	443
Skills	*9,227*	*9,859*	*10,487*
Of which			
Learning and Skills Council Allocation[7]	*7,923*	*8,496*	*9,074*
Non LSC—Adult Skills			
Prisoner education	85	110	125
Sector Skills Councils	42	45	48
RDA: Skills fund	43	43	43
Ufl	44	44	44
UK Online centres (inc capital)	14	20	28
Financial Support for Adults	66	106	106
Employer Training Pilots	130	0	0
Adult Basic Skills Development	76	76	76
Non LSC—adult skills (small programmes)	49	49	45
Union Learning Fund	11	11	11
Non LSC—Youth			
Connexions Service[8]	455	500	515
Connexions Card	5	15	14
QCA	60	60	60
Youth Service disabled access	8	8	8
Millennium Volunteers	15	15	15
Non LSC—14[en rule]19 (small programmes)	89	100	98
Gap Year	5		
Non LSC other			
Non LSC [en rule]FE	78	130	147
International programmes	29	31	30
Other	*7,958*	*8,464*	*9,984*
Of which			
Children's Fund	200	200	200
DfES admin. Costs and related spending[9]	260	281	277
OFSTED	203	206	215
Service Development Fund	0	0	500
Unallocated funds[10]	7,379	8,109	8,752
Behaviour—Post 14 Contribution[11]	17	17	40
Planned use of EYF[3]	-101	-349	0
Additional allocations[12]			
PFI credits	850	1,050	1,200
Transfers to EFS for teacher pensions	590	610	640

[1] An additional £109 million from the Windfall Tax margin allocated in the 2002 Pre-Budget Report.

[2] Excluding capital grants (in the Capital Line) and money transferred to EFS.

[3] Subject to Parliamentary approval, the Department plans to use accumulated End Year Flexibility to supplement the funds available from the SR2002 settlement.

[4] Includes miscellaneous support costs.

[5] Excludes Standards Fund Gifted and Talented programmes.

[6] Excluding PFI credits.

[7] These figures are lower than those published in the LSC's Grant Letter issued on 5 December. The Grant Letter figures include an element of the funds transferred for teachers pensions contributions and CMF funding which is allocated outside the SR settlement.

[8] This figure includes provision for VAT.

[9] Includes Departmental spending on research and central spending on advertising and publicity.

[10] Includes Departmental unallocated provision, Higher Education Baselines and funding to be allocated for Higher Education.

[11] This contributes towards the total Behaviour package of £134/149/186 million announced on 12 December as the remainder is funded through the standards fund and other budgets.

[12] Not included in figures above. Excludes Education Maintenance Allowances which are funded through AME.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): On 5 December I placed in the Library a copy of the Home Secretary's proposals for allocation of police grant for England in 2003–04. I have today placed in the Library a revised copy of those proposals which includes information on allocations of police grant for Wales in 2003–04. The proposals in respect of England are unchanged from the earlier ones. The Home Secretary and I intend to implement the revised proposals subject to consideration of any representations we receive about them and to the approval of the House.

Funding the police service properly is a top priority for this government. The settlement I am announcing today continues that commitment. The total provision for policing in England and Wales, to be supported by grant in 2003–04 is £9,683 million. This is a cash rise of £566 million or 6.2 per cent over the provision for 2002–03. This includes principal formula police grant, direct Home Office spending, the standard spending on which revenue support grant is based.

Provisional grants (i.e. Home Office Police Grant, Revenue Support Grant and National Non Domestic Rates) for Welsh police authorities in 2003–04 compared with 2002–03 are given in Table 1. Where Welsh police authorities fall be low the 3 per cent "floor" applied to English police authorities, they will receive Home Office special grant to bring them up to the minimum increase of 3 per cent. Grant increases for individual authorities vary. Differences between authorities reflect funding formula changes resulting from the recent consultation process over formula changes and year-to-year data changes. Changes to the police funding formula:

The police funding formula that distributes Home Office police grant to police authorities has been reviewed as part of an overall review of local authority funding formulae.

We consulted on proposals for the police funding formula that would make the policing formula more responsive to current policing needs. The six options for change relating specifically to the police funding formula published in the consultation paper were to:

update the activity analysis data on which over 70 per cent of the formula allocation is based;

incorporate the £30million Rural Policing Fund into the main grant formula;

remove the remaining component that was still based on police establishments;

increase the personal crime component by 5 per cent;

increase the public order component by 5 per cent;

introduce a deprivation component at 2 per cent.

Consultation on the proposals was wide ranging. In the light of comments received, the Home Secretary has decided that two changes will be made to the police funding formula. These changes were widely supported by the policing community during the consultation process.

Activity analysis data has been updated to make the formula more responsive to current policing needs. Up to this year, the pattern of resources across policing functions has been calculated using data collected in 1995. It is important to bring it up to date to reflect contemporary pressures on the police service.

The Home Secretary has agreed to reduction of the 'establishment component' in the formula from 10 per cent to zero. This change finally removes the old damping mechanism that cushioned police authorities from the full impact of change when the present formula was introduced in 1995. The component had been reduced from 50 per cent to 10 per cent before the moratorium on formula change was introduced in 1999. The change will complete the process of phasing out the damping. Other damping mechanisms, in the form of floors and ceilings on grant change, are now in place.

The Home Secretary has announced already that the Rural Policing Fund will remain unchanged as a separate £30 million fund to meet the particular needs of forces with the most widespread populations. A proportion of this will be available to police forces in Wales. There has been no change to the method of allocation. Data changes have been applied as usual which accounts for the year-on-year variations in allocations for authorities.

Specific grants for police authorities:

As well as general grant, police authorities will receive additional funding through several specific grants for particular schemes. Some of these grants will be available to all forces in England and Wales, others to specific forces to help meet their particular requirements. Funding for some of these initiatives will be available on a matched funding basis. I estimate that specific grants up to £23million will be available to Welsh police authorities.

The main specific grants are:

Crime Fighting Fund: this will continue for the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06. Police officers recruited between April 2000 and March 2003 through the CFF will continue to be funded at 100 per cent. There will be funds for the recruitment of a further 600 officers in 2003–04 and more in the subsequent two years. Officers recruited in 2003–04 and future years will be funded at 75 per cent;

Airwave: further funds will be available for the start-up operational costs of authorities taking Airwave in 2003–04 and to enable those forces who have the Airwave service to purchase additional menu services.The Home Office will continue to meet the core charges for the service provider. Additional capital will be available to police authorities.

Basic Command Unit (BCU) funds: £50 million for BCU's, that are at the forefront of local policing. Grants will be targeted towards forces with BCU's in high crime areas to help reduce crime in partnership with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships;

Police Negotiating Board (PNB): the pay and conditions package agreed by PNB is fully provided for in the settlement. The package introduces new elements into police pay such as payments for the most experienced officers who can demonstrate a high level of professional competence and extra rewards for officers in the most difficult and demanding posts. A separate special grant is available to underpin the PNB proposals for special priority payments.

Community Support Officers (CSOs): funding will be available to support the costs of CSOs who will free up police officer time, will play a crucial role in providing reassurance and who will have some powers to deal with low level crime and anti-social behaviour. The provision will fund in full CSOs recruited in 2002–03 and fund those recruited in 2003–04 at 50 per cent.

Police authority capital:

The Home Secretary and I intend to allocate to police authorities in England and Wales provision of capital grant and supplementary credit approvals of approximately £190 million in 2003–04. Within this allocation funds will be set aside for a second Premises Improvement Fund to which forces may bid for funds specifically to improve the working conditions of police officers.

In addition capital grants for the introduction of Airwave will be made available to those authorities taking up the radio communications service in 2003–04. Similar arrangements were made for 2002–03.

There will be capital provision for the case and custody project of the Criminal Justice IT system. This will be supported by resource funding as well.

Central spending on policing:

The main specific items are the DNA expansion programme, the National Strategy for Police Information Systems and the Airwave contractor's core charges. In addition, provision is made for the costs of organisations supporting policing, mainly the Police Information Technology Organisation (PITO), Centrex (the Central Police Training and Development Authority) and scientific and technical facilities.

Efficiency:

The settlement continues to take account of the Home Secretary's commitment to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the police service. Future police grant allocations will be considered in the light of police authorities meeting the 2 per cent efficiency improvements. The PNB agreement includes a service-wide target to secure a 15 per cent reduction in overtime expenditure over the three years from 2003-04. Implementation of activity based costing in forces will be another factor considered when assessing the efficiency target.

Conclusion:

We are keeping our promise to the police and public to match reform with investment. In November we published the first National Policing Plan which sets out strategic national priorities for the police service. With this settlement we are delivering our investment in the police service by providing the resources to help the police do their job more effectively. The police service is receiving the resources to benefit from an historic pay and conditions deal and an action plan to cut bureaucracy. At the same time both the police service and the public will continue to benefit from record police numbers that are helping to deliver on high visibility policing targets and to reduce the fear of crime.

Table 1: Police Grant Allocations by Welsh police authority (includes Home office special grants to maintain floor increases but excludes all other specific and special grants)

Police Authority		*2002/03 Allocation £m*	*2003/04 Allocation £m*	*% Change*
Dyfed-Powys	(1)	47.9	49.3	3%
Gwent		66.7	69.6	4.3%
North Wales	(2)	70.1	73.4	4.6%
South Wales	(1)	158.3	163.0	3%
Total		343.0	355.2	3.6%

Notes:

1. Grant allocations for 2003–04 include special grant from the Home Office to ensure a 3 per cent. minimum increase over 2002–03.

2. Grant allocation for 2002–03 included special grant from the Home Office to ensure a 2.3 per cent. minimum increase over 2002/03.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD & RURAL AFFAIRS

Hunting Bill

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): As requested during the final stages of the Second Reading debate in the House of Commons on Monday night, I wish to respond by written statement to the debate.

The Government has a specific manifesto commitment to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on hunting with dogs. The manifesto also made it clear that we have no intention whatsoever of placing restrictions on the sports of angling and shooting.

Many of the questions raised in the debate can be answered by a careful reading of the Bill itself, it seeks to be tough but fair. It seeks to resolve the issue in a way which is based on the right principles tested against evidence, that will make good law, that is enforceable and that will stand the test of time. But as well as being practical it deals clearly with the moral issue. At the heart of the Bill is the key purpose—to prevent cruelty associated with hunting with dogs. It tackles cruelty but it also recognises the need to deal with pests and to protect livestock and crops.

The standards for the utility and cruelty tests are set out in the Bill. The test of utility requires the activity to be shown to be necessary in an area to prevent serious damage by the quarry species to livestock, crops, property or biodiversity. The definition of cruelty is well established in law: it is the causing of unnecessary or avoidable suffering. It is important to be clear that no Bill could prevent all suffering associated with pest control. What the Bill does is to ensure that hunting with dogs is permitted only where it is necessary, and where it is established that the activity proposed would cause the least suffering. The cruelty test is set out in clause 8 of the Bill and demonstrates that suggestions that the Bill would cause more suffering are mistaken.

The two tests have been applied consistently to all the activities and based on the evidence.

In the case of deer hunting, this is banned absolutely because it does not meet the cruelty test. Stalking and shooting will always be available and are less likely to cause less suffering. This is made clear by paragraph 6.39 of the Burns Report:

> "Stalking, if carried out to a high standard and with the availability of a dog or dogs to help find any wounded deer that escape, is in principle the better method of culling deer from an animal welfare perspective. In particular, it obviates the need to chase the deer in the way which occurs in hunting".

The Government's response to concern about the effect a ban on deer hunting may have on the deer population is to secure the control of the populations through local deer management groups. These groups operate both in areas where there is deer hunting and in other areas where there are healthy deer herds and we will encourage them to operate effectively in all areas.

Hare coursing is also banned absolutely because the intention of the activity is to test the speed and agility of dogs and not to control hare numbers. Burns (para 5.94) made clear that there is little or no need to control hare numbers and also (para 6.67–68) drew a distinction between the suffering caused to hares that were killed in coursing and those killed in hare hunting. I have seen nothing in more recent evidence to lead me to disagree with Burn's conclusions.

There are no restrictions on hunting with dogs of rats and rabbits because this method of controlling the populations satisfies the two tests and causes less suffering than alternative methods of control such as poisoning or snaring.

The proposal in the Bill that Parliament should establish a system for making case-by-case decisions in regard to other hunting activities is to ensure that cruelty is prevented. An applicant would have to show that both the tests are met in the case of the particular hunting proposed. The applicant's evidence would need to cover any relevant local factors, the period for which the applicant undertakes the activity, and what hunting practices the applicant wishes to undertake. A designated animal welfare body will also be able to provide evidence regarding the application. The registrar (and in the event of an appeal the tribunal) must determine, on the basis of an objective assessment of the evidence provided by both the applicant and the animal welfare body, whether the proposed hunting satisfies the two tests. If appropriate, for example on questions of bio-diversity, the registrar (or the tribunal) may seek advice from English Nature or the Countryside Council for Wales.

This is not a matter of balancing the two tests. Both tests must be satisfied for hunting to continue. In other words, the registrar or the tribunal must be satisfied that the proposed hunting would be for one of the purposes set out in clause 8(1) and that purpose cannot reasonably be achieved by a method that would cause less suffering. So hunting will be permitted only where no method that causes less suffering is available for achieving a necessary purpose.

I was asked about the effect of the Bill on arrangements for the disposal of fallen stock. It should be remembered that the European Unions Animal Byproducts Regulation will ban routine on farm burial and burning of animal carcasses from 30 April 2003. This will mean that the existing fallen stock service provided by a number of hunts could only continue with considerable investment in new equipment. So the future of the hunts1 service is in doubt irrespective of the Bill. The Government has been holding discussions with the livestock and disposal industries with the aim of developing a national fallen stock scheme.

I look forward to discussions in committee where many of the detailed points raised during the debate can be fully addressed.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Alternatives to the Baton Round

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Jane Kennedy): Today I have placed in the Library a copy of the Report on the third phase of the research programme into alternative policing approaches towards the management of conflict. Copies of the reports on the previous two phases of the programme were placed in the Library of the House on 4 April and 30 November 2001.

The programme was set up, in response to the Patten recommendations on public order equipment, to:

> establish whether a less potentially lethal alternative to the baton round is available; and
>
> review the public order equipment which is presently available or could be developed in order to expand the range of tactical options available to operational commanders.

I am grateful to the Steering Group, and to the many contributors to the programme, including those in government service, the police, academics and other experts, for their sustained commitment.

In summary, the report:

> makes clear that there is no off the shelf, commercially available, effective and acceptable alternative to the baton round at this time,
>
> gives further details on the decision of the Police Service of Northern Ireland to place an order for six vehicle-mounted water cannon announced on 18 July this year;
>
> describes the extensive research into alternative less lethal systems conducted over the past twelve months;

highlights the efforts made in developing an integrated and community-oriented approach to the management of conflict. This report contains both an important account of the approach developed by the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the international context.

The report describes the progress in researching two alternative technologies offered by the private sector, building on the comprehensive evaluation in the phase 2 report. It also sets out the urgent development research that the Northern Ireland Office has commissioned from the Government's own professional advisers. This is currently assessing the scope to develop both an attenuated energy (perhaps soft-nosed) projectile and a discriminate irritant projectile. A further report on the potential of the two alternative systems will be published in due course, although completion of any programme through to manufacture would inevitably be resource intensive and take several years.

The aim of this programme is not only to take research forward, but also to encourage wider debate about the issue of conflict management. The programme has been conducted in an open and transparent way, including publication of developments over the past twelve months and presentations at conferences. The report invites comments on a number of specific issues, that have particular application in Northern Ireland.

Northern Ireland Census 2001

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Ian Pearson): Copies of the second report of the Northern Ireland Census 2001—'Northern Ireland Census 2001 Key Statistics' have today been laid in the Northern Ireland Assembly as required by statute. Copies have also been lodged in the House of Commons Library and the House of Lords Library.

TREASURY

Privately Operated Tolls (VAT)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): On 12 September 2000, the European Court of Justice ruled that privately operated tolls should bear VAT. The Government will implement this ruling with effect from 1 February 2003, once consultations with toll operators have been concluded.

At the time of this ruling, the Government made clear its intention that motorists should not pay higher toll charges as a result of the imposition of VAT. Our intention remains that tolls will not increase on account of VAT being levied from 1 February.

Debt Management Office

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Ruth Kelly): The second published Debt Management Account covering the year to the 31 March 2002 is being laid before the House and published today. Copies will be available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Tonnage Tax

The Paymaster General (Dawn Primarolo): The tonnage tax was introduced in 2000 as part of a package of measures designed to help revive the UK shipping industry. In order to place a check on the cost of the tonnage tax, there are rules that restrict the amount of capital allowances that can be claimed by a lessor for expenditure on a ship that is used for activities within the tonnage tax. These rules apply only to finance leases. Some lessors are, however, now offering long-term leases for ships that have the many of the characteristics of finance leases without being finance leases in form. Such leases can be used to allow lessors to claim significantly more in capital allowances than had been intended when the tonnage tax was introduced. The extra cost is not justified and does nothing to further the objectives of the regime. The next Finance Bill will, therefore, contain a provision extending the restrictions. The provision will take effect for leases entered into on or after today.

The Inland Revenue are today publishing further details of the proposal. Draft legislation containing the provision will be issued shortly and the Inland Revenue will consult with those concerned on the details of that legislation.

Home Care Services (VAT)

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): The introduction of state registers for domiciliary care agencies provides the Government with the opportunity to extend the VAT exemption for welfare services to those services provided by state-regulated private welfare agencies. I am pleased to announce that when the House returns from the Christmas recess the Government will lay the necessary change before Parliament.

FOREIGN & COMMONWEALTH

Council of the European Union

The Minister for Europe (Mr. Denis MacShane):

Date	*Location*	*Event*
January		
9	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
9	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (To Be Confirmed)
16	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
20	Brussels	EUROGROUP (Evening)
20	Brussels	Convention Plenary
20–21	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
21	Brussels	ECOFIN
24	Nafplion	Employment Council (Ministerial informal)
27–28	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council
28	Brussels	EU-ASEAN Ministerial
30	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
February		
5	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
6–7	Brussels	Convention Plenary
10–11	Brussels	AGRICULTURE & FISHERIES Council (To Be Confirmed)
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
17	Brussels	EUROGROUP (evening)
18	Brussels	ECOFIN
20	Brussels	EDUCATION, YOUTH & CULTURE Council (to be confirmed)

Date	*Location*	*Event*
22	Thessaloniki	Energy Council (Ministerial Informal)
24–25	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations Council Agriculture & Fisheries
26	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
27–28	Brussels	Convention Plenary
27–28	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
28	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
March		
1–2	Ioannina	Informal Education
3	Brussels	Competitiveness Council
4	Brussels	Environment Council
6	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
6	Luxembourg	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Luxembourg	EUROGROUP (evening)
7	Luxembourg	ECOFIN
7	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
13	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
14–15	Athens	Informal Defence Meeting
17–18	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Luxembourg	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
18–19	Luxembourg	General Affairs & External Relations Council
21	BRUSSELS	EUROPEAN COUNCIL
27	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
27–28	Luxembourg	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council)
27–28	Athens	EU-Rio Group, EU-MERCOSUR
28–29	Veria	Informal Justice & Home Affairs
31	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council (to be confirmed)
April		
2	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
3–4	Brussels	Convention Plenary
4	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs
4–6	Hania (Crete)	Informal ECOFIN (Ministerial)
5	Lisbon	Europe—Africa Summit
5	Ioannina	Ministerial Meeting on Education (Informal)
10	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
11–13	Chania	ECOFIN (Informal)
14	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
14	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries
16	Athens	European Conference
16	Athens	Signature Of The Accession (Provisional Date)
23	Brussels	Meeting of the Praesidium
24–25	Brussels	Convention Plenary
May		
2–4	(Greece)	Gymnich (Informal Foreign Ministers)
5	Athens	Informal Environment (Ministerial)
5–6	Brussels	Education, Youth & Culture Council (To be confirmed)
8	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
12–13	Corfu	tAgriculture (Ministerial Informal)
12–13	Brussels	Competitiveness
12	Brussels	EUROGRUP
13	Brussels	ECOFIN
14	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
14	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
15–16	Brussels	Convention Plenary
16	Brussels	EU—ACP Ministerial
16–17	Halkidiki	Informal Regional Policy (Ministerial)
16–17	Cruise off	Informal Transport & Merchant Marine (Ministerial) Greece
17	Brussels	EU—W. Balkans (Zagreb Process)
19	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations (+ Defence)
20	Brussels	~~General Affairs & External~~ Relations
22	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
24	Thessaloniki	Informal Culture (Ministerial)
26–27	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
26–27	Athens	EUROMED Conference (Mid Term Ministerial)
27	Brussels	Environment Council
28	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
30–31	Brussels	Convention Plenary
31	St. Petesburg	EU—Russia Summit
June		
2	Brussels	EUROGROUP
2–3	Alexandroupoli	Development Co-operation (Ministerial Informal)
2–3	Brussels	Transport, Telecom & Energy Council
3	Brussels	ECOFIN
4	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
5–6	Brussels	Convention Plenary
5–6	Brussels	Justice & Home Affairs Council
5–6	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
6	Rhodes	Informal Public Administration
11	Brussels	Meeting of the Presidium
11–12	Brussels	Agriculture & Fisheries Council
12–13	Brussels	Convention Plenary
17–18	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
20	Halkidiki	EUROPEAN COUNCIL
21	Halkidiki	Zagreb Process II Summit
22	Brussels	General Affairs & External Relations
24	Brussels	Employment, Social Policy, Health & Consumer Affairs Council
July		
10	Varese	Informal Council/ Troika
11–12	Varese	Informal Council of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs.
17	Treviso	Informal meeting of the EU Employment Committee.
21	Rome	Meeting of MISEP focal points. (Mutual Information System on Employment Policies in Europe)
24	Milan	European Conference on Discrimination.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Malcolm Wicks): I am pleased to announce that 88 of the 135 bids submitted to the Help Fund have been successful. As around a quarter of these

are joint bids from groups of Local Authorities, the Fund will help 272 Authorities overall. The Help Fund was set up to address core problems in Housing Benefit delivery at a local level and is a practical demonstration of the Government's commitment to working with local authorities to improve the standard of Housing Benefit administration. The funded projects totalling over £4.6 million will make significant improvements in areas such as training, customer service and IT capabilities. I am placing a full list of the successful bids in the library today.

CULTURE, MEDIA & SPORT

DCMS/Strategy Unit Report

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The joint DCMS/Strategy Unit report on sport and physical activity will be published today.

Sport is an important part of many people's lives. It defines us as a nation. It teaches us about life. We learn self-discipline and teamwork from it. We learn how to win with grace and lose with dignity. It gets us fit. It keeps us healthy. It forms a central part of the cultural and recreational parts of our lives. Millions of us are involved in one way or another: as players, as coaches or officials, organising clubs, teams and fixtures, or just watching.

Sport and physical activity can help the Government achieve key objectives. Crucially, it can help us tackle serious health issues. It can also help to contribute to other areas, such as crime reduction, social inclusion and help with the development of young people in schools.

Because of our commitment to sport it is now receiving unprecedented levels of public funding—through both the Lottery and the Exchequer. This joint report on sport and physical activity is about how to get more of that cash to the front line and spend less on bureaucracy, on box ticking and procedures. It makes some fundamental recommendations of how to reform the public and other structures which handle money in sport. And it presents our view of how we would like the sporting world to develop over the next 15 to 20 years.

The key messages in the report are that we should:

increase participation in sport, because of the health benefits it can bring and, together with its potential to help reduce crime, tapkle social exclusion and provide a better education for young people;

enhance our international success, building on our achievements at the Olympic Games in Sydney and the Commonwealth Games in Manchester;

adopt a more focused and strategic approach when bidding for major sporting events, with each of the role of each of the stakeholders being clearly defined;

remove layers of bureaucracy and help ensure that more funding and help gets to where it's needed most: to the athletes and the thousands of clubs up and down the country.

We can't get there alone. And nor should we. But with the help of the sports councils, governing bodies, local authorities and all the other organisations and individuals in sport, we are determined to achieve that.

Copies of the report are available on the website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/reports.

Video-on-Demand Services

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): I am pleased to announce that the video-on-demand industry has made excellent progress with the development of a binding code of practice to apply when video-on-demand services are de-regulated, and have written to me with details of that Code. I am satisfied that the Code represents a system that will provide adequate protection for children, and to subscribers to video-on-demand services. I have asked the industry to keep me informed of its progress in establishing the self-regulatory system set out in the Code, so that it can come fully into effect on enactment of the relevant provisions of the Communications Bill.

I have placed copies of the Code of Practice in the libraries of both Houses and the text is also available on the DCMS Departmental website at www.culture.gov.uk.

TRANSPORT

Motorcyclists' Visors

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I have decided to retain the current limit of tint for visors at 50 per cent. following a three month consultation on possible options.

The large majority of motorcyclists were in favour of dark visors which they regard as the best way to reduce glare. Road safety organisations expressed concerns about the safety of other vulnerable road users, given the potential for misuse of dark visors at dusk or at night.

My decision has not been taken lightly and I considered the views and contributions from everyone who responded to the consultation. However, I remain unconvinced that the wearing of dark visors would not present dangers to road safety.

A technological solution may provide the best way forward. I would urge standards bodies to encourage the development of such solutions so that in the longer-term visor designs lend themselves equally to both day and night time use.

In-Flight Security

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The UK aviation security regime is one of the most developed in the world. It was further tightened in the aftermath of the 11 September attacks in the United States, and is kept under permanent review.

Earlier this year that process of review led the Government to decide that the existing package of measures for in-flight security should be reinforced, and deterrence increased, by the development of a capability to place covert, specially trained armed police officers aboard UK civil aircraft, should that be warranted. That capability now exists, and is a sensible and measured addition to the range of security measures we

have available for addressing the threat to UK interests and to UK aviation. That threat remains a real one, but this new capability has not been developed and is not being announced now in response to any new or specific intelligence.

This further security measure joins others the Government has taken to increase security both on the ground at airports and in flight since the attacks in the USA. We have stepped up the search regimes for staff, passengers and their hand and hold baggage, vehicles, cargo and catering, with a particular emphasis on flights going to key destinations such as the USA; added to the range of articles not able to be taken aboard aircraft; and extended the National Aviation Security Programme to smaller aircraft and aerodromes. Additional funding has been made available for airport policing. We have also accepted in principle all of the recommendations of Sir John Wheeler's recent review of airport security, which will in particular enhance the co-ordination of the security effort across different departments and agencies. On in-flight security, we are moving faster than the international community at large to ensure UK aircraft are fitted with intrusion-resistant flight deck doors, and last month we acted to ensure that flight deck doors on foreign aircraft are kept locked, as they have been on UK aircraft since very soon after the US attacks. We have also placed strict limits on those able to be on the flight deck of UK aircraft.

The Government will continue to work with the UK airline industry on sustainable measures for responding to the terrorist threat.

Pharmaceutical Price Regulation Scheme

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The sixth report to Parliament on the pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) was published today.

The report, entitled "PPRS: Sixth Report to Parliament", covers the management and operation of the 1999 scheme, which was introduced in October 1999 including the delivery of the 4.5 per cent, price cut. It explains the Government's objectives for the scheme and gives consolidated information on company annual financial returns. The report sets out the contribution made to the economy by the UK based pharmaceutical industry and sets out the conclusions of the joint Department of Health and Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) study into the extent of competition in the supply of branded medicines to the National Health Service.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The joint Department of Health and Association of the British Pharmaceutical Industry (ABPI) study into the extent of competition in the supply of branded medicines to the NHS was published today.

An integral part of the current pharmaceutical price regulation scheme (PPRS) agreement that took effect on 1 October 1999 is a joint assessment by the Department and the ABPI of the scope, pace and change and practical impact of competition in the supply and use of branded medicines for the NHS. The results of this study will be available to both the Government and the pharmaceutical industry in considering the future direction of policy on the PPRS.

The study comprised seven components and work on each of the components was undertaken jointly by the Department and the ABPI with some elements of the analysis contracted out to third parties. The study allowed an unprecedented level of shared data collection and analysis between the Department and the branded pharmaceutical industry in the UK.

Copies of the study, entitled "PPRS: The Study into the Extent of Competition in the Supply of Branded Medicines to the NHS", have been placed in the

HEALTH

NHS Franchising

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): National Health Service franchising is a new approach being taken by the Department to find the best available managers to take over the functions of the chief executive and, where necessary, other senior management positions in, and to identify organisations which might be called upon to exercise the functions of, some of the most poorly performing NHS trusts in England. The prime goal under new franchised management arrangements will be to address the particular areas where a trust has performed poorly and to demonstrate its capacity to sustain improved performance.

Franchising will bring in new management skills to trusts that have been under-performing, as part of the Government's wider drive to raise standards in all parts of the NHS.

Until now, NHS franchises have only been awarded to suitably qualified people within the NHS. The Department has now widened these opportunities to other areas of the public sector, the voluntary sector and the private sector, as well as to suitably qualified individuals, by inviting formal applications from both within and outside the NHS for inclusion on the NHS franchising register of expertise.

The names of the organisations on the National Health Service franchising register of expertise have been published today and a copy has been placed in the Library. It is also available on the Department of Health's website at www.doh.qov.uk/nhsfranchisinq. The register includes 62 NHS trusts whose three star status gives them automatic inclusion on the register, Trent Strategic Health Authority, and eight private sector organisations—five of which are based in Britain, one in Germany, one in Canada and one has its parent company based in Sweden.

The NHS Appointments Commission set up an independent panel, under the chairmanship of Sir William Wells, to assess the applications received from organisations and individuals who expressed an interest following national advertisements in May 2002. The criteria for entry to the register were designed to assess interested parties' expertise and commitment to the

public service ethos necessary to turn round failing NHS organisations and services in the future. The criteria included:

- a commitment to the ethos of public service;
- expertise in managing and improving performance in large and complex service delivery organisations;
- an excellent track record in both financial and human resource management.

Following the July 2002 performance star ratings, the management of two zero star trusts will be franchised. These are United Bristol Hospitals NHS Trust and Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust.

The Good Hope Hospital NHS Trust, Birmingham, will also be franchised following an investigation around the mismanagement of waiting list figures. As a result the Trust has been reclassified to zero star. The Trust held a disciplinary hearing at which the chief executive was found guilty of gross misconduct and summarily dismissed. The data underlying the Trust's star rating has been reviewed and the performance rating recalculated.

The Department will shortly be inviting those on the NHS franchising register of expertise to tender for the franchises in these trusts early in the new year, along with the interim management team at Bath.

SCOTLAND

Sunday Working (Scotland)

The Secretary of State for Scotland (Mrs. Helen Liddell): Scottish shop workers and betting workers who do not wish to work on Sundays are not protected in the same way as similar workers in England and Wales. I am therefore launching today a consultation exercise on a possible change in the law to end this discrimination.

This follows representations to me about employers moving away from a voluntary arrangement which gave Scottish workers the same rights available under the law to workers in England and Wales. The consultation paper sets out a case for extending to Scotland legal protection in the Employment Rights Act 1996. It invites comments by Friday, 14 March 2003.

I have written to key employer and employee organisations across Scotland inviting them to meet with Scotland Office Ministers to discuss our proposals.

Copies of the consultation paper have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

TRADE & INDUSTRY

Gas and Electricity Markets Authority

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): The current Chair of the Gas and Electricity Markets Authority—who is also the Chief Executive of the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets—plans to step down in October 2003. My rt hon Friend the Secretary of State and I have decided that separate individuals should be sought for the two roles. Accordingly, we are seeking a non-executive Chair, who will provide leadership and direction to the other members of the Authority and to the Chief Executive, has an appreciation of how competitive markets operate, and be committed to Ofgem's social and environmental obligations. The Chair-designate will join the Authority on appointment initially as a non-executive member, and thereafter will take the lead in the selection of a Chief Executive.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bain Review

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The repeal of Section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 is an essential element of the move to risk based fire cover which is at the centre of the recommendations of the Independent Review of the Fire Service—the Bain review. I announced on Monday 16 December that I would take the earliest opportunity to make the necessary amendment to the Fire Services Act. I am now announcing that I shall be proposing an amendment to the Local Government Bill which is currently before the House.

This demonstrates the Government's commitment to fulfil our part of the programme of modernisation proposed by the Bain Review.

Fire Service Pay Dispute

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I am pleased to announce that the Armed Forces personnel deployed on firefighting duties have been given the extended break over Christmas they richly deserve. This does not imply any reduction in our commitment to the provision of emergency fire cover during any further industrial action.

However, the FBU have called off the nine-day strike it had planned to start on 16 December and have not announced any plans to strike again until 28 January. The FBU would be required to give seven days notice of any further strike.

DEFENCE

Meteorological Office

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The first stage of the Quinquennial Review (QQR) of the Met Office has been completed. This has focused primarily on the future status of the Met Office and on the arrangements for strategic oversight by its parent department, the Ministry of Defence.

The Stage 1 report examined a number of alternative status options for the Met Office but concluded that the Met Office should remain a Trading Fund Agency of the Ministry of Defence for the foreseeable future. It concluded also that there was a need for a substantial reform of the arrangements for oversight of the Agency by its Owner, the Secretary of State for Defence. The

recommended reforms comprise the re-shaping of the Defence Met Board into a UK Met Board, including in its membership representatives of the three principal Civil Stakeholder interests in the Met Office's product (Environment, Transport and Civil Contingencies) alongside the existing Defence Stakeholder interest; the adoption of a more proactive stance by the new Board, with the focus on identifying in advance and resolving key strategic issues so as to provide a clear framework policy framework for Met Office management; and the provision of adequate administrative support to the new Board.

I have today given my endorsement of these recommendations, and action is now in hand to give effect to them as soon as possible. It is planned that the UK Met Board should come into existence early in 2003. A copy of the QQR Stage 1 report has been placed in the Library of the House.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 9 December 2002

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Employment Legislation

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will make a statement on the number of church employees who are covered by employment legislation. [85197]

Mr. Bell: The National Church Institutions employ 487 people. No records are held centrally about the numbers of people employed by dioceses and parishes.

Licensing Provisions

Miss McIntosh: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Commissioners have made of the cost of the new licensing provisions to churches and chapels; and if he will make a statement. [84507]

Mr. Bell: Final figures for complying with the proposed provisions of the current Licensing Bill, which has had a second reading in Another Place, will depend upon the level of fees set by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, as well as on the extent to which church buildings apply for licenses to cover the proposed provision of "regulated entertainment". The figures provided in the Regulatory Impact Assessment would, however, suggest that under the Bill's proposals churches or other places of worship seeking to provide entertainment five times a year would pay £100 each year. If more events than this were required, a full licence would be needed and annual inspections would be necessary, each of which would attract a fee.

There are 16,250 church buildings belonging to the Church of England alone: many other denominations and faiths will also be covered by the proposals as they stand.

DEFENCE

Defence Aviation Repair Agency

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement of the developing role of DARA in Wales. [83974]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Aviation Repair Agency is creating centres of excellence as the focus for its business development. In Wales, there are two centres of excellence, St Athan in South Wales which carries out fixed wing aircraft maintenance, and Sealand in North Wales that now does all the Agency's electronic business. The two sites represent nearly 70 per cent. of the DARA's business.

Challenger II

20. **Mr. Swayne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what decision has been reached in respect of the number of Challenger II tanks to be converted for desert operations. [83975]

Mr. Hoon: A number of Challenger 2 tanks are being modified to improve their performance in desert conditions in line with continuing contingency planning. I do not intend to compromise operational security by revealing the exact number of tanks involved.

Gulf (Military Units)

21. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of Defence if he will make a statement on recent activities of the Royal Navy in the Gulf. [83976]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy maintains a permanent presence in the Gulf. For over 10 years it has made a valuable contribution to the Multinational Interception Force deployed in the Gulf to enforce Iraqi compliance with UN sanctions. The Royal Navy deployed in the Gulf also plays its part in the international campaign against terrorism. Beyond these ongoing commitments, a Mine Countermeasure Group deployed to the Gulf during November. This is a long-planned, routine deployment, to conduct bilateral exercises with a number of Gulf States, building on the successful bilateral training conducted in the region in the wake of last year's Saif Sareea II in Oman.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, what British military units are deployed in the Gulf region. [83968]

Mr. Hoon: Units from the UK armed forces are regularly deployed in the Gulf region.

For example, the RAF continues to patrol the no-fly zones over Iraq in support of UN SCR 688 which demanded that Saddam Hussein cease repression of his own people. The Royal Navy maintains a permanent presence in the Gulf to enforce sanctions on Iraq and as part of our contribution to the campaign against international terrorism. Two RAF Nimrod aircraft are also deployed to the Gulf region for the same purpose.

In addition to those continuing commitments, we have deployed 400 personnel to take part in a long planned United States-led biennial command post exercise in Qatar. A Mine Countermeasure Group is also currently undertaking a routine deployment to the Gulf in order to conduct bilateral exercises with a number of Gulf States.

A wide range of personnel are deployed throughout the region, from all three services, in support of defence diplomacy.

Al-Qaeda

22. **Ross Cranston:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what potential security threat remnants of al-Qaeda pose to the security of *(a)* Afghanistan and *(b)* other countries. [83977]

Mr. Ingram: The al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan has been severely weakened by coalition military action. Isolated remnants of al-Qaeda and Taleban forces continue to pose a limited threat to the security of Afghanistan, and coalition operations to defeat them continue.

More widely, al-Qaeda has a global reach. Despite important arrests in the past month, many of the organisation's leaders are still at large, and pose a significant threat to international security. That is why we, together with our coalition partners, shall continue to hunt down the al-Qaeda leadership until they are brought to account for their crimes.

Armed Forces Personnel (Non-combatant Deaths)

23. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce the number of non-combatant deaths of armed forces personnel. [83978]

Dr. Moonie: In the last five years there have been 770 deaths in the Services: 246 from natural causes, 255 from road traffic accidents, 93 from suicide or with an open coroner's verdict and 176 from other causes. The Services recognise and stress the importance of welfare support, health education and good safety practices, especially since the nature of work in the Armed Forces inevitably involves an element of risk. Procedures are reviewed regularly.

NATO Enlargement

24. **Mr. Jim Cunningham**: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the enlargement of NATO following the Prague summit. [83979]

Mr. Hoon: At the Prague summit NATO issued invitations to begin accession talks to Bulgaria. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. This enlargement is a major step forward for European security. I know the invitees have made great efforts over the past three years to prepare themselves under the Membership Action Plan, and they must continue to do so during the accession process. I am pleased that the United Kingdom will continue its significant contribution to helping with those preparations.

Arctic Convoy Medal

25. **Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress he is making towards awarding medals to those who served on the Arctic convoys in the second world war. [83980]

Dr. Moonie: The Atlantic Star recognised service on the convoys to Russia during the Second World War. Service in Arctic waters is specifically mentioned in the Command Paper which laid down the qualifying criteria for the medal.

Aircraft Carriers

26. **Mr. Jack**: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the factors which will determine the choice of consortiums to build the next UK aircraft carriers. [83981]

33. **Mr. Hepburn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will report progress on the new aircraft carrier programme. [83988]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the right hon. Member and my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier today to my hon Friend the Member for Wirral South (Mr. Chapman), *Official Report*, 9 December 2002, columns 8–9.

Afghanistan

27. **Mr. Blizzard**: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on security operations in Afghanistan. [83982]

Mr. Ingram: Coalition operations against the remnants of al-Qaeda continue. The United Kingdom provides Airborne Early Warning and Air-to-Air Refuelling aircraft for coalition air operations, as well as support to the coalition headquarters.

We currently contribute some 300 British troops to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Kabul. ISAF has helped the Afghan authorities to restore and maintain stability within Kabul and there is a continuing need for its presence to support President Karzai's transitional Administration.

Falkland Islands

28. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on naval support for the defence of the Falkland Islands. [83983]

Mr. Ingram: We intend to maintain a modern and capable force in the Falkland Islands, consisting of air and land as well as naval elements. The Atlantic Patrol Task (South) is generally deployed to the South Atlantic on a year-round basis, subject to operational availability; it is currently not deployed as the crew of HMS Lancaster are engaged in fire-fighting duties. The Governor of the Falkland Islands was informed in advance of this unavoidable temporary gap in cover. APT(S) is only one element of the United Kingdom's maritime presence in the region. HMS Leeds Castle, the permanent Falkland Islands patrol vessel, is currently in Falkland Islands waters, and the ice patrol ship HMS Endurance is currently deployed to the South Atlantic region, which includes time spent in Falkland Islands waters. RFA Grey Rover, the South Atlantic tanker, is on passage to the Falkland Islands following her participation in EXPO NAVALE, Valpariso.

QinetiQ

29. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to help those made redundant by QinetiQ restructuring to acquire new jobs. [83984]

Dr. Moonie: QinetiQ has been a commercial organisation since its creation in July 2001, at which point its employees ceased to be civil servants. Redundancies which result from restmcturing within the company are based purely on its business requirements and the Ministry of Defence does not have direct involvement in QinetiQ5 s decisions concerning its staff. I understand that QinetiQ has a range of

measures in place to provide assistance to staff with the training and skill development needed to help them find alternative employment.

Army Overstretch

30. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he is taking to reduce overstretch in the Army. [83985]

Dr. Moonie: We do not believe that the Army is overstretched. However, they are currently very busy in light of firelighters' industrial action. The Ministry of Defence keeps all operational commitments under review and reduces the numbers deployed where possible.

NATO Rapid Response Force

31. **Mr. David Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received about the proposed NATO rapid response force; and if he will make a statement. [83986]

Mr. Hoon: The proposed NATO Response Force (NRF) was discussed by Defence Ministers at their informal meeting in Warsaw in late September and again at the NATO Summit in Prague last month. I have also discussed the NRF in bilateral meetings with NATO counterparts. The discussions focused on the need for a technologically advanced, flexible, deployable, interoperable and sustainable force, ready to move quickly to wherever needed. The NRF should also be a catalyst for improving the Alliance's military capabilities. At Prague, Heads of State and Government agreed to the creation of the NRF and work is now underway to take the concept forward within the Alliance. We expect that a report on the NRF will be submitted to Defence Ministers in June 2003 and that the NRF to have an initial operating capability no later than October 2004.

Missile Defence

32. **Mr. Mullin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for a missile defence system for the UK; and if he will make a statement. [83987]

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress his Department has made in analysing the implications for the UK of missile defence; and if he will make a statement. [83990]

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Government's policy is on ballistic missile defence. [83991]

Mr. Hoon: The Government understands the role that missile defences could play as part of a comprehensive strategy to respond to the potential threat from ballistic missiles. We are currently examining whether the range of responses we have now would be enhanced by participation in active missile defence. I have today placed further analytical and discussion material in the Library of the House which I hope will contribute to the debate on the issues involved.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what Memoranda of Understanding have been signed in relation to the use by the USA of British facilities for missile defence activities. [85376]

Mr. Hoon: None.

Risk Reduction (New Equipment)

37. **Dr. Francis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures his Department is taking to reduce the risk to users when acquiring new equipment. [83993]

Dr. Moonie: In accordance with United Kingdom Health and Safety legislation, it is Ministry of Defence policy that the risks associated with any equipment shall be as low as reasonably practicable.

Responsibility for the acquisition of new equipment is vested in the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA). Safety Management is an integral part of the DPA's Acquisition Management System, beginning at the requirement definition stage and being carried forward through service to disposal.

The basic principle that underpins the equipment safety process is the management of through-life hazards: their identification, evaluation, elimination, mitigation and control.

Equal Opportunities

38. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to promote equality between men and women in the armed forces. [83994]

Dr. Moonie: The armed forces are committed to promoting equality of opportunity between Service men and women consistent with the need to maintain combat effectiveness. They are currently reviewing career progression to identify any barriers to the advancement of women, and exploring steps to address work-life balance with the aim of improving their recruitment and retention.

Academic Conferences

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has taken since 1990 to enable Army officers to participate in academic conferences and to share experiences gained by officers in other countries to address bullying in the armed forces. [86049]

Dr. Moonie: Although no specific measures have been taken since 1990 to enable Army officers to discuss bullying with their counterparts in other countries, welfare issues are often discussed in a number of fora which may include, on occasion, members of the armed forces from other countries.

Altcar Training Camp

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proposals for the modernisation of the facilities at Altcar training camp have been received; and

what recommendations are being implemented, with particular reference to the upgrading of targetry and associated range control features. [85448]

Dr. Moonie: As a result of proposals from the North West England and the Isle of Man Reserve Forces and Cadets Association to upgrade the existing manually operated Rifle Ranges at Altcar training camp, lanes 1 to 15 of the existing 38 lane gallery range have now been converted to provide 12 electric targets with new firing point mounds. A small building to accommodate the control console has been positioned at the rear of the range. Work was completed in October 2002 and the range was formally brought into use on 30 November 2002. There are currently no plans to upgrade the remaining 23 lanes.

Army Foundation College

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the opening of a new campus at the Army Foundation College in Harrogate. [85655]

Dr. Moonie: The new Army Foundation College buildings at Harrogate were formally opened on 18 October by HRH Prince Andrew CVO ADC. These new facilities have been delivered through a Private Finance Initiative by Defence Training Services Limited working with the Ministry of Defence in a 30-year contract. The college was originally opened in September 1998 and occupied the existing buildings of the old Army Apprentices College for the Royal Signals, which closed in 1996. The college remained open throughout the building period and now provides training and education facilities for 1,344 young people each year, in the most modern facilities available.

Army Welfare Service

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military members of staff of the Army Welfare Service are based in *(i)* Scotland and (ii) the rest of the UK; and how many are female in each case. [86128]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested, as at 5 December 2002, is shown in the table.

	Scotland	*Rest of UK*
Military		
Male	1	18
Female	2	26
Civilian		
Male	0	0
Female	1	3
Total	4	47

A further six military staff (four male and two female) and four civilian female staff are currently under training.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military female members of staff of the Army Welfare Service have made complaints concerning bullying by superiors in each of the last five years. [86130]

Dr. Moonie: There have been two recorded complaints of bullying/harassment by female members of the Army Welfare Service in the last five years. Both incidents were dealt with internally in accordance with established procedures.

Balkans (Troop Reductions)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on troop reductions in the Balkans. [85652]

Mr. Ingram: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence on 13 June 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1343–44, to my hon. Friend the Member for Broxtowe (Dr. Palmer).

Barracks Opening Hours

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the regular hours of opening for consultation are at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick of (i) the regimental medical office, (ii) the Padre, (iii) the unit welfare officer, (iv) the local army welfare worker and (v) the Women's Royal Voluntary Service welfare office. [86074]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is as follows:

	Deepcut	*Catterick*[1]
Medical Centre	0800–1630 Mon-Fri other times via the Medical Reception Centre Pirbright or Frimley Park Hospital A&E Dept.	0800–1630 weekdays Medical non Commissioned Officer on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Garrison Medical Centre and the North Yorkshire emergency doctors can be called on outside normal working hours
Padre	Normal working hours, with answerphone. On call 24 hrs by mobile phone.	Padres at ITC Catterick teach elements of the training course. They are also available for welfare interviews and visits. The Padres office is open to all trainees at any time during the working day. Contact at other times via mobile phone or alternative telephone numbers.
Unit Welfare Office	0830–1700 Mon-Fri other times on call via mobile phone	0800–1630 Mon-Fri
Army Welfare Service	0830–1630 Mon-Fri, Duty call out via Duty Officer, plus Confidential Support Line 1030–2230	Contact is maintained through the Unit Welfare Office.

	Deepcut	Catterick [1]
WRVS	1000–1400 and 1800–2200 seven days a week	1000–1400 and 1800–2200 Mon-Fri, 1700–2200 Weekends

[1] Catterick refers to the Infantry Training Centre Catterick, unless otherwise noted. Catterick Garrison maintains parallel services which are also available to the ITC as required.

Barry Buddon Overspill Site

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects Catterick's overspill site at Barry Buddon to receive its first draft of trainees. [85649]

Dr. Moonie: The Army Training and Recruiting Agency has scheduled the commencement of an Infantry training course to commence at Barry Buddon on 20 January 2003. There are no plans for a further intake of trainees at that location.

Bullying

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints have been made of bullying within the Army Welfare Service in each of the last five years, broken down by area office. [86131]

Dr. Moonie: There have been three recorded complaints of alleged bullying/harassment within the Army Welfare Service in the last five years. Due to the small numbers involved, I am not prepared to disclose the locations of these incidents in the event that this leads to the identification of those concerned. I am therefore withholding that information under Exemption 12 (Privacy of an Individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. All the incidents were dealt with internally in accordance with established procedures.

Casualty Exercises

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what mass casualty exercises have been undertaken by the Defence Medical Services in the past two years; and how many personnel were involved in each exercise. [80977]

Dr. Moonie: Members of the Defence Medical Services (DMS) participate in military training and exercises, and operational deployments, which can have a mass casualty exercise element to rehearse the procedures to be followed by a military medical facility facing large numbers of casualties. These exercises are based on casualty numbers ranging from 25 to over 100. DMS personnel serving at hospital facilities also participate in mass casualty exercises organised by, or involving the hospital concerned. No central records are maintained of the number of mass casualty exercises in which DMS personnel participate, nor of the numbers who do so.

Chemical Weapons Sites

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what systematic research his Department has undertaken since 1972 regarding the health of *(a)* those who worked in chemical weapons production plants during the First and Second World Wars, *(b)* their families and *(c)* those living in the surrounding area; [85447]

(2) what tests have been carried out since 1972 on the effluent discharge arising from chemical weapons sites affecting immediate water sources; and what reports were produced as a result; [85445]

(3) what reports have been produced giving details of the chemical weapons storage sites in the UK; [85444]

(4) what the *(a)* nature and *(b)* quantity is of chemical weapons stored in chemical weapons storage sites in the UK; and what standards define the structure of the storage site for different chemical weapons; [85443]

(5) what organisations have been commissioned to carry out research work on *(a)* the impact of chemical weapons manufacturing sites on the local environment and *(b)* the health of those living within the catchment area; [85442]

(6) what chemical weapons sites in the UK have produced chemical weapons since 1972; over what periods, which site facilities are being maintained; what tests are being carried out; and if he will make a statement on the results; [85441]

(7) what products were manufactured at the Rhydymwyn and Mold chemical weapons processing plants in the last three years. [85440]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Children (Armed Conflict)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Government will ratify the Optional Protocol on the UN Convention on the involvement of children in armed conflict. [85956]

Mr. Ingram: Officials in both the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office have almost finalised the work required to enable the Government to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict. We will begin the ratification process very shortly by laying an Explanatory Memorandum before Parliament.

Decommissioned Submarines

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will *(a)* assess and *(b)* certify the seaworthiness of decommissioned submarines prior to offering them for sale. [83961]

Dr. Moonie: It is our policy that decommissioned nuclear submarines are not offered for sale. The four conventional Upholder Class submarines were taken out of active service with the Royal Navy in 1994, but were not decommissioned. The submarines were subsequently placed under a Custody, Care and

Maintenance contract, which is now managed by BAE Systems, until agreement was reached with Canada in July 1998 for the lease with option to buy the four boats.

In January 1999 a contract was signed between the DPA and now BAE Systems for the reactivation (refurbishment) of the submarines to a standard and to a level of safety acceptable to the Royal Navy. This included MOD safety certification with a safe to dive certificate for a period of not less than three and a half years for each boat.

Deepcut Army Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in which years since 1990 a civilian firefighter has been *(a)* employed at and *(b)* resident in Deepcut Army Barracks; and what financial arrangements cover *(i)* salary and (ii) accommodation. [85321]

Mr. Ingram: There have been Defence Fire Service civilian officers at Deepcut Army Barracks for each year during the period in question, with three officers being stationed there at present. During that time 15 individual officers have occupied accommodation in the officers mess, one of whom is currently in residence. No precise records have been kept of their periods of tenure but generally they range between a few months and three years depending on the terms of their posting and their individual accommodation requirements. All those serving at Deepcut are paid according to the national salary pay scales with accommodation charges being levied at agreed departmental rates.

European Security and Defence Policy

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with his counterparts in *(a)* France and *(b)* Germany about the implications for NATO's naval capabilities of the creation of *(i)* an EU rapid reaction capability and (ii) a Franco-German defence union. [86479]

Mr. Hoon: MP: None.

Fire Services

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training the Armed Forces have received for dealing with a fire at *(a)* a chemical and *(b)* a nuclear facility. [85458]

Mr. Ingram: As regards the Defence Estate all Ministry of Defence firefighting units are fully trained to deal with fires involving chemicals and, where there is a nuclear facility, personnel are provided with special instructions and training on the actions to be taken should an incident occur.

In relation to the current firelighters dispute, chemical incident and decontamination procedures were part of the 5-week Enhanced Trained Non- specialist (ETNS) training course undertaken by all members of Breathing Apparatus Rescue Teams (BARTs) and Rescue Equipment Support Teams (RESTs) deployed during the fire fighters dispute. This provided both theoretical training and a series of practical exercises including chemical incident scenarios. The subject has also been included in the Continuation Training Programme issued to all Joint Operational Control Centres and carried out at Temporary Service Fire Stations.

ETNS personnel have not been trained in nuclear incident procedures. Military fire fighting teams would be reliant upon the response of specialist teams from the nuclear agencies in the event of such an incident.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what access the armed forces has to equipment necessary to deal with a fire at *(a)* a chemical and *(b)* a nuclear facility. [85459]

Mr. Ingram: All Ministry of Defence firefighting units are fully equipped to deal with fires on the defence estate involving chemicals and special equipment is provided to those sites where there is a nuclear facility.

In relation to the current firefighters dispute, Rescue Equipment Support Teams are equipped with Chemical Protection Suits and decontamination showers. Military firefighting teams that have been deployed are not equipped to deal with nuclear incidents and would be reliant upon the response of specialist teams from the nuclear agencies in the event of such an incident.

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if naval personnel acting as firefighters during the dispute will lose their long service at sea bonus. [85412]

Mr. Ingram: Longer Service at Sea Bonus (LSSB) is paid, after the qualifying period, to Naval personnel if their permanent place of duty is an LSSB qualifying unit (broadly speaking, most ships, submarines and Naval Air Squadrons). These personnel will continue to receive LSSB if detached temporarily for firefighting duties during the current dispute.

Personnel not entitled to LSSB can qualify for Longer Separated Service Allowance to compensate for extended periods away from their permanent place of duty.

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what estimate he has made of the effect of the firefighters' dispute on *(a)* naval training and *(b)* naval deployment. [84366]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces will continue to perform their duty to the public by providing emergency fire cover for as long as required. But as I stated in the House on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 16:

> "there must be knock-on effect for the training regime, and the longer the strike runs the greater the effect will be. We must constantly review the situation; over time it will create problems for effective delivery and for other missions in which we may be called on to participate."

Specifically for the Royal Navy, the firefighters' dispute has caused some reductions in operational programmes, notably the removal of frigates from NATO's Standing Force Atlantic and from the South Atlantic, but other Royal Navy vessels and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary remain deployed in the Caribbean, the Gulf, the Far East, the Mediterranean and the North and South Atlantic.

The throughput of vessels through operational sea training has been reduced as personnel have been withdrawn from ships. This means that there will be increased demand for training in 2003 as ships return to the operational cycle.

For the individual service person, the effects of the firefighters' dispute on training and deployment are interlinked. Some training is being disrupted with consequential effects on drafting, career progression and promotion. The Royal Navy is making appropriately trained personnel to the fleet. The effect on individuals will be minimised by giving them priority on future courses; and there are existing safeguards for those whose career progression may be adversely affected.

Helicopter Aircrew (Training)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the PFI contract for the Medium Support Helicopter Aircrew Training Facility; whether the contract is on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [85867]

Mr. Ingram: Delivery of the training service provided by the Medium Support Helicopter Aircrew Training Facility at RAF Benson commenced on schedule on 30 March 2000. Expenditure to date on the service, which is being delivered under a PFI contract with CAE Aircrew Training Services, is some £51 million.

Joint Services Comand and Staff College

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the PFI contract for the Joint Services Command and Staff College; whether the contract is on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [85865]

Mr. Ingram: A total of £68.917 million has been spent to date on the PFI Contract for the Joint Services Command and Staff College. The contract with Defence Management (Watchfield) Ltd. was signed in June 1998 and the college opened for operation on schedule on 7 August 2000.

Manning Control Reviews

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 332W, on manning control reviews, how many personnel in the Army were recommended for Manning Control Review in each of the last five years; broken down by regiment. [85378]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested, concerning the number of Army personnel who were recommended for Manning Control Review in each of the last five years, is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Medical Officers (Deployment)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the dates of service were of each medical officer employed at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick Barracks since 1990, indicating in each case the *(i)* rank and (ii) the reasons given for leaving the post. [86078]

Mr. Ingram: Medical officers employed at Deepcut were/are all civilians. Details are:

Rank	*Dates of employment*	*Reasons for leaving*
Civilian medical practitioner	1990 to March 2000	Suspended
Locum CMP (32 in total)	March 2000 to date	In all cases end of contract, except one who was asked to leave.

Medical Officers at the Infantry Training Centre (ITC), Catterick were/are as follows:

Rank	*Dates of employment*	*Reasons for leaving*
Major	April 1995 to July 1995	Retired from the Army
Captain	July 1995 to December 1995	Posted to another unit
Colonel	February 1996 to September 2001	Posted to another unit
Lt. Colonel	December 2001 to date	Still in post

ITC, Catterick was only set up in April 1995, prior to that date Catterick Garrison would have provided medical services to all personnel. Catterick Garrison also maintains a medical centre for the benefits of garrison personnel, which the ITC can call upon as needed.

Meteor Missile

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how much, and by what percentage, the unit costs of each Meteor missile ordered for the RAF will change as a result of Germany's decision to cut its Meteor missile order. [86378]

Mr. Ingram: There will be no change to the unit cost of the Meteor missiles to be ordered for the RAF as a result of Germany's intention to reduce the number of missiles it plans to order. This is because the United Kingdom already has an agreed maximum price for its planned offtake of missiles.

Minehunters

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on deployment of Royal Navy minehunters for an exercise with the Royal Saudi Navy. [85456]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy deploys a Mine Countermeasure (MCM) Group annually, either to the Mediterranean or the Gulf, to maintain operational capability, support major exercises and practice out of area deployments.

The MCM Group is currently undertaking a routine deployment to the Gulf in order to conduct bilateral exercises with Saudi Arabian forces, as well as those of other Gulf States and coalition partners in the region. The aim is to build on the successful bilateral training conducted in the region in the wake of Exercise Saif Sareea held in Oman towards the end of last year, after which several invitations from Gulf States were received to conduct similar exercises in 2002. It is also planned to undertake a programme of port visits in the region to support Defence Diplomacy initiatives before the vessels are scheduled to return to the United Kingdom in spring 2003.

Missile Defence System

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects preparations to begin for British involvement in the US-led missile defence system. [85665]

Mr. Hoon: The United Kingdom already has close access to US research and development work on missile defence, taking part in collaborative research and information exchange on ballistic missile defence technologies. UK industry is also playing an active role. UK expertise in such areas will enable us to consider and make informed assessments about technical advances in missile defences. This will contribute significantly to our ability to judge the potential benefits to the UK of possible participation in further US development of missile defences. In order to inform debate on the role that active missile defence might play within a comprehensive strategy for tackling the potential threat from ballistic missiles, I am publishing today a public discussion document on missile defence.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what role he expects Fylingdales and Menwith Hill to play in the US-led missile defence system; and what improvements have been made to the facilities at these sites to enable them to fulfil this role. [85666]

Mr. Hoon: No decisions have been taken about the possible future role of any United Kingdom bases in a missile defence system. The radar at RAF Fylingdales could, if upgraded, provide a useful asset to such a system depending on the architecture chosen. No improvements have been made relating to any potential future role, although there is a continuing programme of maintenance and life extension at RAF Fylingdales to ensure that it can continue to fulfil its current functions.

A decision was taken in 1997 to base the European relay ground station for the Space Based Infra-Red System (SBIRS) project at RAF Menwith Hill. SBIRS is a satellite system designed to give early warning of the launch of ballistic missiles anywhere in the world. It updates the existing but ageing defence support programme (DSP) satellites and is needed irrespective of any decision on missile defence.

NATO Costs

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the United Kingdom paid in the last financial year to NATO as its share of NATO's overall costs, broken down into budget headings; and if he will make a statement. [86392]

Mr. Hoon: Direct contributions to NATO's Security Investment Programme (NSEP) and Military Budget (MB) are paid from the United Kingdom Defence Budget. Currently, the UK's share of the NSIP is 10.2 per cent. and of the MB is 16.0 per cent. From January 2003, this will be amended to 12.5 per cent. for both, with no overall increase in cost to UK.

In the Financial Year 2001–2002, the UK paid £62.5 million to the NSIP and £53.1 million to the MB.

Direct contributions to NATO's civil budget are the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The UK's share of this is 17.25 per cent. In the Financial Year 2001–2002 the UK paid some £13.9 million (lower than the anticipated contribution of £16.5 million due to the timing of payments).

Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Weapons

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what nuclear, biological and chemical capability the Army, Navy and RAF possess; and whether the personnel are drawn from regular or reserve forces. [85374]

Mr. Ingram: The regular United Kingdom armed Forces maintain a balanced nuclear, biological and chemical force protection capability founded upon five components: detection and identification; warning and reporting; physical protection; hazard management; medical countermeasures and support. These rest on a range of specialised and other equipment, procedures and countermeasures, including those operated by the Joint NEC Regiment, are described in more detail in the Department's July 1999 public paper "Defending Against the Threat from Biological and Chemical Weapons". They also apply to nuclear and radiological defence.

In addition the Royal Yeomanry, a Territorial Army unit, supports the Joint NBC Regiment.

Offshore Medical Facilities (Gulf)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what offshore medical facilities would be available in the event of operations in the Gulf. [84364]

Dr. Moonie: All Royal Navy ships and submarines have primary care medical facilities. In addition, we could draw on the emergency surgical facilities in our aircraft carriers, HMS OCEAN and two Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) vessels. If required, hospital care could be provided by the primary casualty receiving facility in RFA ARGUS.

Operation Amber Fox

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2002, ref 82556, what factors will determine the length of the period for which Operation Amber Fox will continue under a NATO mandate. [86053]

Mr. Ingram: Operation Amber Fox concludes on 15 December 2002 and will be succeeded by the NATO-led Operation ALLIED HARMONY on 16 December 2002: Operation ALLIED HARMONY is scheduled to operate until 16 June 2003.

The factors which determine the length of the NATO operation remain those normally applied: namely, the assessment of military requirements and the views of the Macedonian authorities. A NATO review of Operation ALLIED HARMONY is planned for February 2003.

We remain keen to see an ESDP operation in Macedonia once permanent EU-NATO arrangements are in place.

Operation Sandcastle

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence, pursuant to his answer of 27 November Ref. 81327, if he will publish the conclusions of the report. [84722]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*:
Conclusion

"Investigations by the SIB RMP major enquiry team tasked by the Secretary of State for Defence to collect and collate evidence of war crimes committed against or witnessed by British citizens in the Gulf from 2 August 1990 to the cessation of hostilities have revealed considerable and compelling evidence of systematic and continuous grave breaches of the Fourth Geneva Convention committed by the Iraqi authorities, members of the Iraqi armed forces and their collaborators against the personal and property rights of British subjects".

Parachute Training

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what changes there will be in the level of actual parachute training as a result of the virtual reality simulator. [85653]

Dr. Moonie: The level of parachute training undertaken from aircraft has not changed as a result of the introduction into service of the parachute Virtual Reality Simulator in 1999. The Virtual Reality Simulator enhances the training and safety of static line square parachute courses, but does not reduce the number of descents or flying hours required to complete the static line square parachute course.

PFI

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the PFI projects approved by his Department since 1st April together with *(a)* the capital value and *(b)* the through-project costs estimated in each case. [85499]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has signed three PFI deals since 1 April 2002. These are as follows with details in rounded resource cost terms:

(a) Materials Handling Equipment (MHE) Service "Follow-on",which has a capital value of £40 million and estimated through project costs of £50 million.

(b) Field Electrical Power Supplies (FEPS), which has a capital value of £70 million and estimated through project costs of £200 million.

(c) Strategic Sea Lift (Roll-on Roll-off Ferries), which has a capital value of £175 million and estimated through project costs of £950 million.

RAF (Grievances)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff officers are employed by the Royal Air Force in dealing with redress of grievances; and how many cases are outstanding. [85529]

Dr. Moonie: Staff officers throughout the chain of command are involved in processing redresses of complaint among a wide range of other personnel-related duties. Only three staff officers, at HQ Personnel and Training Command, are dedicated to redress work. The number of redresses not yet resolved at Command and Air Force Board level is 359, of which 247 relate to the introduction of Pay 2000.

Separated Service

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much separated service was recorded by the *(a)* RAF Separated Service Recording System in each year since 1997 and *(b)* Navy Separated Service Recording System in each year since 2001. [85377]

Dr. Moonie: The following table shows how much Separated Service was recorded by the RAF Separated Service Recording System in each financial year since April 1997.

Incidences of Separated Service for operations and training[1]

	Personnel on Separated Service spending								
	Average trained strength	*< 28 days*	*28–89 days*	*90–139 days*	*140–279 days*	*280+ days*	*Total personnel spending time on Separated Service*	*Percentage of average trained strength who were on Separated Service*	*Total days spent on Separated Service*
1997–98	53,357	15,123	10,834	4,410	2,113	329	32,809	61	1,744,985
1998–99	52,107	14,097	11,959	5,701	2,489	517	34,763	67	2,085,535
1999–2000	51,358	14,321	11,691	6,431	2,706	456	35,605	69	2,185,558
2000–01	50,328	14,505	11,243	6,036	2,117	374	34,275	68	1,974,563
2001–02	49,266	13,455	11,322	6,514	2,432	87	33,810	69	1,999,168
2002–03[2]	48,781	14,866	9,776	2,710	188	0	27,540	56	1,005,075

[1] An incidence of Separated Service is recorded when an individual is absent from their parent unit on duty for three nights or more and a permanent order has not been issued. The table shows separated service for operational and training commitments excluding resettlement and expedition training.
[2] Information up to 30 September 2002 only.

Information from April 2000 excludes weekends where personnel are able to return home while on detached duty.

The Royal Navy Separated Service Reporting System was introduced in October 2001, initially with data held only at unit level. Information was first collected centrally in July 2002 and results from this will become available once the data have been quality assured and analysed. This is expected to be in the first half of 2003.

Skill Force Scheme

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the pilot Skill Force scheme; and if he will make a statement. [83989]

Dr. Moonie: The Skill Force scheme is now in its third year in secondary schools at its two original locations. A further nine locations are in their second year of piloting and this autumn we are putting Skill Force teams into a

further 13 locations. This latest expansion is being taken forward jointly between the Ministry of Defence and Department of Education and Skills (DfES) as part of DfES's Behaviour Improvement Programme which, in turn, is part of the Government's Street Crime Initiative.

Independent evaluation of the impact of this exciting scheme is an integral part of the approach we have taken to the piloting of Skill Force. This focuses on testing the scheme's achievement against the key objectives: reducing truancy; reducing exclusions; improving educational and vocational attainment; improving behaviour; and reducing the number of young people who are not in employment, education or training on completion of their mandatory schooling.

The latest evaluation by the British Market Research Bureau reviews the original schemes in Newcastle Upon Tyne and West Norfolk and shows positive results. Attendance rates exceeded 90 per cent. among children who were otherwise expected to display sharply declining attendance through years 10 and 11; for many it would have been expected that declining attendance would have led eventually to exclusion. Exclusion levels have also reduced dramatically; only 13 participants were excluded, compared to 46 who were identified at being at risk of permanent exclusion. One Norfolk Head Teacher said:

"There are youngsters that would have been excluded by now from school if it hadn't been for Skill Force. Some of them have got very challenging behaviours but there has been a noticeable improvement, there's also been a noticeable improvement in their attendance as well".

Skill Force has been credited as the major factor in raising GCSE A*-C grades from 26 per cent. to 36 per cent. in one of the Newcastle Upon Tyne schools.

In addition, over half of the parents interviewed have reported more positive behaviour and attitudes which they attribute directly to Skill Force.

The report also indicated areas where further development of the Schemes could be undertaken and would be beneficial.

A full copy of the British Market Research Bureau research has already been placed in the Library of the House.

Strategic Sealift Programme

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much was paid by his Department after it assumed responsibility for contract payments in the RoRo strategic sealift programme. [85383]

Dr. Moonie: In March 2001 the Ministry of Defence assumed responsibility for the contracts for the two RoRo vessels to be built at Harland and Wolff and made its first payments in respect of the contracts. The payments amounted to some £3.7 million in respect of the first ship and £3.8 million for the second. As both ships are now nearing completion the total sums paid are approaching the contract prices originally agreed between the shipbuilder and the service provider. Total payments are commercially sensitive and I am withholding this information in accordance with Exemption 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to effective management and operations of the public services.

Tactical Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what tactical nuclear devices his Department holds. [86218]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence holds no tactical nuclear devices.

Tomahawk Missiles

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which submarines are expected to be equipped with Tactical Tomahawk Block IV missiles; and if he will make a statement. [85375]

Mr. Ingram: No decisions have yet been taken on the purchase of Tactical Tomahawk (Block IV) missiles. However, it is planned that all ASTUTE and TRAFALGAR Class submarines will be capable of firing torpedo tube launched Tactical Tomahawk missiles.

UN (Culture of Impunity)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his policy is on the request from the United Nations that each member state should adopt exclusionary measures to protect its armed forces against the development of a culture of impunity; and what his policy is if criminal convictions result in individual service personnel being excluded from membership of HM armed forces. [85968]

Mr. Ingram: There is no culture of impunity in the United Kingdom armed forces, whose members are subject to the ordinary law of the land. Criminal convictions are judged according to their seriousness: minor offences would not necessarily exclude a person from membership of the armed forces; more serious offences, including those leading to a sentence of imprisonment, may be expected to result in dismissal.

Virtual Air Traffic Control Tower

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the costs were of the upgrades to the virtual air traffic control tower; and by how much this project went over budget. [85453]

Dr. Moonie: The total cost of the upgrades to the virtual air traffic control tower at the Centralised Air Traffic Control School, RAF Shawbury was £1.15 million inclusive of VAT. The project was completed in November 2001 within the approved budget.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight will receive a reply

from the Legal Services Commission to his letter of 31 July and his subsequent letters of 26 September, 11 October and 30 October. [85720]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The correspondence from the hon. Member for the Isle of Wight has now been dealt with by the Legal Services Commission's (LSC) Reading Office and a response sent on 6 December. The commission regrets the delay in reply.

Staff turnover has affected recent customer service performance at the LSC's reading office. The LSC is conducting a major review with a view to resolving these difficulties.

Legal Aid

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department under what circumstances it is possible for a person earning £90,000 per year to obtain legal aid. [82570]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Such a decision would be very rare. Under the Access to Justice Act 1999, public funding (formerly called legal aid) is provided under the Community Legal Service (CLS) and the Criminal Defence Service (CDS). CLS funding, which covers civil proceedings, is only available for cases within the scope of the scheme subject to a statutory means test and funding assessment. Under the present system a person with an income of £90,000 per year would rarely qualify for civil public funding. It could be possible in cases involving public family law, such as care and supervision orders, child assessment orders, emergency child protection orders; and Mental Health Review Tribunals.

Any individual charged with an offence and appearing before the courts can receive publicly funded representation without reference to their means where it is in the interests of justice for help to be granted. When the CDS was introduced in April 2001, the means test for criminal legal aid was abolished. It was replaced with a power for judges in the Crown Court to order a convicted defendant to pay some, or all, of the costs incurred in defending him, by way of a Recovery of Defence Costs Order.

Thus a person with a high income might receive public assistance, but can be required to repay that support. Typically a court will exercise that power if the defendant is found guilty. A defendant found not guilty will almost certainly not have to repay legal aid costs. But this represents no effective change on the position before April 2001. It has always been, and remains, the case that a defendant found not guilty, who pays for his own defence, will almost certainly have the costs of his defence repaid by Government to the extent that such costs accord with legal aid rates.

Sexual Assaults

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to issue guidance on the inferences to be drawn from the timing of complaints by victims of sexual assaults. [84610]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

We have no plans to issue any guidance on this issue. This is a matter of evidence that needs to be decided on the facts of each individual case.

PRIME MINISTER

Iraq

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will name the 10 Iraqi women to whom he referred in his oral answer to the hon. Member for Linlithgow, on 4 December; and what reports the Government have received on the circumstances of their leaving Iraq. [86430]

The Prime Minister: On 2 December I met a group of Iraqi women who had suffered human rights violations by Saddam Hussein's regime. All the women had had direct experience of Saddam Hussein's brutality.

Some of the women present gave a press briefing on 21 November which highlighted the brutality of the Iraqi regime and drew attention to the plight of Iraqi women who have witnessed killings and other atrocities under Saddam's dictatorship. They also gave details on the circumstances under which they left Iraq. These were Safia Al Souhail, Fatima Bahr Al Ulum, Ala Talabani, Berivan Doski and Melina Bakoos. Because of the risk of reprisals against their families and friends in Iraq, it would be wrong to name those women who have not made their names public.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Access Rights

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress is being made towards giving a right of access to open countryside and common land in the lower north-west area; and if this will be implemented by summer 2004. [85346]

Alun Michael: The provisional map of access land for the lower north-west was issued on 18 November. There is now a three-month period when anyone with a legal interest in the land may lodge an appeal with the Planning Inspectorate against the inclusion of their land as access land on the provisional map. We expect a conclusive map to be issued at the end of 2003, but this depends on the number of appeals. On current plans, I intend to open the new statutory right of access in the lower north-west and upper north-west together during the autumn of 2004. This will be followed by the north-east and the south-west in the first six months of 2005, with all access land opened by the end of 2005.

Correspondence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will reply to the letters of 2 December 2001 from the hon. Member for Workington which were passed to her for reply on 8 March. [85486]

Alun Michael: Unfortunately the Department has no record of receiving this correspondence. However, I have asked Correspondence Section to contact my hon. Friend as a matter of urgency to obtain copies of his letters so that we may deal with them speedily.

Farmed Salmon

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what information her Department has collated about the level of toxins found in farmed salmon; what assessment she has made of the risk to human health; and if she will make a statement. [84187]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

I am advised by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) that the Government have been monitoring and releasing information on chemicals in food, including farmed salmon, for over 10 years. Information on fish, including farmed salmon, has been published in the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food's Food Surveillance Paper No. 31, and Food Surveillance Information Sheets Nos. 71, 89, 105, 145, 184 and 191. The most recent information has been published by the FSA in its Food Survey Information Sheets Nos. 4/00, and 5/00, and the FSA Press Release of 10 May which issued precautionary advice for certain population groups on eating shark, swordfish and marlin. Copies of all these papers will be placed in the Library. The FSA is also aware of a range of published studies that have been carried out both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

The FSA advises that consumers should eat at least two portions of fish a week, one of which should be oily, as part of a healthy, balanced diet. The FSA has however been asked about the risks and benefits of eating larger amounts of fish, including oily fish such as salmon, and currently is seeking advice on this from its independent experts.

Fats and Proteins(UK) Ltd

Mr. Dawson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department intends to provide a minded-to letter for Lancaster City Council in the matter of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 and the appeal by Fats and Proteins (UK) Limited. [85007]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* A letter, outlining the decision which the Department proposes to make in respect of the appeal by Fats and Proteins (UK) Limited, will be sent shortly.

Long-distance Trails

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding has been available for the maintenance of long-distance trails in each of the last four years; what estimate she has made of the cost per kilometre of *(a)* restoring and *(b)* maintaining long-distance trails; and what budget is available for the repair and maintenance of the Ridgeway. [85213]

Alun Michael: Through the Countryside Agency DEFRA funds 75 per cent. of the cost of maintaining National Trails. The other 25% is funded by the highway authorities. The Countryside Agency states that their funding has been as follows for established National Trails:

(£)

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Maintenance	1,800,000	1,951,000	911,000	900,000	1,300,000
Maintenance plus salaries, support and marketing	2,204,000	2,223,000	1,176,000	1,170,000	1,580,000

a) There are no specific restoration costs per kilometre available.

b) The average maintenance costs per kilometre of each National Trail are as follows, although again there are major variations in the work needed:

(£)

	Maintenance materials only	*plus salaries and overheads etc*
Pennine Way	383	641
Cleveland Way	310	606
Offa's Dyke Path	88	143
South Downs Way	396	741
South West Coast Path	516	719
Ridgeway/Thames Path	110	536
North Downs Way	153	368
Wolds Way	191	346
Peddar's Way/Norfolk Coast Path	288	450
Average	271	505

In the case of Offa's Dyke Path the figures are for the English element of the Trail and the rest of the funding comes from Countryside Council for Wales. Thames Path and Ridgeway figures are combined due to joint management structures. This year the Ridgeway/ Thames Path have received £203,705 via the Countryside Agency and £53,460 from highway authorities. This figure includes all maintenance costs and salaries.

Organic Milk

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funds have been allocated to the marketing and promotion of organic milk in the UK in each of the next five years; what funds have been spent in each of the years the Organic Farming Scheme has been in operation; and if he will make a statement. [85009]

Margaret Beckett: No funds have been allocated to the marketing and promotion of organic milk in the next five years. However, under the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP), funding is generally available for the marketing of quality agricultural produce, including organic, through the Rural Enterprise Scheme (RES), and for capital projects

through the Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG). Under RES, farmers and others are able to propose projects for the marketing of any organic product.

Non-capital grants are also available under the Agriculture Development Scheme. For all of these schemes, applications need to comply with scheme rules and each is considered on its merits in competition with others. State aid rules limit the extent that Government can support the promotion or advertising of agricultural produce. Previously, the organic milk sector also benefited under the Marketing Development Scheme (MDS), which is now closed to new applicants.

During the life of the Organic Farming Scheme, which since April 1999 has assisted farmers to convert land to organic farming methods, but leaves them free to decide which enterprise to pursue, the following sums have been awarded to organic milk related projects under relevant schemes:

	£
Agriculture Development Scheme	
2001	22,548
Marketing Development Scheme (MDS) (closed)	
1999	7,908
2000	22,904
2001	6,086
Processing and Marketing Grant (PMG)[1]	
2001–02	3,869.10
2002–03	222,860.90 (committed)
2003–04	25,235 (committed)

[1] Two projects are currently being funded in England under the Processing and Marketing Grant.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Colombia (Trials)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many embassy staff, and of what grade, have been assigned to observe the trial of Niall Connolly, James Monaghan and Martin McCauley in Bogota, Colombia. [86014]

Mr. MacShane: None.

Iraq (Human Rights)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps were taken to verify the information included in the report, "Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuses", published on 2 December; and what considerations underpinned the timing of the release of the report. [86138]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The report is based on the testimony of Iraqi exiles, evidence gathered by UN rapporteurs and human rights organisations, and intelligence material. The report was released to provide the public with accurate information about the ruthless nature of Saddam Hussein's regime in the context of the Government's policy towards Iraq, the focus of which is the disarmament of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for the *(a)* preparation and *(b)* publication of special reports on human rights abuses in *(a)* Israel and *(b)* Saudi Arabia. [86140]

Mr. Rammell: The FCO lays before Parliament an Annual Report on Human Rights detailing UK action to promote human rights around the world. This year's Report was laid on 26 September. There are sections on Israel and Saudi Arabia. HMG has no plans to issue special reports listing human rights violations in Israel and Saudi Arabia.

HMG continues to believe that in the vast majority of countries progress on human rights is best achieved by engagement and critical dialogue.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84785]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374–75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The total expenditure on official travel in the FCO during 2001–02 was £12,502,000.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84930]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing 500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374–75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

The FCO does not budget centrally at this level of detail.

Travel Advice

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what co-ordination exists between the United States, Australian, French and British governments to ensure that travel advice is consistent. [85724]

Mr. Straw: Some consultation takes place with key allies, including the United States, Australia and France, on the evaluation of risks to travellers and communities abroad. Each country retains responsibility for formulating its advice for its own nationals, in the light of its own judgements. But we continue to develop mechanisms to improve information sharing.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when in the last two months his Department's travel advice on *(a)* Africa, *(b)* South East Asia, *(c)* Latin America and *(d)* the Asian sub-continent was revised. [85725]

Mr. Straw: FCO Travel Advice is under constant review. It was revised for the following areas on the following dates:

Africa:

Angola— 18 October and 4 November, Benin 18 October and 2 November, Botswana- 18 October; Burkina Faso—18 October; Burundi—18 and 28 October; Cameroon—2, 18 and 23 October and 29 November; Cape Verde 18 October; Central African Republic—18 and 28 October and 28 November; Chad—18 October; Comoros—18 October; Congo (Rep of)—18 October; Congo (Democratic Rep of)—18 October; Cote d'Ivoire—2, 9, 11, 16, 17 18, 22, 23, 28 and 31 October and 4 and 15 November; Djibouti—18 October, 29 November and 5 December; Equatorial Guinea—18 October and 28 November; Eritrea—18 October, 29 November and 5 December; Ethiopia- 18 October and 5, 8, 29 November and 5 December; Gabon 18 October and 28 November; The Gambia -18 and 25 October and 12 November; Ghana—18 October and 6 November; Guinea 18 October; Guinea Bissau—18 October; Kenya—2 and 18 October, 6, 28 and 29 November and 5 December; Lesotho 15 and 18 October, 20 November and 4 December; Liberia 18 October and 4 December; Madagascar—16 and 18 October and 7 November; Malawi—18 October; Mali—18 and 31 October; Mauritius—18 and 31 October; Mozambique—18 October; Namibia—18 October; Niger—18 October; Nigeria—18 October and 25 and 29 November; Rwanda—18 October; Sao Tome and Principe—12 and 13 November; Senegal—18 October; Seychelles—18, 29 October; Sierra Leone 18 October and 28 November; Somalia—18 October, 29 November and 5 December; South Africa—18 and 31 October and 20, 27 and 29 November; Swaziland—18 October and 20 November; Tanzania 18 and 24 October, 29 November and 5 December; Togo 18 October and 6 November; Uganda—18 October, 7 and 29 November and 5 December; Zambia—18 October and 20 November; Zimbabwe -4, 18 and 31 October and 8 and 27 November.

South East Asia:

Brunei—15, 17, and 18 October and 1 November; Burma—15, 18 and 23 October; Cambodia—15, 18 21, 23 and 25 October and 5 November; East Timor—15 to 18 October and 4 December; Indonesia—13, 15, 17, 18, 21 and 25 October and 25 November; Laos—15 and 18 October; Malaysia—15 and 18 October; Philippines—15, 18 and 28 October and 1, 11 and 22 November and 3 December; Singapore—15 and 18 October; Thailand—15, 18 and 28 October and 29 November; Vietnam 15 and 18 October.

Latin America:

Argentina—18, 23 and 31 October; Belize—18 October; Bolivia—18 October; Brazil—18 October; Chile—18 October; Colombia—18 and 28 October; Costa Rica 18 October and 12 November; Ecuador—16 and 18 October and 4, 6, 14 and 26 November; El Salvador—18 October; Guatemala 18 October and 25 November; Guyana—18 October and 5 November; Haiti—18 October and 20 November; Honduras—18 and 29 October; Mexico—2 and 18 October and 15 November; Nicaragua—18 October; Panama—18 October; Paraguay—18 October; Peru 18 and 15 October and 12 November; Uruguay 18 October; Venezuela—3, 9, 18 and 29 October and 20 November. Asian sub-continent: Bangladesh—4, 18 and 30 October; India 18 and 30 October and 13 and 29 December; Pakistan—8, 14, 18 and 24 October and 1 and 22 November. October and 6 November;Uganda—18 October, 7 and 29 November and 5 December; Zambia—18 October and 20 November; Zimbabwe—4, 18 and 31 October and 8 and 27 November. South East Asia: Brunei—15, 17, and 18 October and 1 November; Burma—15, 18 and 23 October; Cambodia—15, 18 21, 23 and October and 5 November; East Timor—15 and 18 October and 4 December; Indonesia—13, 15, 17, 18, 21 and 25 October 25 November; Laos—15 and 18 October; Malaysia—15 and 18 October; Philippines—15, 18 and 28 October and 1, 11 and 22 November and 3 December; Singapore—15 and 18 October; Thailand—15, 18 and 28 October and 29 November; Vietnam—15 and 18 October. Argentina—18, 23 and 31 October; Belize—18 October; Bolivia—18 October; Brazil—18 October; Chile—18 October; Colombia—18 and 28 October; Costa Rica—18 October and 12 November; Ecuador—16 & 18 October and 4, 6, 14 and 26 November; El Salvador—18 October; Guatemala 18 October and 25 November; Guyana—18 October and 5 November; Haiti—18 October and 20 November; Honduras—18 and 29 October; Mexico 2 and 18 October and 15 November; Nicaragua—18 October; Panama—18 October; Paraguay—18 October; Peru—18 and 15 October and 12 November; Uruguay—18 October; Venezuela—3, 9, 18 and 29 October and 20 November.

Asian sub-continent:

Bangladesh—4, 18 and 30 October; India—18 and 30 October and 13 and 29 December; Pakistan—8, 14, 18 and 24 October 8 and 22 November.

TRANSPORT

A12/Colchester Northern Approach Road Junction

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when a decision will be made to approve a junction between the A12 and the Colchester Northern Approach Road; and if he will make a statement. [86515]

Mr. Jamieson: The principle of a junction between the A12 and the Colchester Northern Approach Road has been agreed for some time, but the Highways Agency is not yet able to fully assess the impact of the proposed new junction on the safety and operation of the A12. Despite several meetings and requests, a number of issues remain outstanding with the developer. No decision can be made until the Highways Agency is in possession of all necessary information to determine the application.

Air Transport

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will give an early response to the Midlands section of the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport. [85736]

Mr. Jamieson: This is a national consultation and decisions taken in one area will have an effect on decisions for other parts of the UK. Therefore, we will make our decisions in the Air Transport White Paper, based on consideration of all responses received across the UK, once the extended consultation period has finished.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if it is his policy that before any option for Birmingham Airport is included in the White Paper, he will satisfy himself that the shareholders have sufficient funds available to fund the option stated in the White Paper. [85863]

Mr. Jamieson: Options included in the Air Transport White Paper will form a strategic framework for air transport in the UK for the next 30 years. We will wish to assure ourselves, as far as foreseeable, that preferred options have a reasonable prospect of being financially deliverable.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the Air Transport Consultation Process, whether the 30 year economic appraisal for the second runway at Birmingham Airport will commence in the year following completion. [85864]

Mr. Jamieson: The benefit stream for Birmingham International airport, with an additional second runway, has been estimated from the year following completion. The economic performance will vary depending upon the year of opening.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aircraft departed from *(a)* Heathrow, *(b)* Gatwick and *(c)* Stansted airports in each month since December 2000, broken down by aircraft type; and which are exempt from noise limit standards announced on 18 December 2000. [86105]

Mr. Jamieson: 22 individual aircraft, which were given specific exemptions from the Chapter 2 phase out provisions in the EC Directive 92/14, were also given exemptions from the new daytime noise limit (94dBA Lmax) announced on 18 December 2000 and introduced on 25 February 2001. The exemptions applied until 31 March 2002.

During this period the actual number of departures by relevant aircraft was as follows:

Heathrow Nil

Gatwick Two (both in January 2002)

Stansted Two (one in March 2001, one in January 2002)

All of these movements were by DC8F-55s; none exceeded 94dBA at the relevant noise monitor, even though exempt from that limit.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will ensure that a Minister from his Department attends a public meeting on Canvey Island, organised by the hon. Member for Castle Point, to discuss the Government's Cliffe Airport option. [86522]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November 2002, *Official Report,* columns 474–75, that the consultation on airports capacity will be kept open until we have consulted on options for new runways in relation to Gatwick.

We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process when we publish the further consultation paper in the new year.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many responses had been received by 30 November in response to *(a)* the consultation document, Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: A National Consultation and *(b)* each of the regional consultation documents on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (i) in total and (ii) for each region; [85209]

(2) how many copies of the *(a)* main document and *(b)* summary of the (i) national and (ii) regional consultation documents on Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom have been issued in hard copy as a result of each exhibition which has taken place to promote the consultation as of 30 November; [85211]

(3) how many copies of the *(a)* main document and *(b)* summary of the consultation documents (i) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: A National Consultation, (ii) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: North of England, (iii) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South West, (iv) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Midlands, *(v)* Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: Wales and (vi) Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East have been (A) issued in hard copy and (B) downloaded from the website by 30 November; [85208]

(4) what the cost to his Department has been of *(a)* the exhibitions promoting the consultation documents on the Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom and *(b)* the printing costs relating to the publication of the consultation documents as of 30 November. [85210]

Mr. Jamieson: As at 30 November a total of over 118,000 main and over 180,000 summary consultation documents had been issued. A breakdown by area for both hard copy and website downloads is given as follows. The figures include consultation documents distributed at public exhibitions across the country. A breakdown of the numbers issued at individual exhibitions is not available.

	Hard copy		*Website downloads*	
Region	*Main*	*Summary*	*Main*	*Summary*
North of England	13,005	48,343	14,382	7,954
South West	5,366	13,876	8,977	8,869
Midlands	35,297	45,696	8,767	10,484
Wales	4,135	5,453	2,872	2,244
South East	50,590	49, 399	67,299	73,878
Northern Ireland	4,317	8,982	3,083	2,286
Scotland	5,810	11,642	11,499	17,531
Total	118,520	183,391	116,879	123,246

To date, nationally, over 30,000 completed NOP questionnaires and around 31,000 letters responding to the consultations have been received. Additionally, around 2,000 responses have been received via the dedicated website. Very large numbers of responses are arriving and we do not yet have accurate numbers broken down by region.

As part of the consultation there have been 17 exhibitions which cost approximately £929,000. The cost of producing the seven detailed consultation documents and seven summary documents was £609,000.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 474–75, the consultation on airports capacity will be kept open until we have consulted on options for new runways in relation to Gatwick. We will publish a further consultation document in the new year.

Channel Tunnel Links

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of private investment in the Thames Gateway area in advance of the completion and opening of the section of the High Speed Channel Tunnel Link between the Tunnel entrance and Fawkham Junction; what the level of investment was in each case, and what investment is anticipated for future years. [86111]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department's value for money assessment of the 1998 deal to secure construction of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link included an assessment of the regeneration benefits of the project. The main private investment impacts of the Link for the Thames Gateway area were anticipated to be associated with Ebbsfleet station. Details of the assessment are reported in the Public Accounts Committee, Twenty-Second Report, Session 2001–02, Appendix 2.

Cliffe Airport

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his Answers of 2 December, *Official Report*, column 498W, on the Cliffe Airport Option, how he identified suitable venues for the exhibitions *(a)* in relation to proximity to the airport option and affected areas, *(b)* venue capacity, *(c)* accessibility and *(d)* availability; and in each case how many and which other alternative locations were considered. [85629]

Mr. Jamieson [*holding answer 5 December 2002*]: Specialist consultants in event management were commissioned to identify suitable venues and to organise the public exhibitions on the airport options.

Using a database of potential venues in the region, they were able to recommend the most suitable venue for each airport exhibition taking account of the listed criteria.

Disabled Access

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 2 December, Official Report, column 500W, how many of the stations owned by *(a)* London Underground and *(b)* train operating companies, defined as step free, rely on a lift service in their qualification as a step free station. [86516]

Mr. Jamieson: Thirteen London Underground stations rely on lifts in their qualification as step free, as do three of the TOC-owned stations served by London Underground.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met members of the Strategic Rail Authority regarding disabled access to train station platforms. [86518]

Mr. Jamieson: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority on a regular basis; specifically to discuss aspects or the Authority's work, or as part of wider industry meetings.

European Ports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the European Commission has decided to investigate public financing and charging in European ports in its proposed Directive on Market Access to Port Services. [85488]

Mr. Jamieson: The Transport Council has adopted a common position on the Ports Directive and has also asked the Commission to present proposals for measures on public financing of port infrastructure, state aids and transparency. We understand that the Commission is currently working on these issues.

Fatigue-Related Road Accidents

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what initiatives have been undertaken by his Department to reduce fatigue-related road accidents since 1 January 2000; when each initiative took place; how much each cost; to whom contracts were awarded; what assessment has been undertaken of the projects; and what further action is planned. [86082]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department is concerned about fatigue-related road accidents and has an extensive programme of publicity and research aimed at reducing these.

The Department has been using a variety of media to encourage drivers to plan their trips and to take suitable breaks on long journeys. These include:

nine bursts of radio advertising since August 2000 at a total cost of £1,165,000,

TV advertising in January, April, and August 2002 at a cost of £814,000,

poster advertising in July and December 2000, and in February 2002 at a cost of

£121,000,

some two million advisory leaflets costing £17,000 have been printed and

distributed, many at Motorway Service Areas.

The total publicity spend in the current financial year on driver sleepiness has been £1.152 million, which is just over 8.4 per cent. of the publicity budget.

Since January 2000, advertising agency AMV.BBDO has been responsible for the creative work for the campaigns. Media buying until July 2002 was contracted to PHD, and to Carat Ltd. since then.

Quantitative tracking research demonstrates that awareness of the dangers of driving while tired has increased considerably. The costs of this are included in tracking all aspects of the Department's Think! Road Safety campaign, which is contracted to Taylor, Nelson, Sofres.

Nearly 400 Variable Message Signs on Motorways were used during the 2002 Easter period to carry the 'Don't Drive Tired' message in support of TV advertising. Over half those questioned at Motorway

Service Areas said they had assessed their tiredness after seeing the message and some 12 per cent. of those surveyed decided to take a break as a result. The Variable Message Signs will continue to be used for this purpose over the coming year. The cost to the Highways Agency was some £40,000. Molt MacDonald (Consultants) were the project managers, SSL Ltd. and D.S. & S. Ltd. dealt with software changes and the Agency's routine maintenance contractors undertook the software installation. MVA Consultancy Ltd. surveyed drivers.

Advice on how to avoid and combat driver tiredness is in The Highway Code and on the DfTs road safety website at "www.think.dft.gov.uk". We will continue to warn drivers of the dangers of falling asleep at the wheel.

The Department has also undertaken considerable research to study driver sleepiness. The university of Loughborough Sleep Research Laboratory was contracted to carry out a series of road audits into sleep-related vehicle accidents on sections of selected trunk roads and motorways in the UK. The results were published in February 2001 in Road Safety Research Reports No. 21 and 22, available on-line at "www.roads.dft.gov.uk/roadsafety/index.htm". The cost was £268,000. This contract has been extended and requires the Loughborough Laboratory to undertake six more audits. The cost is expected to be £120,000 and the report is due to be submitted in May 2003.

Loughborough Sleep Research Laboratory have also been contracted to produce the following reports:

"Over the counter medicines and the potential for unwanted sleepiness in drivers. A review". The report was published in February 2001 as Road Safety Research Report No 24 and is available on-line as above. The cost was £5,000.

"A survey of Public Education Literature regarding Driver Sleepiness". The report

was published in February 2001 and is available on-line at "www.roads.dft.gov.uk/roadsafety/sleepiness/index.htm". The cost was £5,000.

On-going research, scheduled for completion during December 2002, into "the

interactions between sleepiness and moderate alcohol intake". The cost is expected to be £198,000.

A new research contract is being prepared to study "The Effectiveness of Motorway Service Areas in reducing fatigue-related accidents". This is scheduled to start in January 2003 and last one year.

Intelligent Traffic Control Systems

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps have been taken by his Department to support the development of Intelligent Traffic Control systems across the United Kingdom; what financial support has been given to pilot or full projects, including those in *(a)* Reading, *(b)* Preston, *(c)* Stratford-upon-Avon and *(d)* York; over what timescale the projects have operated; what the expected outcomes of the projects were in each case; what assessment has been made by his Department in each case; and what the outcomes from each project have been, including their impact on congestion. [86113]

Mr. Jamieson: There are a wide range of Intelligent Traffic Control systems used by both the Highways Agency and local authorities. The Department, through the Highways Agency, has supported the development of these systems on the motorway and trunk road network. Most of the local authority schemes are funded through Local Transport Plan settlements. Specific initiatives to support this include:

ITS Assist—helping and encouraging local authorities to use new information and communication technology, including traffic control, in their plans;

Clear Zones—encouraging innovative planning and use of technology, including for traffic management, to minimise the impacts of traffic in towns;

Research—into traffic control systems and techniques for networks and isolated signalled junction and pedestrian crossings; and

UTMC—The Urban Traffic Management and Control (UTMC) programme was devised by the Department to provide the framework to support efficient and effective network management in towns and cities. This concept is being developed and taken forward primarily through a five-year, £6 million research programme.

As part of this, four demonstration projects were started in September 2000 and are due to complete in 2003. These are in Reading, Preston, Stratford-upon-Avon and York. The Department has contributed £1.7 million to these demonstration projects.

A structure for evaluation of the projects has been agreed with the local authorities, reflecting their transport and environmental objectives, including impacts on congestion. As the projects are not complete, assessments cannot yet be made, but will be reported when the projects conclude.

I have arranged for copies of leaflets describing the above initiatives to be sent to the hon. Member and also placed in the Libraries of the House.

International Maritime Organisation

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department of the success of the International Maritime Organisation's Quality Shipping Campaign. [86104]

Mr. Jamieson: The International Maritime Organization (IMO) has a key role in the international Quality Shipping Campaign, which is designed to rid the seas of substandard shipping. Progress is being made, not least in terms of the growing acceptance that there is a real need for more effective and consistent implementation of convention requirements by owners and flag States, reinforced through targeted Port State Control. But there is still a long way to go before we achieve the Campaign's objectives.

One tangible initiative to arise from the Campaign has been the setting up of the EQUASIS database. This provides the industry with freely accessible safety-related information on the quality of the world's merchant fleet, answering calls for greater transparency. Charterers can no longer justifiably claim ignorance as an excuse for engaging in business with substandard ships.

Lane Rental Charges

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the pilot schemes testing lane rental

charges in Middlesbrough and the London Borough of Camden will end; and when the conclusions will be published. [85489]

Mr. Jamieson: The pilots are scheduled to continue until March 2004. My Department has appointed consultants, Halcrow, to carry out a study monitoring the effect of the pilot schemes. I expect to receive their first report shortly and copies will be placed in the House Libraries in due course.

Local Transport Plan

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many *(a)* kilometres of local roads, *(b)* bridges and *(c)* footways have been restored by local authorities using money in the Local Transport Plan settlement for capital maintenance work on local highways for (i) 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03, (A) in total and (B) for each local authority. [86094]

Mr. Jamieson: Highway maintenance is funded from Revenue Support Grant as well as the Local Transport Plan settlement. It is not possible to identify works funded through either source separately.

Local road condition is monitored through the National Road Maintenance Condition Survey. The latest results for 2001 showed that there was a possibility that deterioration in their condition may have been arrested, but this could not be confirmed until the results of subsequent years were available.

From the data supplied through Local Transport Plan returns, 4,746 bridges on local roads required strengthening in 2000 and 4,504 in 2002.

Montford Bridge Junction

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment the Highways Agency has made of the safety of the junction between the A5 and the B4380 at Montford Bridge. [86529]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Mr. Tim Matthews to Mr. Paul Marsden dated 9 December 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent question about the safety of the junction between the A5 and the B4380 at Montford Bridge.

The Highways Agency shares the concerns of local people about the accidents that have occurred at this junction and we have instructed our Managing Agent for the A5, as a matter of urgency, to explore what measures might be used to improve safety in the short term.

Montford Bridge was identified as a junction where safety is an issue in a Road Based Study completed in May. The study was commissioned by the Government Office for the West Midlands with the objective of making recommendations for addressing safety and congestion problems on the route between Shrewsbury and Chester. One of its recommendations is that a Route Management Strategy should be undertaken to support delivery of improvements to specific trouble spots, such as Montford Bridge.

The Highways Agency, jointly with the National Assembly for Wales, have commissioned the Route Management Strategy study which is designed to develop a three year Action Plan and a ten year Route Management Plan for the A5/A483. It will further analyse the accident locations identified in the Road Based Study, including Montford Bridge, to suggest solutions and recommend priorities.

I hope this is helpful; we will ensure that you are kept informed of developments on all these fronts. If you would like more information, the Agency's Route Sponsor for this part of the A5, Liz Talbot, would be pleased to help. She can be contacted at jour offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8746.

Motorists (Mobile Phone Use)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will report on the findings of the consultations into introducing legislation to regulate the use of hands-free telephones in motor vehicles; when he intends the legislation will take effect; and if he will make a statement. [86514]

Mr. Jamieson: Consultation on a proposal to prohibit the use of hand-held mobile phones when driving ended on 25 November 2002. Some 1,000 responses have been received and the Department is now considering these. An announcement on the results of consultation will be made as soon as possible.

Norwich Airport

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the environmental effects of the planned expansion of Norwich Airport. [85451]

Mr. Jamieson: "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)" main consultation document summarises in chapter 12, paragraphs 12.1–12.10, the analysis undertaken as part of the SERAS Study relating to Norwich Airport.

Further details of the appraisal of the impacts of, and constraints upon, development at Norwich Airport are reported in the "Small Airports—Demand and Impact Appraisal" (August 2001) and "Small Airports Optioneering" (January 2002) reports.

Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Roads

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his policy on encouraging the use of trenchless construction methods on existing roads. [85752]

Mr. Jamieson: We believe that it is vital to reduce the unnecessary disruption which works on roads cause to road users, and are taking a range of measures to achieve this. The use of trenchless techniques can help reduce this disruption, although there will be many occasions when—for technical reasons—these will not be suitable. My Department has recently set up a working party, involving representatives of local authorities and utility companies, to look at ways in which greater use can be made of trenchless techniques when works are carried out in the street.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost to local authorities was of roads maintenance and repair in each financial year since 2000–01 in respect of *(a)* flood and *(b)* other damage (i) in total and (ii) for each local authority. [86109]

Mr. Jamieson: Information on flood damage is not collected centrally on a regular basis. However, local highway authorities were asked in 2001 about the damage caused to highways by the severe flooding in the previous winter and spring. Their responses are shown in the table:

Flood damage to bridges and highways: Reported costs to local authorities as at 29 June 2001

£000

	Reported flood damage
Kent	7,060
Hampshire	6,531
North Yorkshire	3,275
Surrey	3,204
Devon	2,700
West Sussex	2,642
East Sussex	2,505
Gloucestershire	2,405
Wiltshire	2,365
Herefordshire	1,640
Northumberland	1,497
Shropshire	1,453
Hertfordshire	1,275
Oldham	1,199
Dorset	817
Telford/Wrekin	748
West Berkshire	557
Brighton and Hove	510
Durham	508
Redcar and Cleveland	430

Flood damage to bridges and highways: Reported costs to local authorities as at 29 June 2001

£000

	Reported flood damage
Medway Towns	302
Transport for London	300
Lincolnshire	286
South Gloucs	210
Somerset	207
Leeds	155
Hartlepool	144
Richmond	130
Enfield	104
Total	45,478

No information on other damage to highways has been collected centrally since 2000–01.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many vehicles used each of the roads built or operating using the design, build, finance and operate contracting method, in each month of operation; who the contractor was in each case; how much was paid under each contract; and if he will make a statement. [86099]

Mr. Jamieson: The table shows the traffic figures (in vehicle kilometres) for each financial year for each of my Department's design build finance and operate projects since these were opened to traffic. Providing figures for each month would be disproportionately expensive.

Project	*Company*	*Length of road (km)*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
M1-A1	Yorkshire Link Ltd.	30	—	640	676	716
A69	Road Link (A69) Ltd.	84	489	494	488	505
A19	Autolink Concessionaires (A19) Ltd.	118	—	1,565	1,611	1,637
A50	Connect (A50) Ltd.	57	—	675	731	793
M40	UK Highways M40 Ltd.	122	—	3,844	3,859	3,932
A1(M)	Road Management Services (Peterborough) Ltd.	21	—	405	416	429
A417/A419	Road Management Services (Gloucester) Ltd.	52	544	574	582	604
A30/A35	Connect (A30/A35) Ltd.	102	—	—	591	634

Note:
Figures are given in millions of vehicle kilometres

The following table shows the total payments made under my Department's design build finance and operate contracts.

Financial Year	*£ million*
1998–99	105
1999–2000	119
2000–01	142
2001–02	130

The A13 DBFO scheme is operated by CountyRoute (A130) plc under a contract let by Essex county council. I am unable to advise on the detailed information requested as that is a matter between Essex county council and their contractor.

Statutory Harbour Authorities

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the statutory harbour authorities in the UK broken down by *(a)* companies, *(b)* local authorities and *(c)* trusts; which authorities have (i) completed and (ii) not completed implementation of the port marine safety code; and what steps he is taking to ensure full compliance. [86092]

Mr. Jamieson: We have concentrated our monitoring on harbour authorities that have powers in relation to the regulation of shipping and safety of navigation under the Pilotage Act 1987—"competent harbour authorities"—because they comprise virtually all ports with significant functions to which the Code applies, and also account for almost all commercial port traffic. To date, the following competent harbour authorities have told my Department that they have implemented the Port Marine Safety Code:

(a) Company Ports
Associated British Ports:

- Ayr
- Barrow
- Barry
- Cardiff
- Fleetwood

- Garston
- Goole
- Grimsby
- Hull
- Immingham
- Ipswich
- King's Lynn
- Lowestoft
- Newport (Gwent)
- Plymouth
- Port Talbot
- Silloth
- Southampton
- Swansea
- Teignmouth
- Troon
- Whitby

Boston
Brighton Marina Estate Management Company
Bristol Port Company
Clydeport
Falmouth Docks & Engineering Company
Forth Ports Ltd (Dundee, Forth, Tilbury)
Hutchison Ports (Felixstowe, Harwich International)
Manchester Ship Canal Company
Mersey Docks & Harbour Company (Heysham, Liverpool, Medway)
Newhaven Port & Properties Ltd
Portland Port Ltd
Port of MostynLtd
Seaham Harbour Dock Company
Stena Line Ports (Fishguard, Folkestone, Holyhead)
Tees & Hartlepool Port Authority

(b) Local Authority Ports

Aberdeenshire Council (Macdufi)
Anglesey County Council (Amlwch)
Argyle and Bute Council (Rothesay)
Bristol City Docks
Carrick District Council (Truro)
Cumbria County Council (Workington)
Fenland District Council (Wisbech)
Gwynedd Council (Porthmadoc)
Moray Council (Buckie, Burghead, Cullen, Findochty, Hopeman, Portknockie)
North Devon District Council (Ilfracombe)
Orkney Islands Council Harbours
Penwith District Council (Penzance)
Portsmouth City Council (Portsmouth Commercial Port)
Sedgemoor District Council (Bridgewater)
Scarborough Borough Council (Scarborough, Whitby)
Shetland Islands Council (Lerwick, Scalloway, Sullom Voe)
South Hams District Council (Salcombe)
Thanet District Council (Broadstairs, Margate, Ramsgate)
Torbay Council (Brixham, Paignton, Torquay)
Torridge District Council (Bideford)
West Dorset District Council (Bridport)
West Somerset District Council (Minehead, Watchet)
Weymouth & Portland Borough Council

(c) Trust Ports

Aberdeen Harbour Board
Belfast Harbour Commission
Berwick Harbour Commission
Blyth Harbour Commission
Bridlington Harbour Commission
Caernarfon Harbour Trust
Carlingford Lough Commission
Chichester Harbour Conservancy
Coleraine Harbour Commission
Cowes Harbour Commisson
Cromarty Firth Port Authority
Dart Harbour and Navigation Authority
Dover Harbour Board
Falmouth Harbour Board
Fowey Harbour Commission
Fraserburgh Harbour Commission
Gloucester Harbour Trustees
Great Yarmouth Port Authority
Harwich Haven Authority
Inverness Harbour Trust
King's Lynn Conservancy Board
Lancaster Port Commission
Langstone Harbour Board
Littlehampton Harbour Board
Lerwick Port Authority
Londonderry Port
Lymington Harbour Commission
Milford Haven Port Authority
Montrose Port Authority
Neath Harbour Commission
Newlyn Pier and Harbour Commission
Padstow Harbour Commission
Peterhead Bay Authority
Peterhead Harbour Trust
Poole Harbour Commission
Port of London Authority
Port of Sunderland Authority
Port of Plymouth (Cattewater Harbour Commission)
Shoreham Port Authority
Stornoway Pier and Harbour Commission
Teignmouth Harbour Commission
Tyne Port Authority
Warkworth Harbour Commission
Warrenpoint Harbour Authority

Wells Harbour Commission

Whitehaven Harbour Commission

Wick Harbour Trust

Yarmouth (Isle of Wight) Harbour Commission

(d) Other public sector ports

British Waterways Board (Caledonian and Crinan canals, London Docklands, River Ouse, Sharpness Docks)

Environment Agency (Rye Harbour)

The following competent harbour authorities have not yet issued a statement of compliance in accordance with the Port Marine Safety Code:

(a) Company ports

Eastbourne (Sovereign Harbour)

Irvine Harbour Company

Porthleven Harbour & Docks Company

(b) Local authority ports

Canterbury District Council (Whitstable)

Carmarthenshire County Council (Llanelli / Burry Port)

Exeter City Council

Isle of Wight Council (Newport)

Waveney District Council (Southwold)

Worthing Borough Council

(c) Trust ports

Crouch Harbour Authority

Looe Harbour Commission

Maldon Harbour Improvement Commission

Maryport Harbour Commission

Mousehole Harbour Commission

Sandwich Port & Haven Commission

(d) Other

Duchy of Cornwall (Isles of Scilly)

Environment Agency Wales (Dee Conservancy)

Broads Authority

My officials are continuing to correspond with these harbour authorities and many are reporting that they are in an advanced stage of implementing the Port Marine Safety Code.

TAN21 Computer System

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what specifications were required by his Department in the contract for the development of the TAN21 computer system; what changes to this specification have taken place since the contract was awarded; and when these took place. [86087]

Mr. Jamieson: As part of the TAN21 Programme an Invitation to Tender (ITT) was issued through the European Journal (OJEC Ref: S251 (1999/S251–207302)) for the procurement of TAN's core operational systems. The specification attached to the ITT was based on the requirement to develop the core business applications of licensing, enforcement and bus route registration which would be integrated with support and management systems. This requirement was incorporated as Schedules to the final contract and has not changed.

Train Performance

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport *(a)* how many and *(b)* what proportion of trains of each train operating company *(i)* arrived late by (A) more than five minutes and (B) more than 10 minutes and (ii) were cancelled in each month since September 2001. [86097]

Mr. Jamieson: Performance figures for each of the train operating companies are published by the Strategic Rail Authority in their quarterly publication "National Rail Trends", and in more detail in their six monthly publication "On Track". Copies of these publications are placed in the Library of the House. These next publications are on 12 December.

Vehicle Standards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes have been made to the rules on the *(a)* environmental, *(b)* safety and *(c)* security standards of cars and light vehicles imported from outside the EU since 1 January 2000; what assessment of the effect of the changes has been made; and what further changes are planned. [86114]

Mr. Jamieson: Most of the vehicles that are not the subject of a European or National type approval are subject to The Motor Vehicles (Approval) Regulations 2001. Those regulations came into force on 1 February that year and replaced the Motor Vehicles (Approval) Regulations 1996 as amended. The regulations prescribe the technical standards the vehicle must meet before it can be licensed and registered for use on public roads. Compliance is determined by individual inspection of the vehicle. The main change was to replace the earlier single-tier set of technical standards with a two-tier system. The first tier—standard Single Vehicle Approval—set technical standards appropriate for vehicles entering service in very low numbers, such as amateur builds. The second tier—Enhanced Single Vehicle Approval (ESVA)—applied higher standards for vehicles being sold or entering service in competition with the mainstream supply of mass-produced cars and light goods vehicles in Britain. ESVA is much closer to the European or British type-approval standards for key safety, environmental and anti-theft items required of the mainstream manufacturers. It thus ensures a consistent level of consumer protection relative to the numbers of vehicles involved.

We expect to consult very shortly on proposed amendments that reflect practical experience since the new arrangements were introduced. These will include:

Changes to the arrangements for Disabled Persons Vehicles and for personal imports by serving members of the Armed Forces.

Various other generally applicable changes on points of technical detail and procedures, most of which would simplify the inspection.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Airport/Port Security

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on changes

in security at Northern Ireland's airports and ports following the Prime Minister's recent warning of terrorist attacks. [82102]

Jane Kennedy: Security at airports and ports in Northern Ireland, as in the rest of the UK, is kept under continuous review. There have been changes since September 11 to take account of the threat from international terrorism, but it would not be appropriate to comment on the detail.

Baton Guns

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many hours of additional training are required to enable PSNI personnel to discharge a Baton Gun to be fired in situations other than public disorder; what the minimum distance is at which a baton round may be discharged at a human target; what level of authorisation is required for this use of the baton gun; and what the reporting requirements are. [80634]

Jane Kennedy: The Chief Constable has advised me that in situations where it may be necessary to deploy personnel with baton guns other than public disorder, the preferred option of the PSNI is to deploy Tactical Firearms Teams. Officers within such teams who are trained in the use of the baton gun will, in addition to the initial three-day classification course in respect of the weapon, receive an additional 16 hours of training in the tactical use of the baton gun.

With regard to the minimum distance in relation to baton round discharge I would refer my hon. Friend to the written reply of the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 312W.

In situations other than public order situations authorisation to deploy Tactical Firearms Teams to carry baton guns lies with an officer of the rank of Assistant Chief Constable. Authority to deploy the baton gun lies with the senior officer in charge of the non-public order incident. The actual firing of the weapon (if such is felt justified) is self-authorised by the individual officer provided that the officer is satisfied that to do so is both lawful and proportionate in the circumstances.

The firing of a baton gun whether in non-public order or in public order circumstances is classified as the discharge of a firearm. All discharges of firearms by the PSNI are subject to immediate report to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland for investigation. In addition, when a baton round is discharged a report is sent to the Policing Board for information.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps he has taken to collect information from hospitals and general practitioners that have treated injuries as a result of impact damage of the L21A1 plastic baton round; and what *(a)* quantitative and *(b)* qualitative information has he received. [80633]

Jane Kennedy: The Government have at present no plans to collect such information from hospitals or general practitioners.

I understand that the police ombudsman for Northern Ireland does make inquiries of local hospitals after the discharge of rounds by the PSNI. The purpose of such inquiries is to establish whether anyone has suffered injury which may be attributable to a baton round and also to facilitate any necessary evidence gathering. The research report that the ombudsman published in May 2002 summarised the findings of seven reports: 86 per cent. of the 28 rounds that struck persons were observed to have struck the person's legs. While patient confidentiality is an important factor, the ombudsman is looking at ways that might facilitate inquiries.

Belfast Agreement

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether paramilitary groups received public funding for the resettlement of prisoners following their release under the terms of the Belfast Agreement. [82839]

Jane Kennedy: No public funding has been paid to Paramilitary organisations for the resettlement of prisoners following their release under the terms of the Belfast Agreement.

Civil Disturbance

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what rules govern the relationship between the police and the Army in situations of civil disturbance. [80632]

Jane Kennedy: The military support to the Police Service in Northern Ireland is in accordance with Military Task 2—Military Aid to the Civil Power in Northern Ireland.

The military provide support to the police. The maintenance of order and response to public disorder will, wherever possible, be undertaken by the police. When necessary, the military can be deployed:

a) in direct support of police as an integral part of operations;

b) as a contingency reaction force (to deploy into operations at an agreed point); and

c) as a reserve force (not necessarily in the operations area, but at notice to move within an agreed time).

The level and type of military deployment will vary depending on the circumstances of the incident and the wider security environment, but the relationship remains one of provision of support to the police.

Cod Fishing

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the response of Her Majesty's Government to the report by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea recommending a total ban on cod fishing in the Irish Sea. [85693]

Mr. Pearson: Ministers and senior officials from all the regions are working closely to ensure a viable and sustainable fishing industry is maintained. I have given a commitment to work energetically in the interests of the Northern Ireland fishing industry, particularly between now and the vital Fisheries Council meeting in Brussels just before Christmas, to ensure that the Northern

Ireland dimension to this complex and difficult problem is not overlooked in developing the United Kingdom position.

Decommissioning

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received on progress with decommissioning; and if he will make a statement. [82218]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State met the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning on 5 November 2002 and was briefed on progress on decommissioning to date. The Prime Minister categorically stated, on 17 October, that republicans had to make the commitment to exclusively peaceful means, real, total and permanent as should all paramilitary organisations. The IICD will continue to play their part in that process.

Rev. Ian Paisley: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many weapons the IRA have reported as destroyed to General de Chastelain's International Independent Commission on Decommissioning. [82819]

Jane Kennedy: On 23 October 2001 the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning reported that they had witnessed an event which they regarded as significant in which the IRA had put a quantity of arms completely beyond use. The material included arms, ammunition and explosives.

On 8 April 2002 the IICD reported the IRA had put a varied and substantial quantity of ammunition, arms and explosive material beyond use. An inventory of the arms will be provided to the British and Irish Governments when the Commission's task is completed.

The arms and material in question have been dealt with in accordance with the decommissioning scheme and regulations.

Draft Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland for what reasons his Department seeks the powers *(a)* to issue directive, *(b)* to obtain information and *(c)* to issue a code of practice detailed in the draft Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002; and if he will make a statement. [86175]

Angela Smith: The main reasons for providing this legislation are to further improve the public accountability of Northern Ireland trust ports and to enable the Department for Regional Development to better safeguard the public interest in relation to their commercial activities.

The proposals were advocated by the Regional Development Committee of the former Northern Ireland Assembly following the completion of an inquiry into a development proposal in Belfast Harbour.

European Funding

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much money Northern Ireland has received from *(a)* Special European Programmes and Initiatives, *(b)* the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund, *(c)* the European Regional Development Fund, *(d)* the European Social Fund and *(e)* all European Union sources, in each financial year since 1997. [84388]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is in the following table.

European money—1997 to 2002[1]

	EAGGF	*FIFG*	*ERDF*	*ESF*	*Misc.*	*Total*
1997–98	22,158,556.82	4,680,904.12	61,113,779.16	68,819,213.59	67,519.76	156,839,973.45
1998–99	12,584,851.60	2,151,055.20	115,803,539.45	15,120,464.16	152,996.37	145,812,906.78
1999–2000	38,700,116.77	3,993,133.59	34,341,936.49	61,796,083.14	30,205.37	138,861,475.36
2000–01	1,368,192.83	511,266.42	97,007,617.82	77,421,881.19	117,899.30	176,426,857.56
2001–02	5,449,538.01	1,281,775.97	94,389,146.35	43,202,897.92	47,444.14	144,370,802.39
2002–03	—	—	327,709.47	—	13,666.06	341,375.53
Total	80,261,256.03	12,618,135.30	402,983,728.74	266,360,540.00	429,731.00	762,653,391.07

[1] To date.

Fire Authority for Northern Ireland

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what was discussed at the meeting between the National Employers and the Fire Brigades Union in London attended by the Chairman of the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland and referred to in the authority's minutes of 22 January; and if he will make a statement. [85721]

Mr. Browne: The "meeting" referred to in the authority's minutes of 22 January 2002 was in fact an informal dinner arranged to acquaint the National Employers with recently appointed representatives of the Fire Brigades Union. No official record was kept of their discussion.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on which occasions the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland has received a report on the meetings of National Joint Council for Fire Brigade Personnel since 22 January in accordance with the undertaking given to the authority at its meeting on 22 January recorded in minute number 6; and if he will make a statement. [85722]

Mr. Browne: The Fire Authority received a report on National Joint Council meetings at each of its monthly meetings from February to date.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the circumstances relating to, and the matters referred to, in

(a) the HELM Report on Navigator Blue and *(b)* the Quality and Audit Manager's Report on the same subject provided to the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland. [85723]

Mr. Browne: Shortcomings identified in the Fire Authority's management of its media services contract with Navigator Blue have been addressed. The Authority now has in place open and accountable tendering procedures for these services. Its new procedures have been quality assured by the sponsoring Department's internal auditors, and are in line with the policies of the Government Purchasing Agency.

The Authority's contract with Navigator Blue was terminated in May this year.

Fire Dispute

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland pursuant to the answer of 2 December, ref 84475, if he will discuss the Fire Brigade dispute with Mrs. Rosemary Craig and Professor James Shields; and if he will make a statement. [85714]

Mr. Browne: No. Officials from the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety have been maintaining close contact with the Fire Authority for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about the dispute, and they will continue to do so.

Fishing

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what proportion of Northern Ireland's fishing fleet has been decommissioned under European Union regulations since 1990. [85687]

Mr. Pearson: In March 1990 there were 450 fishing vessels in the Northern Ireland fleet, compared with 318 vessels in December 2002. Since 1990, 102 Northern Ireland fishing vessels have been decommissioned with assistance from European Structural Funds.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many commercial fishing vessels were registered in Northern Ireland in *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 2002. [85688]

Mr. Pearson: The number of commercial fishing vessels registered in Northern Ireland in January 1997 and December 2002 was 350 and 318 respectively.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are employed in the fishing industry in Northern Ireland. [85689]

Mr. Pearson: The latest available data relate to 2001 and are as follows:

	Full time	*Part time*
Catching	933	148
Processing	989	208
Others	57	30
Total	1,979	386

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the impact on the Northern Ireland fishing industry of the most recent proposals from the European Union to ban cod and prawn catches in the Irish Sea. [85691]

Mr. Pearson: No such proposals have come from the European Union. I am making representations to make sure the concerns of the Northern Ireland fishing industry are fully heard and I shall give detailed consideration to the implications for the industry when the Commission advances its detailed proposals.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessment has been made of the representations made to Her Majesty's Government by fishermen in Northern Ireland concerning European Union proposals to ban cod and prawn catches in the Irish Sea. [85692]

Mr. Pearson: I have met representatives of the catching sector who have briefed me in considerable detail on the responsible efforts that they have made in recent years to secure sustainable fisheries in the Irish Sea, and on the potential social and economic consequences of further cuts in fishing effort.

Home Expulsions

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will estimate how many people have been forced from their homes by *(a)* Loyalist and *(b)* Republican paramilitary organisations *(i)* since the signing of the Belfast Agreement and (ii) during the year 2002; and if he will make a statement. [82017]

Jane Kennedy: From 1 April 1998 to 31 October 2002, 6,646 persons presented themselves to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as being homeless due to intimidation. Information for the year 2002 cannot be supplied in the form requested but from 1 April 2002, 983 persons presented themselves to the Northern Ireland Housing Executive as being homeless due to intimidation.

It is a deplorable situation where people have been forced from their homes and this has strengthened the Government's resolve to work with communities to find a resolution to this problem.

IFI/Richardsons Plant

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Government of the Republic of Ireland about *(a)* the pension scheme, *(b)* redundancy payments and *(c)* outstanding holiday pay entitlements for employees of the IFI/Richardsons Plant in Belfast. [84750]

Mr. Pearson: As well as meeting with Richardsons' management and Unions representing the work force, I have written to the company shareholders, including the Irish Government, expressing my concern over the treatment of the work force. I have met with ICI and a representative of the Irish Government. Furthermore I hope to meet Mary Harney TD Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment shortly.

The issues relating to pensions are complex. There are four different pension schemes and the shareholders have asked the trustees of each scheme to establish the facts and options to mitigate the impact on members. The shareholders are proposing to meet with the four pension fund trustees and while the government's influence in relation to the operation of private pension schemes may be limited, I will await the outcome of this meeting with interest.

In relation to redundancy payments, applications from 151 employees of Richardsons for statutory entitlement have been received by the Department for Employment and Learning. All claims will be handled and, where payable, payments processed within normal timescales.

Outstanding holiday pay owed to employees forms part of the debt owed to them by their former employer and is a matter for the liquidator.

Marie Star Cafe

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether the PSNI Aliens Branch checked individually the passports for workers at the Marie Star Cafe. [82444]

Jane Kennedy: The PSNI do not individually check passports for the workers at the Movie Star Cafe. This is an immigration matter.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84935]

Jane Kennedy: The total budget for official travel in 2002–03 is:

Department	*Travel budget (£)*
NIO	
(a) Core Department (excluding Commissions as we do not have a breakdown of their budgets)	3,526,000
(b) Agencies (excluding NDPBs)	1,313,000
Total	4,839,000

The total travel budget for the Northern Ireland Departments in the financial year 2002–03 is *(a)* £9,501,038 and *(b)* for its agencies the budget is £8,492,862:

Department	*Travel budget (£)*
Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister	628,000
Department of Education	507,250
Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment	467,916
Department for Employment and Learning	1,686,000
Department for Social Development	273,000
Agencies	2,127,000
Department for Regional Development	200,000
Road Service	1,300,000
Water Service	1,900,000
Department of Culture Arts and Leisure	135,000
OSNI	147,000
PRONI	14,150
Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety	559,872
Agencies	160,615
Department of Agriculture and Rural Development	3,820,000
Agencies	940,000
Department of Finance and Personnel	1,047,000
Agencies	607,097
Department of Environment	177,000
Planning Service	443,000
EHS	338,000
DVLNI	102,000
DVTA	414,000
Departments	9,501,038
Agencies	8,492,862
Total	17,993,900

Organised Crime

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he expects to receive a report from Professor Goldstock giving recommendations for tackling the problem of organised crime in Northern Ireland. [83108]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State appointed Professor Goldstock in March 2002. He has been specifically asked to provide an international perspective on the problem of organised crime in Northern Ireland, to offer recommendations for tackling the problem and, in particular to formulate proposals for securing cross community support for action, drawing on his international experience.

Prof. Goldstock has provided the Secretary of State with a report of his preliminary findings on 15 September. He is expected to report to the Secretary of State in June 2003.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what agreement has been made with Professor Goldstock as to the number of days he is *(a)* required and *(b)* expected to spend working in his capacity as an adviser to the Secretary of State on organised crime. [83109]

Jane Kennedy: The Secretary of State appointed Professor Goldstock, ex-director of the New York State Organised Crime Task Force, in March 2002 to act as his independent expert and to provide an international perspective on the problem of organised crime in Northern Ireland.

Professor Goldstock has been specifically asked to provide an international perspective on the problem of organised crime in Northern Ireland, to offer recommendations for tackling the problem and, in particular, to formulate proposals for securing cross community support for action, drawing on his international experience.

Professor Goldstock's appointment does not carry a stipulation on the amount of time he is expected or required to spend in his capacity as an adviser to the Secretary of State on organised crime. To date, Professor Goldstock has visited Northern Ireland on four occasions and has met with all the main stakeholders within the law enforcement agencies and Government. He has also met with representatives from the loyalist and nationalist communities.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of the Organised Crime Task Force in Northern Ireland have taken place since its formation. [83105]

Jane Kennedy: The Organised Crime Task Force in Northern Ireland has met on 12 occasions since its formation in September 2000.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what priorities have been agreed by the law enforcement agencies in Northern Ireland as a result of the establishment of the organised crime task force. [83107]

Jane Kennedy: On 23 May 2002, the Secretary of State launched the second annual organised crime task force threat assessment and strategy. The OCTF threat assessment provides an overview of the scale and scope of organised crime in Northern Ireland and highlights trends and developments in the preceding year.

Based on the issues highlighted in the new threat assessment, the OCTF's strategy for countering the threat sets priority areas for concerted multi-agency action by the OCTF partners. These are extortion, drugs, oils-related fraud, tobacco and alcohol duty evasion. To this list we have also added the trade in counterfeit goods, as this has an on-going potential to affect investment in Northern Ireland; and armed robbery which is on the increase here.

During the year the OCTF, which I chair, will also keep a watching brief on emerging and new organised crime trends.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Police Officers are engaged full-time as investigators with the Organised Crime Taskforce. [85887]

Jane Kennedy: The Northern Ireland Organised Crime Task Force (OCTF), is a Government-led multi-agency approach to tackling organised crime. The OCTF is established to provide strategic direction and generate close co-operation between the operational law enforcement agencies and other Government agencies backed up by a strong political will to succeed.

The OCTF does not initiate operations. Operational response is a matter for the individual law enforcement agencies that take the lead in tackling the strategic priorities agreed annually by the OCTF. There are no Police Officers engaged full-time as investigators with The OCTF.

The PSNI have established an Organised Crime Co-ordination Unit headed by a Detective Chief Superintendent to co-ordinate the work of the PSNI in combating organised crime.

Parade's Commission

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what progress has been made in implementing the recommendation made by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee in their second report published in March 2001 in which they called for greater transparency in the procedures adopted by the Parades Commission. [80667]

Jane Kennedy: The commission is currently attempting to achieve greater transparency in the light of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee (NIAC) recommendation. Where the commission considers a parade in depth, it is prepared to make known, to those expressing interest, the substance of arguments and information presented to it, while continuing to adhere to its statutory rules on confidentiality.

This aspect of the commission's work has, for some time, been the subject of an application for judicial review. While both the Government and the commission would be keen, circumstances permitting, to see greater transparency (amending the Procedural Rules if necessary), neither would wish to pre-empt a judicial ruling on the subject.

Following the Weston Park talks, John Reid appointed Sir George Quigley to review the Parades Commission and the legislation under which it was established. Sir George's report, which addressed the issue of transparency, was issued for consultation on 7 November 2002.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set out the total costs incurred by Her Majesty's Government in respect of the Review of the Parade's Commission carried out by Sir George Quigley. [83098]

Jane Kennedy: The total costs incurred by the Northern Ireland Office in respect of the Review of the Parade's Commission are:

	£
2001–02	38,572.43
2002–03	[1]102,156.53

[1] At end of October 2002

Police

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what the basis is of the policy not to include members of the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland in a pension scheme for service prior to 1988; [83121]

(2) if he will take steps to ensure that service by members of the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland prior to 1988 is included as years of service for the police pension scheme; [83122]

(3) if he will grant full rights of access to the police pension scheme to all serving and former full-time police reserve officers in Northern Ireland. [84514]

Jane Kennedy: The decision to extend the police pension scheme to the full-time reserve was taken after detailed consideration and extensive consultation.

The resultant policy led to the introduction of legislation in 1994, and this generously included recompense for prior denial to the police pension scheme, including six years free service credit for 1988–1994 and non-reclamation of SERFS benefits for that period.

Treasury advocated backdating credit in full to all members of the full-time reserve both former and present for service rendered prior to the 6 April 1988, as this is the date from which Social Security legislation reduced the threshold for preservation of pensions on leaving employment from five years to two years

These arrangements were unsuccessfully challenged by way of judicial review and petition to the House of Lords. Significantly, in the judicial review judgement from the Court of Appeal in 1997, the decision to backdate at all was considered very much an act of grace on the part of the Secretary of State. All aspects were given full and detailed consideration at that time, and there are no plans for a further review.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many members of the full-time police reserve in Northern Ireland have been denied access to the police pension scheme because their service took place before 1988. [83123]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not readily available and could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the successful candidates chosen after the recent competition for Chief Inspector posts in the Police Service of Northern Ireland have turned down two or more offers of postings. [84139]

Jane Kennedy: No successful candidates turned down two or more offers of postings.

Prison Officers (Protection)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prison officers in Northern Ireland have been warned that their personal details have come into the possession of the Provisional IRA. [83124]

Jane Kennedy: The Police Service of Northern Ireland have assessed that 1,426 staff have been identified as on the 'list'. At the time of writing, the majority of these staff have now received formal notification from the PSNI that their details have been compromised. The majority of those who have not yet received formal notification have been informed verbally. The notification process is ongoing.

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are being introduced to protect those prison officers in Northern Ireland whose personal details have fallen into the hands of the Provisional IRA. [83125]

Jane Kennedy: I am satisfied that the schemes currently available to Prison Officers represent a proportionate and reasonable response to the situation. The schemes include the following:

I. Key Persons Protection Scheme (KPPS)

II. Assisted Home Removals Grant (AHR)

III. Prison Service Protection Scheme (PSPS)

IV. Special Purchase of Evacuated Dwellings (SPED)

Prison Service

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many of the Northern Ireland Prison Service staff that have applied to the SPED scheme, have *(a)* received their SPED certificates and *(b)* been granted a place on the SPED scheme. [84480]

Jane Kennedy: 102 Northern Ireland prison staff have applied through the NIHE to be admitted to the scheme to purchase evacuated dwelling (SPED). To date 69 have been accepted on to the scheme.

Real IRA (Ceasefire)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent discussions Her Majesty's Government have had with the Government of the Republic of Ireland about the Real IRA's ceasefire. [83097]

Jane Kennedy: Ministers and officials meet regularly with their counterparts in the Irish Government to discuss issues of mutual concern. While the Real IRA announced a complete cessation of all military activity from midnight, 7 September 1998, the Government continue to judge that organisation by its deeds, not its words.

Shooting Incidents

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list by month since April the shooting incidents attributed to the Provisional IRA in Northern Ireland. [81103]

Jane Kennedy: It is not possible to provide the statistics in the format requested. The table provides details of the number of shooting incidents attributed to republican, loyalist and other groups.

Number of shooting incidents by month-1 April to 15 November 2002[1]

Month	*By loyalists*	*By republicans*	*Other/ Not known*
April	12	5	3
May	10	8	1
June	23	18	3
July	26	9	1
August	24	12	1
September	19	7	—
October	22	1	3
November[2]	10	1	1
Total	146	61	13

[1] 2002 statistics are provisional and may be subject to minor amendment.
[2] To 15 November

Transsexual Rights

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what action his Department is taking to implement previously continuing policy initiatives of the Northern Ireland Executive in response to the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Goodwin with regard to transsexual rights; and what time scales have been set for implementation. [85882]

Mr. Pearson: The European Court of Human Rights, in the case of Goodwin *v.* UK, has found the UK in breach of Articles 8 and 12 of the European Convention. My officials are currently considering the implications of the judgment in the Northern Ireland context.

Trust Ports

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make available in the Vote Office the consultation document published on 12 October 2001 on the proposals to improve the public accountability of the Northern Ireland Trust Ports; if he will publish responses received prior to the House considering the draft Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002; and if he will make a statement. [86176]

Angela Smith: The consultation document and a summary of responses were made available to the Fourth Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation on 4 December 2002 to assist its deliberations on the draft Harbours (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. Copies were also made available in the Library and the Vote Office from the 4 December. The consultation document is also available on the Department's website.

Welfare Organisations (Grants)

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been paid in grants to welfare organisations representing *(a)* republican paramilitary groups and *(b)* loyalist paramilitary groups since the signing of the Belfast Agreement in 1998. [82783]

Jane Kennedy: A total of £5.864 million has been paid to ex-prisoner groups by the various Northern Ireland Departments and the Northern Ireland Office. This includes Peace and Gap funding.

In addition the Northern Ireland Prison Service has made payments of £44.5k to organisation or individuals assisting with the resettlement of prisoners under the Northern Ireland (Sentences) Act 1998.

It is not possible to say which of these groups represent republican or loyalist organisations.

Written Questions

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the average length of time taken by the Northern Ireland Office to answer written parliamentary questions has been since the General Election; and if he will make a statement. [86287]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not held in the format required and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, my Department's Parliamentary Section are currently introducing a computerised Parliamentary Question tracking system which will in due course allow for the provision of such statistics.

The Northern Ireland Office as with all other Government departments endeavour to answer all Parliamentary Questions promptly and accurately.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what has been the average time from 2001 for answering written questions to the Northern Ireland Office; and if he will make a statement. [86486]

Jane Kennedy: The information requested is not held in the format required and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. However, my Department's Parliamentary Section is currently introducing a computed Parliamentary Question Tracking system which will in due course allow for the provision of such statistics.

The Northern Ireland Office as with all other Government departments endeavours to answer all Parliamentary Questions promptly and accurately.

SOLICITOR GENERAL

Departmental Budget

Mr. Chope: To ask the Solicitor General what the total budget of *(a)* the Attorney General's Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84937]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The official travel budget for the Legal Secretariat to the Law Officers in 2002–03 is £100,000. For Treasury Solicitor's Department for the same period it is £20,000 and for HM Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate £121,000.

The budget of the CPS for official travel in the year 2002–03 is £4,271,000 and that for the Serious Fraud Office £626,000.

Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas.

Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002, was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1374 75W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

AIDS

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the Government are doing to help those suffering from AIDS and HIV in the developing world. [85389]

Clare Short: My Department continues to make a significant contribution to combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic. In our bilateral programmes alone, expenditure on HIV/AIDS related work has increased from £38 million in 1997–98 to over £200 million in 2001–02. Major new investments include support for programmes in Nigeria, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mozambique, Russia, and Ghana, China and India totalling over £350 million. We have also pledged US$200 million to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and £30 million to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative and the Medical Research Council's Microbicides Development Programme. Considerable additional resources have also been committed to United Nations agencies and civil society organisations to help combat HIV/AIDS and to help people living with the disease across the developing world. We will continue to support health system strengthening and comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, care, control and mitigation programmes. We are also supporting access to medicines, including

for HIV/AIDS. The approach of the recently launched High Level Working Group on Access to Medicines Report is to facilitate widespread voluntary differential pricing of essential medicines for the poorer developing countries as the operational norm.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department has contributed to the International AIDS Vaccine Initiative in each year since its inception. [85632]

Clare Short: The International AIDS Vaccine Initiative (IAVI) is harnessing public and private resources to accelerate the development of safe, effective and accessible preventive AIDS vaccines that will be affordable to poor countries. The UK was the first Government to support IAVI, initially with £200,000, followed by a grant of £14 million over five years, which the Prime Minister announced at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting in November 1999.

The annual breakdown of expenditure is as follows:

	£
1999–2000	625,000
2000–01	875,000
2001–02	1,500,000
2002–03	2,250,000

CDC Offices

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the funds proposed to target *(a)* power and *(b)* SMEs under the reorganisation of CDC Capital Partners. [85513]

Clare Short: CDC has established a power company to raise capital for investment in poorer developing countries. Aureos, which is a joint venture with Norfund, has launched a Central America Fund and is raising capital for three regional African Funds for SMEs.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has received concerning the re-organisation of CDC Capital Partners; and from whom these representations were received. [85516]

Clare Short: No such representations have been received.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many CDC Capital Partners offices have opened in *(a)* South Asia, *(b)* South East Asia, *(c)* Africa, and *(d)* Latin America since 1997. [85517]

Clare Short: CDC has opened two offices in South East Asia, two offices in Africa, and three in Latin America since 1997.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations her Department has received concerning the impact on development of closing CDC offices in Africa; and from whom these representations were received. [85610]

Clare Short: No such representations have been received.

Chocolate Producers

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to encourage *(a)* chocolate producers and *(b)* supermarket chains in the United Kingdom to (i) transfer to fair trade products and (ii) source chocolate from Ghana. [85398]

Clare Short: DFID is supporting Kuapa Kokoo, a cocoa producers association, and the Day Chocolate Company. In 1999 DFID provided a loan guarantee agreement of £400,000 to Natwest Bank in respect of a loan made to Day Chocolate Company. The Day Chocolate Company has succeeded in encouraging a large number of supermarket chains in the UK (eg Co-op, Sainsbury's, Waitrose and Tesco) to stock its products. Furthermore it has succeeded in securing contracts with supermarket chains, such as the Co-op and Sainsbury's, to produce their own brand Fairtrade chocolate products—the cocoa for which is sourced from Ghana.

Democratic Republic of Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what reports she has received on the origin of the virulent flu outbreak in the Equateur Province of the Democratic Republic of Congo; how many people are estimated to be infected with it in the DRC; and what response she has made to the outbreak in the north western region of the DRC; [84982]

(2) what the suspected cause is of the outbreak of acute respiratory disease in Bosobolo in the Democratic Republic of Congo; and if she will make a statement. [85879]

Clare Short: The Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response unit of the World Health Organisation has confirmed the reports of this outbreak at Bosobolo in Equatuer Province of Democratic Republic of Congo. We do not have any information on the origin of the epidemic. What is reported is that as of 22 November, there have been over 4,000 cases of acute respiratory illness, including approximately 500 deaths, since October. The clinical features of the illness include rhinorrhea, headache, arthralgia and respiratory insufficiency. Laboratory confirmation of the cause of this outbreak is pending.

This is a difficult area to get to and communications are poor. Currently, Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF-France), Epicentre and WHO are supporting the Ministry of Health in investigating this outbreak and providing medical services.

We have not provided any direct support to address this problem. However a large element of our humanitarian support to DRC is focused on health. We remain ready to respond if necessary.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is providing to help halt the spread of cholera in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84988]

Clare Short: On 20 October 2002, the Ministry of Health, Democratic Republic of the Congo reported 394 cases of cholera including 41 deaths in Kasai Oriental. Cholera is reported in Congo most years. This year DRC reports the third highest number of cases, and the highest death rate from the disease. The surveillance committee (Ministry of Health, WHO, UNICEF and Health Net International) which was established to control the outbreak has set up five cholera centres and is reinforcing surveillance and community health activities.

Unfortunately it is not only cholera that is a problem in DRC. Almost all indicators demonstrate evidence of an appalling health situation. DFID does not directly support any cholera interventions. However a significant part of our humanitarian programme is aimed at improving general health. Specific projects deliver improved water and sanitation to poor urban communities. Other support provided through the United Nations and the International Committee of the Red Cross is not earmarked and can also be used for such work.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the outbreak of haemorrhagic fever in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84991]

Clare Short: On 26 November the Minister of Health of the Government of Democratic Republic of Congo reported that eight people had died from a haemorrhagic disease at three widely spread locations in Oriental Province, in the north east of the country. The outbreak has not yet been reported by the Communicable Disease Surveillance and Response Unit of the World Health Organisation.

This area is blighted by continuing fighting between groups that have not signed the peace agreement that continues to hold between the main warring parties. Access to carry out the proper investigations is therefore very difficult. The Minister of Health has called on the belligerents to allow safe access for medical teams.

Economic Changes

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what changes there have been in *(a)* productivity, *(b)* income, *(c)* employment and *(d)* economic growth in (i) South Asia, (ii) South East Asia, (iii) Africa and (iv) Latin America since the 2000 White Paper 'Making Globalisation Work for the Poor.' [85514]

Clare Short: The 2000 White Paper on Globalisation gave data up to 1998. Since then information for income for 1999 and for economic growth for 2000 has become available. This is presented in the following tables for the standard regions published by the World Bank.

Percentage of the population with incomes of less than $1/day

	1990	*1998*[1]	*1999*
East Asia and Pacific	28	15	14
Latin America and the Caribbean	17	12	15
South Asia	44	40	37
Sub-Saharan Africa	48	48	47

[1] Revised

Gross domestic product per person (annual percent growth)

	1998–99	*1999–2000*
East Asia and Pacific	6	6
Latin America and the Caribbean	−1	2
South Asia	4	2
Sub-Saharan Africa	0	1

Statistics on productivity and employment are collated by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The information available is patchy and refers primarily to productivity and employment in the formal sector. Coverage of the informal sector is partial and as a result the ILO data will not necessarily present a complete picture for many developing countries. DFID does not currently have access to this data.

Education Fast Track

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answers of 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 15–16W, on the education Fast Track Initiative, when she expects *(a)* India, *(b)* Pakistan, *(c)* Bangladesh, *(d)* DRC and *(e)* Nigeria to join the Fast Track Initiative. [86124]

Clare Short: The UK has prepared technical notes detailing the analytical work which will need to be done in each of these countries to prepare them for support from the so called Fast Track Initiative. We have proposed to the World bank that these should be discussed at a meeting of FTI partners dedicated to these five countries, with the aim of gaining agreement on the way ahead and support for the process from other agencies.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answers of 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 15–16W, on the education fast track initiative, what money has been allocated for *(a)* Burkina Faso, *(b)* Guinea, *(c)* Mauritania and *(d)* Niger following the decision of the World Bank to support the fast track education initiative within these countries. [86125]

Clare Short: The international community has agreed that FTI proposals should be reviewed rigorously by local donor groups, to ensure that they are coherent with each country's existing plans (including Poverty Reduction Strategies and Medium Term Economic Frameworks or their equivalent) and to confirm that countries have the capacity to absorb any additional finance. Specific sums will be allocated by development agencies only when this process is complete.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to her answers of 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 15–16W, on the education Fast Track Initiative, what finance will be provided for teacher salaries in countries included in the Fast Track Initiative; what emphasis will be placed on HIV/AIDS education; how many new school buildings will be built, in each country; and whether she estimates that adequate supplies of teachers exist. [86126]

Clare Short: The Fast Track Initiative is intended to be tailored to the needs of individual countries. These issues will therefore be addressed to varying degrees in the proposals which countries are now putting forward. Local donor groups will review the proposals, including

an assessment of capacity issues. Until all the proposals have been endorsed, it is impossible to say how much finance will be dedicated to teacher salaries, how many school buildings will be constructed, or what the total teacher requirement will be.

Eritrea

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 201–02W, on Eritrea, what meetings have been fixed with the Government of Eritrea to discuss bilateral support for its poverty reduction strategy. [86127]

Clare Short: No meetings have yet been arranged with the Eritrean Government. DFID officials are planning a visit to Eritrea early in the new year.

Ethiopia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the impact which Ethiopia's debt service payments are having on the ability of the Ethiopian Government to combat poverty. [85876]

Clare Short: Ethiopia qualified for interim debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) at Decision Point (DP) in November 2001. Irrevocable relief will be provided at HIPC Completion Point, which is expected within the next two years. Savings resulting from HIPC assistance will amount to around US$ 96 million per year on average until 2021. These resources will be freed up for the Ethiopian Government to use for poverty reduction. Poverty-targeted public expenditure increased by over 1 per cent. of GDP in the current year as a result of HIPC relief.

Ethiopia owes the £UK 15.4 million. Provided Ethiopia remains on track with its programme of economic reform, we would not expect Ethiopia to make any further payments on its debt to the UK after DP.

Malawi

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on how the focus on health and sustainable livelihoods in the bilateral donor programme in Malawi relates to her integrated approach to water supply, sanitation and hygiene designed to improve health and combat poverty. [84615]

Clare Short: Our substantial health and sustainable livelihoods programmes in Malawi do not directly focus on water supply, sanitation and hygiene as other bilateral and multilateral donor partners are leading in these areas.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what evidence has been collated by her Department regarding manipulation of food distribution by the Malawian Government for political gain. [84985]

Clare Short: Distribution of humanitarian food supplies provided to Malawi under the emergency operation led by the World Food Programme, is being handled efficiently by an NGO consortium. We are working with other donors and NGOs to monitor the distribution processes and sales of subsidised commercial maize imported by the Government. To date we have no evidence of political interference.

Manufactured Goods (Tariffs)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on US proposals globally to abolish tariffs on manufactured goods; and what the level of US tariffs is for EU goods. [85057]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

We welcome the US proposal to reduce non-agricultural tariffs as an imaginative contribution to the Doha development round and will press for a positive EU response. It will be important to ensure that the Doha round contributes significantly to the position of developing countries in the world trading system. Current US tariff rates are available from the US International Trade Commission website at www.usitc.gov/taffairs.htm

Pakistan

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent initiatives she has taken to help fund and encourage the education of girls in Pakistan. [84664]

Clare Short: DFID is working closely with the Government of Pakistan and other donors to improve school quality and increase opportunities for girls to go to school. At the national level, DFID is supporting improvements to information systems so as to better monitor and evaluate girls' education. In the North West Frontier Province and Azad Jammu and Kashmir, DFID is supporting the development of community schools, which have been shown to be more effective in attracting girls to school. With DFID support, girls' enrolment in the Northern Areas has increased by 73 per cent. since 1997–98. Despite some progress overall, the challenges facing Pakistan remain great.

River Congo (Flooding)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the potential danger arising from flooding of the River Congo during the coming rainy season. [84989]

Clare Short: December is the month when the level of the river is usually at its highest level. On 27 November the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo warned that the level of the Congo river this year is rising at a rate, and to an extent, that suggests flooding is possible. In 1999, the last time the Congo river flooded at Kinshasa, as many as 80,000 people were displaced.

Rwandan Refugees

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made in the repatriation of Rwandan refugees in Tanzania. [84990]

Clare Short: There is progress with repatriation of Rwandan refugees in Tanzania who volunteer. UNHCR provides assistance to those who register. It is estimated that over 4,500 returned to Rwanda in 2001 and there will be similar number this year. This has exceeded the number of arrivals.

Tanzania

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she is giving to ensure adequate training of police officers in human rights issues in Tanzania; and if she will make a statement. [84987]

Clare Short: DFID provides budgetary support to the Government of Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy which this year increased budgetary resources to the police, prisons and the judiciary. UNDP is the lead agency in the field of Human Rights and is working directly with the Government of Tanzania to improve standards across a range of institutions, including the police service.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

VAT

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many VAT registrations per 10,000 resident population there were in each local authority in England and Wales in *(a)* 2002, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 1992 and *(d)* 1987. [85801]

Nigel Griffiths: VAT registrations before 1994 were on a different set of administrative boundaries. The latest VAT registration data available is for 2001. I have placed details of the VAT Registration rate per 10,000 Resident adults (16+) in the Libraries of the House.

Analogue Switch-off (Rural Areas)

John Thurso: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of analogue switch-off on remote rural areas. [83776]

Mr. Timms: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting on 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 535–36.

Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum Pipelines

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the UK companies involved in the consortium applying for an Export Credit Guarantee for the *(a)* Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline and the *(b)* Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline. [83728]

Ms Hewitt: The information is as follows:

(a) The sponsors of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Company are seeking ECGD support for the supply of UK goods and services and for UK investments related to the project. BP plc is the only UK company in the sponsor group.

(b) ECGD has not received an application from any UK company for an Export Credit Guarantee for the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzerum gas pipeline.

Broadband

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluation she has made of the initiative between British Telecom and Highlands and Islands Enterprise to extend broadband coverage; and how she intends promoting similar initiatives to other remote and rural areas within the UK. [84966]

Mr. Timms: Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) are involved in the Exchange Activate trial being run by BT across the UK, including at two exchanges near Inverness. This is due to run until next spring, so no evaluation has been carried out as yet. If the initiative is successful, HIE will be keen to see this approach applied more widely in the area.

A wider range of initiatives is also underway in the Highlands and Islands to increase broadband access. These include a pilot of aggregated public sector procurement and projects under the UK Broadband Fund, such as a major wireless trial in the Western Isles, a powerline carrier trial in Campbeltown, and a demand stimulation scheme based on road shows and demonstration centres.

The UK Broadband Task Force, established in November, will find and disseminate exemplars of best practice around the country, including to rural and remote areas and by so doing stimulate the further roll out of broadband.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 228W, on priority areas how many *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* GP surgeries, *(c)* schools, *(d)* police stations, *(e)* local authority agencies and *(f)* other public sector places will SEEDA be upgrading to broadband in the Sittingbourne and Sheppey constituency; and how much of the SEEDA Broadband fund *(i)* has been and (ii) will be spent in Sittingbourne and Sheppey. [85002]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* SEEDA does not maintain data at this level. SEEDA's broadband fund has been allocated to projects that provide benefits to the region and there is no detailed breakdown of the amount of funding that has been spent specifically in Sittingbourne and Sheppey.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assistance her Department has made available to UK businesses to enable them to access broadband via satellite technology. [85107]

Mr. Timms: The Department of Trade and Industry has made available £30 million to the RDAs and Devolved Administrations for pilot projects to extend broadband access. Several of the recipients have used this fund to enable small businesses to access broadband via satellite technology. For example, the South West

Development Agency, East Midlands, Development Agency, East of England Development Agency and Advantage West Midlands are collaborating in the Remote Area Broadband Inclusion Trials (RABIT) programme to trial alternative broadband Internet access to small businesses in rural areas using wireless and satellite. The scheme has been operating since September 2002. Some £700 is made available to each company. By the beginning of December, 264 applications had been approved, of which 75 per cent. to 80 per cent. involve satellite trials. About 1,800 to 2,000 companies are expected to participate in the programme to December 2003.

Chemicals Innovation and Growth Team Reports

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the Chemicals Innovation and Growth Team will produce its reports. [85490]

Alan Johnson: The Report will be available on 11 December, and I will place copies in the Libraries of the House.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with interested parties about the contribution of CHP to Britain's future energy needs. [86188]

Mr. Wilson: I have had several meetings with interested parties from the CHP industry over the last year, where a range of issues affecting CHP were discussed.

Commonwealth Countries (Trade)

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the volume of trade between the UK and each Commonwealth country was in the last year for which figures are available; and what estimate she has made of UK investment in Commonwealth countries. [85716]

Nigel Griffiths: Statistics on UK trade in goods are published by HM Customs and Excise while those on UK investment overseas are compiled by the Office for National Statistics. The latest available information is as follows:

£ million

Country	*UK exports: Goods 2001*	*UK imports: Goods 2001*	*UK outward FDI stock End 2000*
Anguilla	1.2	0.1	n/a
Antigua Barbuda	17.3	3.4	[1]
Australia	2,321.9	1,837.9	10,004
Australian Oceania	0.4	0.7	0
Of which:			
Christmas Islands	0.0	0.6	[2]
Cocos Islands	0.3	0.1	[2]
Heard and McDonald	0.0	0.0	[2]
Norfolk Island	0.0	0.0	[2]
Bahamas	15.2	7.1	223
Bangladesh	68.0	455.2	158
Barbados	55.7	40.2	112
Belize	13.8	34.9	[1]
Bermuda	34.0	45.3	6,071
Botswana	24.2	1,076.9	88
British Indian Ocean Territories	0.5	0.0	[1]
British Virgin Islands	7.3	6.8	64
Brunei	59.6	34.1	[1]
Canada	3,250.3	3,786.3	8,430
Cayman Islands	9.7	3.1	443
Cook Islands	0.1	0.0	n/a
Cyprus	291.5	250.1	40
Dominica	10.1	12.0	0
Falkland Islands	19.8	6.9	[1]
Gambia	18.5	7.7	[1]
Ghana	144.4	134.0	102
Gibraltar	127.6	14.3	237
Grenada	7.0	0.8	[1]
Guyana	22.7	60.6	34
India	1,780.7	1,884.1	1,246
Jamaica	70.7	117.9	598
Kenya	172.5	211.8	430
Kiribati	0.1	0.1	0
Lesotho	1.9	1.9	[1]
Malawi	8.2	15.0	25
Malaysia	1,033.3	2,012.2	1,741
Maldives	5.0	6.4	[1]
Malta	217.4	148.0	81
Mauritius	52.3	337.8	234
Montserrat	1.1	0.0	n/a
Namibia	12.7	316.5	[1]
Nauru	0.8	0.0	0
New Zealand	311.5	560.5	1,919
Niue and Tokelau	10.3	2.2	[1]
Of which:			
Niue Island	0.3	0.0	[2]
Tokelau Islands	10.0	2.2	[2]
Nigeria	683.6	68.2	804
Pakistan	229.6	437.9	513
Papua New Guinea	4.3	41.4	[1]
Pitcairn	0.9	0.0	0
Samoa	4.8	0.0	0
Seychelles	13.4	47.9	[1]
Sierra Leone	61.9	3.0	[1]
Singapore	1,603.5	2,146.4	6,300
Solomon Islands	0.3	0.5	[1]
South Africa	1,547.4	2,953.3	3,051
Sri Lanka	142.4	400.8	108
St. Helena	9.7	0.4	[1]
St. Kitts and Nevis	7.5	7.1	[1]
St. Lucia	17.0	16.5	[1]
St. Vincent	9.2	13.7	[1]
Swaziland	4.3	33.6	[1]
Tanzania	66.0	35.2	39
Tonga	1.3	0.3	[1]
Trinidad and Tobago	91.6	53.9	-102
Turks and Caicos	0.8	0.2	[1]
Tuvalu	0.1	0.2	0
Uganda	34.8	8.5	35
Vanuatu	0.5	0.1	[1]
Zambia	23.9	11.7	45
Zimbabwe	36.2	91.4	130
The Commonwealth	14,794.0	19,805.2	n/a

[1] Disclosive
[2] Not separately available
Note:
n/a = Not available
Sources:
HM Customs and Excise
Office for National Statistics

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she has taken to encourage trade between Commonwealth countries. [85811]

Ms Hewitt: The Government have acted on specific commitments in the Edinburgh Commonwealth Economic Declaration of 1997 by vigorously supporting: the EU's stance on multilateral liberalisation, notably through the launch of the WTO Round at Doha; the full opening of the EU's market to the least developed countries, 14 of whom are in the Commonwealth; the launch and work programme of the Commonwealth Business Council, whose task is to promote Commonwealth trade and investment. DTI Ministers have also encouraged effective Commonwealth networking on trade through informal discussions with their counterparts and in an ongoing series of seminars with High Commissions in London. Trade Partners UK is responsible for helping UK companies export and invest overseas, including to our Commonwealth partners.

Construction Industry

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she has taken to encourage a healthy and efficient construction and building industry in the last 12 months. [85825]

Mr. Wilson: I attach considerable importance to the health and efficiency of the UK construction industry. Construction represents 8 per cent. of GDP and employs almost two million people. Construction is central to the delivery and maintenance of the national infrastructure and therefore to all our public service, including health care, transportation, housing and education. The Government's Rethinking Construction initiative aims to work with the industry improve its productivity and competitiveness by addressing issues such as the efficiency of processes and the quality of the end product.

Departmental Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the grants funded by her Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if she will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82191]

Ms Hewitt: *(a)* Information on the Department's grant-making schemes together with funding for 2001–02 is available in Annex B1 and in the text of my 2002 Expenditure Plans Report (Cm 5416), a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House.

(b) Information on numbers of awards is not held centrally by the Department and to provide it would entail disproportionate cost.

(c) It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of related administrative costs as a large number of different units within the Department are involved with a wide range of staff making a contribution.

India First

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial support her Department gives to the organisation India First. [84923]

Nigel Griffiths: None.

Manufacturing Summit

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to hold a manufacturing summit *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* elsewhere. [83923]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* We have no current plans to hold a manufacturing summit in the UK or elsewhere.

We meet industrial partners frequently to share views on the key manufacturing issues, and to focus on the practical steps of taking forward the Government's Manufacturing Strategy. For example, my colleague the Minister for Small Business met Chairs of the Regional Development Agencies, together with Digby Jones of the CBI, Brendan Barber of the TUC, and Martin Temple of the EEF on 3 December to discuss the publication of the Regional Development Agencies' reports on manufacturing which set out specific achievements to date and key strategic initiatives for the delivery of the Manufacturing Strategy at the regional level.

Post Offices

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices in Lancashire are open for less than full-time hours; and what the corresponding figure was for 1997. [85340]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Post Offices (Wycombe)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many post offices in the Wycombe constituency are open for less than full-time hours; and how many there were in 1997. [85661]

Mr. Timms: These are matters that fall within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. and I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Process Centre for Manufacturing Excellence

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding the Government has provided to the Process Industries Centre for Manufacturing Excellence; which organisations have *(a)* been involved with the Centre and *(b)* benefited from the Centre; and if she will make a statement on the effectiveness and financial benefits of the Centre. [85491]

Alan Johnson: The Government are providing funding support of £1.525 million over the period 2000–01 to 2003–04 to the Process Industries Centre for Manufacturing Excellence (PICME) to help UK

chemical and other process-based companies improve their productivity and manufacturing performance. Since becoming operational in March 2001, PICME has delivered 60 benchmarking analyses and 25 Masterclass workshops to companies in these sectors. To date, this activity has resulted in substantial direct savings being achieved by each of these companies, collectively totalling over £14 million per year.

Quoted Companies Alliance Report

Mr. Ruffley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what action she proposes to take in response to the report of the Quoted Companies Alliance, The Threat to Enterprise Britain. [85201]

Nigel Griffiths: The Department is committed to helping UK companies, including the important Smaller Quoted Companies sector, improve their productivity and increase value added. We have strong links with the Quoted Companies Alliance who have played a key role in identifying the challenges facing Smaller Quoted Companies. I welcome this report and I look forward to working with them in the future to ensure that companies within this important sector reach their full growth potential.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much financial support has been given to *(a)* wind power, *(b)* solar power, *(c)* wave power, *(d)* geothermal power, *(e)* hydro power and *(f)* other renewable energy sources in each year since 1972. [80864]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The available information is shown in the table from 1978 onwards. Regrettably, information for 1972, 1973, 1974 and 1975 is not available and the figures for 1976 and 1977 were not broken down into these subject areas.

£ million

	Wind	*Solar*	*Wave and tidal*	*Geo*	*Hydro*	*Other*	*Total*
1975–76	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
1976–77	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.30	0.30
1977–78	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	1.00	1.00
1978–79	0.30	0.20	1.80	0.20	0.00	0.00	2.50
1979–80	0.60	1.20	3.60	1.30	0.00	0.10	6.80
1980–81	0.80	0.90	4.70	2.30	0.00	0.22	8.92
1981–82	0.90	0.71	4.80	8.20	0.00	0.43	15.04
1982–83	2.50	1.40	3.13	4.50	0.00	0.53	12.06
1983–84	2.50	0.90	1.00	4.70	0.00	0.27	9.37
1984–85	4.80	0.50	0.70	5.70	0.00	0.20	11.90
1985–86	5.40	0.70	0.50	3.80	0.00	0.29	10.69
1986–87	3.70	0.90	0.20	3.60	0.10	0.91	9.41
1987–88	4.00	1.10	1.60	3.60	0.18	2.00	12.48
1988–89	3.90	1.40	1.30	3.60	0.10	2.20	12.50
1989–90	4.80	1.90	1.20	3.50	0.10	2.66	14.16
1990–91	4.50	2.10	2.30	2.60	0.03	3.70	15.23
1991–92	6.67	2.35	2.40	1.62	0.12	4.79	17.95

Notes:
1. Definition of each technology stream has varied over time.
2. Spend prior to 1978–79 was not recorded by programme area.

Renewable energy programme external expenditure (ie excluding ETSU/FES services) from 1972

£ million

	1992–93	1993–94	1994–95	1995–96	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02
Wind	8.69	7.31	2.73	3.37	2.37	1.24	0.95	1.20	1.10	2.20
Solar	2.30	2.38	2.07	1.88	1.87	1.66	0.98	1.73	1.40	2.70
Wave and tidal	2.06	0.78	0.33	0.20	0.05	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.40	0.30
Geo	1.22	1.13	0.24	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Hydro	0.07	0.17	0.15	0.08	0.14	0.06	0.08	0.30	0.00	0.00
Other	4.37	6.11	6.54	6.72	4.90	3.85	3.75	4.62	6.80	8.40
Total	18.71	17.88	12.06	12.25	9.33	6.81	5.85	7.86	9.7	13.6

Notes:
1. Definition of each technology stream has varied over time.
2. Spend prior to 1978–79 was not recorded by programme area.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much of the funding made available to support renewable technologies in March 2001 has been allocated to *(a)* existing and *(b)* new onshore wind programmes. [85110]

Mr. Wilson: For several years funding of research and development into wind technology has concentrated on off shore wind developments as onshore wind is considered to be close to becoming commercially competitive.

There have been five projects commissioned since March 2001, with a total value of £356,898, that could be considered as onshore related. These have looked primarily at the impact of onshore wind farms on Radar and Aviation interests.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many of the most recent development plans of local authorities in England and Wales make specific mention of renewable energy plans; and how many of these include technology-specific policies. [85320]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* That information is not held centrally.

Planning is a devolved matter. In England, local planning authorities are required, in formulating the policies in their development plans, to have regard to any regional and strategic planning guidance and to current national policies. Development Plans should therefore take account of Planning Policy Guidance Note 22, Renewable Energy, and formulate policies on renewable energy which are relevant to the local planning authority's area.

In Wales, local planning authorities submit Unitary Development Plans for scrutiny by the Assembly to ensure regard is paid to national planning policy outlined in Planning Policy Wales and Technical Advice Note 8, Renewable Energy.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets she has to increase the use of renewable energy supplies; and how she intends to achieve the targets. [86301]

Mr. Wilson: The Government have set a target that 10 per cent. of electricity will be generated from eligible renewable sources by 2010.

The Renewables Obligation Order, which came into force on 1 April 2002, is the primary instrument for the expansion of renewable energy in the UK. Licensed electricity suppliers are required to obtain specified proportions of their electricity from eligible renewable sources. The level of the Obligation will rise each year to reach 10.4 per cent. by 2010–11.

The Renewables Obligation is being backed by over £250 million of direct support measures to bring forward newer renewable energy technologies. This provides a substantial incentive to renewable energy generation in the UK.

Qualifying renewable energy sources are also exempt from the Climate Change Levy to further assist the expansion of renewable energy.

Royal Mail

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had regarding the appointment of the new Chief Executive of Royal Mail. [85407]

Mr. Timms: Although the recruitment of a new Chief Executive for Royal Mail is primarily a matter for the company the appointment will be made in accordance with public appointment procedures and requires the Secretary of State's consent. The Secretary of State has been kept informed of the recruitment process and in due course will be invited to consider a recommendation for appointment.

Rural Post Office Network

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures are being taken to improve security arrangements at rural post offices; and if she will make a statement. [85021]

Mr. Timms: Security arrangements at all post offices are an operational matter for Post Office Ltd. and I have asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Small Firm Loan Scheme

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimate she has made of the number of firms in *(a)* Roxburgh and Berwickshire, and *(b)* the Scottish Borders that are eligible for the small firm loan scheme *(i)* now and (ii) following widening of the scheme's eligibility. [85703]

Nigel Griffiths: Eligibility for the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme is based on the business having a viable business proposal but lacking the collateral to obtain conventional finance. It is not possible, therefore, to estimate the number of businesses eligible now and following the recently announced changes on the basis requested.

Detailed information is available at county level. During Financial Year 2001–02 the scheme guaranteed 16 loans for businesses in the Scottish Borders at a value of £710,000. It is estimated that overall the changes will result in a 25 per cent. increase in the number of applications received.

Solar PV Projects

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many bids for funding solar PV projects were received in the first two rounds of stream 2 of her Department's solar PV Major Demonstration Programme; how many were successful; what was the total value of *(a)* bids received and *(b)* projects approved; and what the total size, measured by kWp, was of bids received. [86174]

Mr. Wilson: In the first two rounds of stream 2 of my Department's solar PV Major Demonstration Programme, 59 bids were received. Of these 27 were successful.

The total value of grants requested was just under £9 million and the total value of projects approved was just over £3.5 million.

The total size of bids received, for both rounds was just over 2100kWp.

Thompsons Solicitors

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much has been paid to Thompsons Solicitors with regard to the processing of respiratory disease claims. [85668]

Mr. Wilson: As of 30 November 2002, a total of £18.6 million (inclusive of VAT and disbursements) had been paid to Thompson's Solicitors in costs with regards to the processing of respiratory disease claims.

I would like to take this opportunity to correct erroneous information inadvertently relayed in reply to PQ No. 60802 tabled by my hon. Friend on 1 June 2002. My hon. Friend asked for a separate breakdown for the legal costs paid to the top 100 companies handling respiratory disease and Vibration White Finger claims. The figure given for Thompson's solicitors was £19.2 million. The correct figure should have been £12.4 million. I have written to my hon. Friend about this.

Wind Generators

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many wind generators are working in the United Kingdom; and how many are planned to be built in the next five years. [86402]

Mr. Wilson: There are at present, 75 wind power schemes working in the UK, comprising of 974 turbines. (British Wind Energy Association information).

It is for developers to bring forward proposals for wind farms. The Government does not keep a register of such proposals, most of which are assessed by local authorities under the normal planning process. Only applications for consent to construct and operate wind farms with a capacity greater than 50 megawatts on-shore, and greater than one megawatt off-shore, are required to be referred to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989.

For onshore wind farm development, my Department is considering one application in England and Wales and the Scottish Executive are considering seven applications in Scotland.

Out of 20 potential offshore sites offered by the Crown Estate in April 2001, the DTI and Scottish Executive are currently considering proposals in respect of 11 sites and a further two have now been granted construction consent under section 36 of the Electricity Act.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Initiatives

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the schemes and initiatives sponsored by her Department and its agencies which are not the subject of national roll out showing *(a)* the authorities or areas covered by the scheme and *(b)* the budget of the scheme in the last year for which information is available. [86741]

Dr. Howells: The following schemes and initiatives are sponsored by my Department in partnership with other funding bodies.

Space for Sports and Arts Programme (SSA)

Space for Sports and Arts Programme (SSA) is a partnership between traditional public expenditure of £75 million from the Capital Modernisation Fund and £55 million from the three lottery distributors: New Opportunities Fund (£25 million), Sport England (£25 million) and Arts Council of England (£5 million).

The SSA programme is being rolled out in 65 local authorities in deprived areas. The budget for the programme is £130 million from the beginning of 2000 to March 2004, which is the life of the programme. Approximately 297 projects are planned in the 65 local authorities. The Local Education Authorities (LEAs) invited to bid were:

Barking and Dagenham, Barnsley, Bedfordshire, Birmingham, Blackburn with Darwen, Bradford, Brent, Brighton & Hove, Bristol, City of Nottingham, Cornwall, Cumbria, Derby City, Derbyshire, Doncaster, Durham, East Sussex, Essex, Gateshead, Greenwich, Hackney, Hartlepool, Islington, Kent, Kingston-upon-Hull, Knowsley, Lambeth, Lancashire, Leeds, Leicester City, Lewisham, Liverpool, Luton, Manchester, Middlesbrough, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Newham, Norfolk, North Somerset, Northamptonshire, Northumberland, Nottinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Plymouth, Portsmouth, Redcar and Cleveland, Rochdale, Rotherham, Salford, Sandwell, Sheffield, Slough, Somerset, South Tyneside, Southwark, St. Helens, Stockton-on-Tees, Stoke-on-Trent, Sunderland, Tower Hamlets, Trafford, Walsall, Wirral, Wolverhampton.

Portable Antiquities Scheme

The Portable Antiquities Scheme was established in 1997 to encourage members of the public to report all finds of archaeological objects. Since autumn 1997 DCMS has been funding six pilot schemes to promote voluntary reporting of all archaeological finds. These pilots were established in Kent, Norfolk, North Lincolnshire, North West (Cheshire, Lancashire, Merseyside, Greater Manchester and Cumbria), West Midlands and Yorks. A further six pilots have been funded for three years by Heritage lottery fund since spring 1999. These pilots were established in Dorset & Somerset, Hampshire, Northamptonshire, Suffolk, Wales, and in London.

A bid for a three-year funding for a national network of 41 posts at a cost of £1.5 million a year from April 2003 was approved by the Heritage lottery fund in May. This bid has 63 national and local partners, each of whom is contributing 10 per cent. towards the cost. In 2002–03 the Department is providing £411,000 to support the current pilot schemes until the new funding comes on line. The following schemes and initiatives are by public bodies sponsored by DCMS. These are not the subject of national roll out.

Splash Extra

This was a joint DCMS/Youth Justice Board programme of summer activities targeted on those 9–17 year olds identified as most at risk of offending in the areas covered across Government. A list of those areas has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. Resourced by the New Opportunities Fund and providing almost 300 estate-based schemes across England, Splash Extra established a menu of high quality sports, arts and personal development activities.

The budget was £8.5 million for the last financial year.

Creative Partnerships

This initiative is to develop long-term partnerships between schools, cultural and creative organisations and artists. The partnerships will help children develop their own creativity, which should bring benefits in

terms of educational attainment. The partnerships are being developed in 16 areas (listed below) across the country.

The Arts Council of England is delivering the initiative and the budget for 2002–03 is £15 million.

List of Creative Partnerships areas

1. Manchester/Salford
2. Merseyside (Liverpool, Knowsley, St Helens, Wirral, Sefton)
3. Tees Valley (Redcar & Cleveland, Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton)
4. Durham/Sunderland
5. Kingston upon Hull
6. South Yorkshire Coalfields (Barnsley, Rotherham, Doncaster)
7. Birmingham
8. Black Country (Sandwell, Wolverhampton, Walsall)
9. Nottingham
10. Norfolk
11. Bristol
12. Cornwall
13. Slough
14. Kent
15. Inner London East (Hackney, Islington, Newham, Tower Hamlets)
16. Inner London South (Southwark, Lewisham, Lambeth, Greenwich).

Sport England

Sportsearch is being piloted in three local authorities (Southampton City Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and the London Borough of Lambeth). The budget for the pilot is £200,000 in 2002/03 and 31 schools in the three authorities are involved.

Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI), Sport England have made a one-off grant of £1 million to the English Federation of Disability Sport to develop and deliver the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IFI) scheme. There are currently 27 IFI sites around the country (eventually there will be 30). They are in Leeds city council, Oxford city council, Bolton MBC, LB Lewisham, Kerrier DC, Bury MBC, Cannock Chase DC, Plymouth city council, Coventry city council, Kirklees MBC, Bromsgrove DC, Dacorum BC, Borough of Pool, Slough MBC, Mansfield DC, Ipswich BC, Amber Valley BC, North Tyneside council, Leicester city council, Berwick upon Tweed, Spelthorne BC, Chichester council, Copeland BC and South Gloucestershire council. There are no current plans to roll out these initiatives nationally.

Grants to Grade II Buildings at Risk in London

Under the Local Government Act 1985, English Heritage is able to offer grants for the repairs of Grade II listed buildings within the Greater London area. The scheme is concentrated on those buildings included on the English Heritage Register of Buildings at Risk, and projects which make a strategic contribution to the conservation of historic buildings, areas, gardens, landscapes or archaeology within Greater London. In 2001/02 English Heritage offered a total of £175,000 under the scheme.

Access Radio

The Radio Authority is currently running a pilot study of 15 access radio projects across the UK. These are in Glasgow, Belfast, Banbridge, Bradford, Manchester, Stoke on Trent, Nottingham, Leicester, Birmingham, Forest of Dean, Pontypridd, Havant, Southall (London), Hackney (London), South Bank (London). The projects will be subject to an independent evaluation which will assist the Government in deciding whether to introduce access radio on a national basis. The full extent of coverage will depend on a number of factors such as local spectrum availability and the local radio ecology. None of these pilots have received funding from either the Department or the Radio Authority.

This information is accurate as of 7 November 2002.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether a condition laid down in an existing planning consent would be superseded automatically by a permission given under the licensing regime proposed in the Licensing Bill before the House of Lords. [85565]

Dr. Howells: No. The planning and licensing regimes are entirely separate and one cannot supersede the other.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total expenditure of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travelling in 2001–02. [84792]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* DCMS expenditure for travelling and subsistence for 2001–2002 was £752,860. In addition, expenditure by the Royal Parks Agency was £26,015.

Since 1999, the Government has published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were published on 24 July 2002 (*Official Report*, columns 1374–1375W). The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Wembley Stadium

Rob Marris: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the Government's policy is on *(a)* giving, *(b)* loaning and *(c)* underwriting funding for Wembley Stadium additional to that set out in the final report of the English National Stadium Review. [86272]

Mr. Caborn: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made clear in response to a question from her right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Gorton (Mr. Kaufman), following her statement on the National Stadium on 23 May, *Official Report*, column 406, there will be no further public money invested in the National Stadium project beyond that already announced; £120 million from the Sports Lottery Fund, £21 million from the London Development Agency and £20 million from this Department for non-stadium infrastructure. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport also set out in reply to a question from his hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) on 19 March, *Official Report*, column 238W, that a further £7 million from his transport provision would be earmarked towards improvements to Wembley Park tube station which would be matched by a similar sum from the Mayor of London for the same purpose.

TREASURY

Alcohol Sales

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the projected volume of *(a)* sales and *(b)* tax revenue is from high strength lagers for the 12 months since the 2002 Budget. [85399]

John Healey: The information requested is not available. HM Customs and Excise do not project the volume of sales or revenue from any particular category of beer.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the volume of *(a)* sales and *(b)* tax revenue was from high strength lagers in each year from 1988 to 2001. [85400]

John Healey: The information requested is not available. HM Customs and Excise does not record volumes or tax revenue for any particular category of beer. Figures are only available for the total of beer and cider. These are available in the HM Customs and Excise Beer and Cider Factsheet, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House.

The following table shows clearances and receipts of coolers and spirits as published in the Wine Factsheet and Spirits Factsheet respectively:

Clearances and receipts of coolers and spirits

Year	*Volume "coolers" thousand hectolitres of product*	*Volume spirits thousand hectolitres of pure alcohol*	*[1]Receipts (a) "coolers" £ million*	*Receipts spirits £ million*
1988–89	21	992	N/a	1,576
1989–90	104	988	N/a	1,514
1990–91	188	987	N/a	1,703
1991–92	281	888	9	1,742
1992–93	434	863	15	1,661
1993–94	505	850	18	1,707
1994–95	553	887	20	1,776
1995–96	1,049	814	36	1,653
1996–97	1,696	823	65	1,593
1997–98	1,214	810	68	1,546
1998–99	1,287	840	75	1,643
1999–2000	2,028	926	122	1,904
2000–01	2,911	937	185	1,842
2001–02	3,823	978	236	1,919

[1] Before 1991–92 receipts for "coolers" were included with made-wine.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the projected volume of *(a)* sales and *(b)* tax revenue is from (i) spirit-based alcoholic beverages and (ii) non-spirit based alcoholic beverages in the 12 months following the 2002 Budget. [85401]

John Healey: Not all of the information requested is available. Customs and Excise do not project the volume of 'sales'.

Information on projected total duty receipts from spirits can be found inTable B12 of the Pre-Budget Report, November 2002 (HM Treasury Cm 5664). The projection for 2002–03 is £2.2 billion.

Information on projected total duty from non-spirit based beverages is also in Table B12. The projection for 2002–03 for wine is £1.9 billion and beer and cider is £3.1 billion.

Mr. O'Hara: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the volume of *(a)* sales and *(b)* tax revenue was from spirit-based (i) ready to drink and (ii) alcoholic beverages in each year from 1988 to 2001. [85402]

John Healey: The precise information requested is not available. Until Budget 2002 wine and spirit-based products with an alcohol content below 5.5 per cent. referred to in the hon. Member's question as "ready to drink", were dutied at the same rate and classified as made-wines. These products are also referred to as "coolers". Data on volumes of UK duty paid "coolers" and receipts can be found on page 1 of the HM Customs and Excise Wine factsheet, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The data includes volumes from wine and spirit-based "coolers".

Data on volumes of UK duty paid spirits and receipts can also be found on the factsheet. The figures do not include spirit-based "coolers"

Child Care Tax Credit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people receive the child care tax credit in the Scottish Borders. [85699]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to my answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Jarrow (Mr. Hepburn), on 16 January 2002, *Official Report*, column 293W.

Corporation Tax

Mr. Howard: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to table B11 of the Pre-Budget Report November 2002 (Cm 5664), on what basis he is forecasting a rise in corporation tax receipts as a proportion of GDP between 2002–03 and 2006–07. [85544]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Details on assumptions underlying the projection for corporation tax receipts are given in paragraphs B45 and B46 of the Pre-Budget Report.

Council Tax

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to Table B12 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), on what basis he is forecasting a further 7.2 per cent. rise in council tax receipts in 2003–04; and what measures he intends to take to achieve this rise. [85543]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The Government do not set a target for increases in council tax receipts. Council tax rates are a matter for local authorities to set in consultation with their electorates. In line with this the Government do not operate a system of crude and universal pre-announced capping. The Government's approach was laid out in a note to the Treasury Select Committee on 19 November 2002.

The 2002 Spending Review gave local government a substantial three year grant increase, amounting to an average real increase of 3.9 per cent. per annum. This should allow authorities to deliver high quality public services without excessive council tax increases.

As in previous years the figure for council tax receipts presented in the pre-Budget report is for the United Kingdom as a whole; projections for future years are based on assumptions about changes in the council tax rate, the taxbase, the collection rate and council tax benefit payments.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what percentage of full-time workers in *(a)* Scotland, *(b)* each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and *(c)* Great Britain earn less than (i) £302.12 per week, (ii) £277.24 per week, (iii) £203.85 per week and (iv) £155.39 per week in gross pay (A) including and (B) excluding overtime, in the categories (1) male manual, (2) male non-manual, (3) all male workers, (4) female manual, (5) female non-manual, (6) all female workers, (7) all manual, (8) non-manual and (9) all workers; [86276]

(2) what the average weekly earnings were in gross pay *(a)* including and *(b)* excluding overtime for full-time workers in (i) Scotland, (ii) each of the unitary local authority areas in Scotland and (iii) Great Britain for (A) all manual, (B) all non-manual and (C) all workers. [86277]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Michael Moore, dated 9 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on weekly earnings for workers in Great Britain, Scotland and the unitary authorities in Scotland. (86276, 86277)

I attach tables showing average weekly earnings, both including and excluding overtime, (Table 1) and the proportion of people earning below the different thresholds you listed, both including overtime (Table 2) and excluding overtime (Table 3).

The New Earnings Survey (NES) can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy and I have provided the available data for Scotland, the unitary authorities in Scotland and Great Britain only for those areas where the samples are large enough. These are based on the 2002 NES, the latest survey for which data are available.

New Earnings Survey, April 2002—Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence—Gross Average Weekly Earnings, Excluding Overtime

		Percentage of employees with gross weekly earnings			
		< 302.12	*< 277.24*	*< 203.85*	*< 155.39*
Non-Manual Male Employees	Great Britain	18.6	14.3	3.8	0.5
Manual Male Employees		49.2	38.1	10.2	1.0
All Male Employees		30.8	23.8	6.4	0.7
Non-Manual Female Employees		39.6	32.0	9.7	1.3
Manual Female Employees		83.4	76.2	41.2	8.2
All Female Employees		45.8	38.2	14.1	2.3
All Non-Manual Employees		28.3	22.5	6.6	0.9
All Manual Employees		55.2	44.8	15.6	2.2
All Employees		36.4	29.2	9.3	1.3
Non-Manual Male Employees	Scotland	21.4	17.2	4.7	0.4
Manual Male Employees		54.9	43.7	11.5	1.4
All Male Employees		35.6	28.4	7.6	0.8
Non-Manual Female Employees		43.9	35.2	9.7	1.2
Manual Female Employees		87.0	80.2	45.0	8.2
All Female Employees		50.2	41.8	14.9	2.2
All Non-Manual Employees		32.9	26.3	7.3	0.8
All Manual Employees		61.2	50.8	18.0	2.8
All Employees		41.6	33.9	10.6	1.4
Non-Manual Male Employees	Aberdeen City	13.9	[—]	[—]	[—]
	Edinburgh, City of	18.9	15.6	4.7	[—]
	Fife	18.3	[—]	[—]	[—]
	Glasgow City	26.4	21.8	6.7	[—]
	North Lanarkshire	24.8	19.3	[—]	[—]
Manual Male Employees	Aberdeen City	52.1	41.4	[—]	[—]
	Aberdeenshire	62.5	53.1	[—]	[—]
	Scottish Borders, The	73.9	[—]	[—]	[—]
	Dumfries and Galloway	59.4	55.1	[—]	[—]
	Dundee City	48.6	[—]	[—]	[—]
	Edinburgh, City of	57.6	46.8	14.0	[—]
	Falkirk	50.0	43.1	[—]	[—]
	Fife	56.1	43.3	[—]	[—]
	Glasgow City	52.1	42.2	10.2	[—]
	Highland	57.0	43.0	[—]	[—]
	North Ayrshire	63.0	55.6	[—]	[—]
	North Lanarkshire	57.1	44.6	[—]	[—]
	Perth and Kinross	56.3	[—]	[—]	[—]
	Renfrewshire	50.6	43.8	[—]	[—]
	South Ayrshire	52.6	[—]	[—]	[—]
	South Lanarkshire	50.0	40.0	[—]	[—]
	West Lothian	40.6	[—]	[—]	[—]

New Earnings Survey, April 2002—Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence—Gross Average Weekly Earnings, Excluding Overtime

		Percentage of employees with gross weekly earnings			
		< 302.12	< 277.24	< 203.85	< 155.39
All Male Employees	Aberdeen City	26.9	20.8	7.5	[redacted]
	Aberdeenshire	40.7	33.9	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dumfries and Galloway	41.1	37.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dundee City	32.5	27.4	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Edinburgh, City of	29.9	24.4	7.4	[redacted]
	Falkirk	38.2	31.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Fife	37.2	28.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Glasgow City	35.9	29.3	8.0	[redacted]
	Highland	38.9	30.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Moray	44.7	39.5	[redacted]	[redacted]
	North Ayrshire	39.4	32.3	[redacted]	[redacted]
	North Lanarkshire	39.8	31.0	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Perth and Kinross	42.3	31.7	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Renfrewshire	32.4	25.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Ayrshire	34.9	28.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Lanarkshire	32.0	24.3	[redacted]	[redacted]
	West Lothian	32.1	23.8	[redacted]	[redacted]
Non-Manual Female Employees	Aberdeen City	34.9	25.5	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dundee City	43.2	37.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Edinburgh, City of	37.7	28.1	6.3	[redacted]
	Fife	48.4	40.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Glasgow City	45.2	33.2	8.7	[redacted]
	Highland	49.0	41.5	[redacted]	[redacted]
	North Lanarkshire	44.2	38.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Perth and Kinross	52.6	42.3	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Renfrewshire	41.0	32.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Lanarkshire	44.7	36.0	[redacted]	[redacted]
	West Lothian	42.9	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
Manual Female Employees	Edinburgh, City of	75.0	65.4	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Fife	93.6	89.4	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Glasgow City	78.9	73.7	48.7	[redacted]
	South Lanarkshire	84.2	78.9	[redacted]	[redacted]
All Female Employees	Aberdeen City	41.4	32.7	13.7	[redacted]
	Aberdeenshire	62.5	56.3	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dundee City	49.7	42.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Edinburgh, City of	40.7	31.1	8.3	[redacted]
	Fife	57.3	50.2	15.1	[redacted]
	Glasgow City	48.7	37.3	12.8	[redacted]
	Highland	53.6	47.0	18.7	[redacted]
	North Lanarkshire	50.7	45.4	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Perth and Kinross	57.8	48.9	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Renfrewshire	46.8	39.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Ayrshire	44.8	40.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Lanarkshire	52.7	44.7	[redacted]	[redacted]
	West Dunbartonshire	62.0	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
	West Lothian	47.7	35.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
All Non-Manual Employees	Aberdeen City	23.6	17.3	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Aberdeenshire	29.9	25.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Angus	41.1	35.8	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dumfries and Galloway	34.7	30.6	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Dundee City	33.3	29.0	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Edinburgh, City of	27.9	21.6	5.5	[redacted]
	Falkirk	41.7	32.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Fife	33.9	27.7	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Glasgow City	36.2	27.8	7.8	[redacted]
	Highland	36.7	30.9	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Moray	42.5	41.1	[redacted]	[redacted]
	North Ayrshire	31.3	[redacted]	[redacted]	[redacted]
	North Lanarkshire	33.9	28.2	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Perth and Kinross	41.6	32.8	[redacted]	[redacted]
	Renfrewshire	30.7	22.7	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Ayrshire	31.1	27.0	[redacted]	[redacted]
	South Lanarkshire	31.2	23.9	[redacted]	[redacted]
	West Lothian	32.6	25.8	[redacted]	[redacted]

New Earnings Survey, April 2002—Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence—Gross Average Weekly Earnings, Excluding Overtime

		Percentage of employees with gross weekly earnings			
		< 302.12	< 277.24	< 203.85	< 155.39
All Manual Employees	Aberdeen City	59.5	50.0	23.2	[1]
	Aberdeenshire	69.8	61.1	[1]	[1]
	Angus	71.2	57.6	[1]	[1]
	Scottish Borders, The	82.6	71.0	[1]	[1]
	Dumfries and Galloway	65.9	61.2	[1]	[1]
	Dundee City	57.7	47.4	[1]	[1]
	East Ayrshire	63.5	[1]	[1]	[1]
	East Lothian	67.4	[1]	[1]	[1]
	Edinburgh, City of	60.6	50.0	16.9	[1]
	Falkirk	57.3	50.6	[1]	[1]
	Fife	63.9	52.9	15.4	[1]
	Glasgow City	56.9	47.8	17.0	[1]
	Highland	61.7	49.6	[1]	[1]
	Inverclyde	70.6	[1]	[1]	[1]
	Moray	66.1	59.3	[1]	[1]
	North Ayrshire	68.1	59.4	[1]	[1]
	North Lanarkshire	62.2	51.2	[1]	[1]
	Perth and Kinross	61.8	50.0	[1]	[1]
	Renfrewshire	56.6	51.3	[1]	[1]
	South Ayrshire	56.9	47.7	[1]	[1]
	South Lanarkshire	58.2	49.4	[1]	[1]
	West Lothian	45.2	31.0	[1]	[1]
All Employees	Aberdeen City	32.5	25.4	9.9	[1]
	Aberdeenshire	48.4	41.8	15.0	[1]
	Angus	52.6	44.2	[1]	[1]
	Argyll and Bute	42.0	38.5	[1]	[1]
	Scottish Borders, The	58.5	52.3	19.9	[1]
	Dumfries and Galloway	47.6	43.2	14.6	[1]
	Dundee City	40.1	34.1	10.2	[1]
	East Lothian	41.7	32.3	[1]	[1]
	Edinburgh, City of	34.4	27.2	7.8	[1]
	Falkirk	47.1	38.5	12.1	[1]
	Fife	45.2	37.2	9.8	[1]
	Glasgow City	41.4	32.8	10.1	[1]
	Highland	45.2	37.2	13.0	[1]
	Inverclyde	54.5	40.7	[1]	[1]
	Midlothian	46.2	38.5	[1]	[1]
	Moray	53.0	49.2	[1]	[1]
	North Ayrshire	46.7	38.2	[1]	[1]
	North Lanarkshire	43.7	36.1	8.0	[1]
	Perth and Kinross	48.8	39.0	[1]	[1]
	Renfrewshire	38.5	31.3	11.7	[1]
	South Ayrshire	39.0	33.3	[1]	[1]
	South Lanarkshire	40.3	32.4	8.7	[1]
	West Lothian	37.8	28.0	[1]	[1]

[1] Denotes the data has been suppressed in line with NES publication criteria.
Note:
Where an authority does not appear the data has been suppressed.

Economic Cycles

Mr. Howard: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to paragraph A37 of the Pre-Budget Report November 2002 (Cm 5664), what further data is required before a definitive judgement can be made on the start date for the present economic cycle; and when he expects to be in a position to make that judgement. [85538]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* It is inevitably much more difficult to judge whether or not an on-trend point occurs when output hovers close to trend as it did in mid-1999 than when output clearly passes through trend. As paragraph A37 of the Pre-Budget Report states:

> "There is still some doubt about whether the economy was on trend in mid-1999 or just close to trend, so the judgement that the present cycle started in mid-1999 remains provisional. The data and methodology for estimating on-trend points and dating cycles are kept under review. But whether the current cycle started in 1997 or 1999 does not affect the judgement that the Government remains firmly on track to meet the fiscal rules over the cycle: the average current surplus since both 1997–98 and 1999–2000 is positive in every year of the projection period."

Only future GDP revisions could change the current judgement that the present cycle started in mid-1999.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to Chart A4 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), if he will make a statement on the projected end date of the current economic cycle. [85542]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* As set out in paragraph B7 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), the current economic cycle is projected to end in 2005–06.

Economic Growth

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he will publish the estimates of actual UK trend growth prior to 2002 he has received from *(a)* the OECD, *(b)* the EC, *(c)* the OEF and *(d)* Goldman Sachs; and what reasons underlay his decision on the use of these estimates in the estimate of trend growth. [85539]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Estimates of trend growth for the UK produced by the OECD, the EC, OEF and Goldman Sachs, among other organisations, are set out in Table 4.1 on page 26 of the Treasury paper, "Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects" published at the time of the 2002 Budget.

Mr. Howard: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the effect of the reduction in assumed trend growth from 2007–08 on the public finances from that financial year. [85546]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The forecast for the public finances in Budget 2002 covers the years to 2006–07. However paragraph 3.41 of the accompanying paper, Trend Growth: Recent Developments and Prospects, signalled that population effects could affect growth projections in 2007–08. Under the Pre-Budget Report assumptions on spending for 2007–08, set out in paragraph B20, changes in growth projections affect both spending as well as receipts.

Mr. Howard: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his statement of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 318, on what evidence he based his statement that in 2003, Britain and North America are forecast to continue to be the fastest growing of all the major economies. [85549]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* According to the latest Consensus Forecasts, published in November 2002, growth in 2002 and 2003 is expected to be higher in the US, Canada and the UK than in the any of the other G7 economies.

Economic Tests

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will set a date for the publication of a verdict on whether Britain has met the five economic tests for Euro entry. [86204]

Ruth Kelly: A comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, it will be published and will be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he intends to have with the Governor of the Bank of England on whether the five economic tests for entry to the Euro are being met. [86205]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor meets regularly with the Governor of the Bank of England to discuss a range of issues.

The assessment of the Five Economic Tests will be a Government assessment, and the work will be carried out by the Treasury.

Employers' Liability Premiums

Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received about the increase in employers' liability premiums. [86043]

Ruth Kelly: We receive a great many representations from both industry and individuals on this matter and on a variety of subjects.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to use revenue from insurance premium tax above the revenue projected by his Department to provide a pool for employers' liability insurance. [85965]

Ruth Kelly: None.

Equitable Life

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish in full the Penrose report into Equitable Life; and when the report will be published. [85405]

Ruth Kelly: The Penrose Inquiry is independent of the Government and the timetable for conducting the inquiry is a matter for Lord Penrose. However, Lord Penrose has recently said that he hoped that the inquiry would be able to report to Ministers next summer.

I very much hope to be able to publish the full report of the inquiry. However, it may be that parts of the report will be subject to legal and commercial confidentiality restrictions. I will not be in a position to know whether or not we can publish in full until I have seen Lord Penrose's report. These legal and commercial confidentiality restrictions will be the only constraints on publishing in full. However, Lord Penrose is also aware of these issues and he assures me that he is proceeding on the basis that the report will be published.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what Government schemes exist to compensate policyholders in Equitable Life in the event that it should go into receivership. [85502]

Ruth Kelly: The Government established the Financial Services Compensation Scheme as part of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000. The Scheme became operational on 1 December 2001 and acts as an industry financed 'safety net' for customers of finance sector companies which become insolvent. The Scheme would first seek to take measures to safeguard policyholders, for example by trying to ensure that policies are transferred to another company. If this is not possible, compensation may be payable subject to the rules of the Scheme.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the regulators in dealing with Equitable Life. [85753]

Ruth Kelly: Under the terms of the Financial Services and Markets Act 2000, the FSA is obliged to produce an annual report assessing performance against its statutory objectives of maintaining confidence in the financial system, promoting public understanding of the financial system, securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers and reducing the potential for financial firms to be used for financial crime. This is the primary mechanism for holding the FSA accountable to Ministers and Parliament.

In August 2001 the Government announced an independent inquiry under Lord Penrose into the events surrounding Equitable Life. The terms of reference of the Inquiry, which covers events going back over 50 years, include the need to identify any lessons to be learnt for the conduct, administration and regulation of life assurance business. The Government looks forward to receiving Lord Penrose's report as soon as he is able to complete it. In addition, the Government published a report by the Financial Services Authority in October 2001 which reviewed the regulation of Equitable Life from 1 January 1999 to 8 December 2000 and which has been submitted as evidence to the inquiry conducted by Lord Penrose.

Gateway and Child Trust Fund

Mr.Howard: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate of cost for the saving gateway and child trust fund is factored into his public finance projections. [85541]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Funding for the Saving Gateway in the pilot phase is included within current spending plans. Consistent with the Code for Fiscal Stability, the public finances projections presented in the Pre-Budget Report do not take account of measures proposed for consultation, including the Child Trust Fund, or other proposals where final decisions have yet to be taken, including the details of the Saving Gateway.

Global Economic Slowdown

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his statement of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 318, on what evidence he based his statement that there is the worst global slowdown for almost 30 years; and what estimates he has made of world GDP growth in each year since 1972. [85540]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* According to the International Monetary Fund's World Economic Outlook database, available on the IMF's website, World GDP growth fell from 4.7 per cent. in 2000 to 2.2 per cent. in 2001. This was the largest annual fall in World GDP growth since it fell from 6.9 per cent. to 2.8 per cent. in 1974.

Growth Rates

Mr.Howard: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis 2007–08 has been chosen as the year in which the trend growth rate is assumed to change as a result of demographic effects, for the purpose of his calculations in the Pre-Budget Report November 2002 (Cm 5664). [85547]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December2002]:* As set out in paragraph B20 of the Pre-Budget Report November 2002 (Cm 5664), projections by the Government Actuary's Department imply a slowdown in the growth of the population of working age, beyond 2006–07 mainly as a result of women born in the years following the Second World War moving into retirement, as confirmed to the National Audit Office (HC 109 Session 2002–03). This reduces the estimated trend rate of output growth by a $\frac{1}{4}$ of a percentage point in 2007–08.

Higher Rate Taxpayers

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many higher rate taxpayers there were in *(a)* the Scottish Borders, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK as a proportion of the total relevant population in each area in each of the last 10 years. [85701]

Dawn Primarolo: Available estimates for the number of higher rate taxpayers[1] as a percentage of the total population[2] for the respective geographical areas are given in the table.

[1] Based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.

[2] Source for population estimates: Office for National Statistics and General

Percentage

	Scottish borders	*Scotland*[1]	*UK*
1996–97	4	3	4
1997–98	4	3	4
1998–99	3	3	4
1999–2000	3	3	4
2000–01	3	4	5

[1] Government office region

Inward Migration

Mr. Soames: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the net inward migration of non-EU nationals was in each of the last five available years. [85810]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Karren Dunnell to Mr. Nicholas Soames dated 9 December 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the net inward migration of non-EU nationals in each of the last five available years. I am replying in his absence.

The information requested is provided in the attached table which shows the interim revised net migration estimates for non-EU nationals during the period 1997–2001.

These interim migration estimates are consistent with the results of the 2001 Consus. This showed that the population of the UK had been overestimated between 1991 and 2000, mainly due to the overestimation of the net flow of international migrants into the UK. For this reason, an adjustment has been made equivalent to the average annual overestimation of net migration since 1991. This is approximately 76,000 each year. The first release of these interim revised estimates was made on Thursday, 28 November.

More information is available on the NS website: http://wwwstatistics.gov.uk/about/Methodology by theme/downloads/international migration methodology.doc.

Interim revised total international estimates[1]: citizenship 1997 to 2001. Net migration to the UK

Thousands (£)

Year	*All citizenships*	*British*	*Rest of EU*	*Non-European Union[2]*
1997	10.8	67.3	7.6	70.4
1998	96.3	29.2	19.8	105.6
1999	100.5	29.7	2.1	132.3
2000	99.6	65.6	0.1	165.0
2001	125.7	56.3	4.0	178.1

[1] These estimates represent interim revised migration estimates. Further revisions to the series, in the light of more detailed Census data, will be made available in spring 2003. This table includes adjustment for asylum seekers, and for persons admitted as short-term visitors who are subsequently granted an extension of stay for other reasons—for example, as students or on the basis of marriage. Migration flows between the UK and Irish Republic are also included.

[2] Figures for all years show EU as it was constituted on 1 January 1995.

Money Laundering

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what guidance has been given on the implications of money laundering regulations to applicants for post office card accounts. [86214]

Ruth Kelly: The Joint Money Laundering Steering Group (JMLSG), which is an industry-led body, produces general guidance on the implementation of the Money Laundering Regulations. I have endorsed this guidance under section 330 of the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. The guidance is flexible, recognising that people who cannot easily provide detailed evidence of identity should have access to financial services.

Pension schemes

Mr. Heald: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the EU Directive on occupational pension schemes and its impact on UK pension schemes. [85983]

Ruth Kelly: The proposal for the Directive on Institutions for Occupational Retirement Provision is entering the second reading in the European Parliament. The proposed Directive would apply to funded occupational pension schemes. It would not apply to state pension schemes and personal pensions. The proposal leaves member states free to determine the structure of their pensions systems.

Procurement

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what fair trade criteria the Government apply when deciding upon what suppliers to use. [85419]

Mr. Boateng: There is no Government-wide approach to the procurement of fair trade products. Each Government Department is responsible for making its own decisions on such products, against the background of the Government's value for money policy, the EC procurement rules and the Department's objectives. However, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for International Development has made clear, the Government are committed to supporting ethical trading wherever possible, and provide significant support to the Fairtrade Foundation's efforts in promoting the supply and marketing of fair trade products.

Productivity Growth

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to paragraph A34 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), on what basis he is raising his estimate for the trend rate of productivity growth as set out in Table A3. [85536]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* As paragraph A34 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664) sets out,

> "The corollary of Census 2001 related downward revisions to employment and hours in recent years has been somewhat stronger productivity growth than previous estimates suggested."

A full explanation of how this affects estimates of the trend rate of productivity growth is set out in paragraphs A36 to A42 and Table A3 of the pre-Budget report.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether his revised estimates for the trend rate of productivity growth are dependent upon the potential increases in the underlying productivity growth rate, specified in paragraph A35 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), being realised. [85537]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* No. In projecting productivity growth the Government do not score any potential gains from government policies whose impact is yet to materialise. Rather the approach is to estimate underlying productivity growth between past on-trend points for the economy and to use this as the trend rate for projecting forward.

Savings

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he plans to introduce to improve the savings ratio in the short-term. [85962]

Ruth Kelly: The Government's strategy for promoting saving is focused on:

improving the environment for saving;

creating the right incentives for saving; and

empowering individuals by providing greater financial information, improved access to honest and straightforward advice, and simpler, easier to understand savings products.

The pre-Budget report included statements on the progress of the Government's saving policies.

Skills Budgets

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to devolve the management of skills budgets to regions other than the North-east, North-west, South-east and East. [85959]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have asked regional development agencies and local learning and skills councils in the North-east, North-west, South-east and East of England to draw up proposals for pilots to test how they

can pool and co-ordinate adult skills budgets in their regions to improve the delivery of training and skills provision to both employers and individuals. The pilots will start in April 2003 and will run for two years. They will be carefully monitored and evaluated. PDAs and LLSCs in other regions are also looking at ways of working together more closely outside the formal pilot arrangements and I greatly welcome this.

Tax Credits

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what arrangements have been made to reassess recipients of family tax credit whose entitlement is due to be reassessed before the introduction of the new tax credits system in April 2003. [86133]

Dawn Primarolo: Transitional arrangements are currently in place so that any Working Families' Tax Credit award made on or after 4 June this year will run until April 2003. However families who have a new child can surrender their existing award and make a new claim.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures exist for those in receipt of working families tax credit to seek a review on material change of circumstances prior to the introduction of the new system in April 2003. [86134]

Dawn Primarolo: Working Families Tax Credit (WFTC) is a fixed award. Once made, awards generally remain in payment at the same rate during the period of entitlement, regardless of changes in family circumstances. However, families receiving WFTC are able to surrender an existing award and make a new claim as soon as they have a new child.

Tax Receipts

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what basis he is calculating the trend in levels of receipts from *(a)* the financial services sector and *(b)* stamp duty on property. [85535]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Further details on projections of receipts from financial companies are given in paragraphs B45 and B46 of the pre-Budget report.

Details of the projections of stamp duty receipts are given in paragraphs B52 and B53 of the pre-Budget report. They are based on the assumption that house price inflation moderates towards its long run relationship with earnings, as explained in paragraph B54 of the Financial Statement and Budget Report 2002.

The public finance projections are deliberately based on cautious assumptions for key economic variables, including the trend rate of growth of the economy.

VAT

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to paragraph B56 of the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664), how much the strategy on VAT fraud and avoidance is expected to yield in 2002–03; and on what basis the figure for additional receipts by 2005–06 is calculated. [85545]

John Healey *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Projected VAT receipts in 2002–03 are calculated primarily on the basis of receipts to date. The forecast of VAT revenues from 2003–04 onwards is governed by an NAO-audited assumption, which has now been adjusted to take account of the VAT strategy. The NAO's "Audit of Assumptions for the 2002 Pre-Budget Report" sets out the additional revenue yield included in the forecast and the basis on which this has been calculated.

Vehicle Fuel

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much HM Customs and Excise spent on its programme to detect the use of vehicle fuel on which fuel taxes have not been paid in the last year for which figures are available, broken down by region. [85996]

John Healey: I refer to the answer I gave to the Member for Edinburgh, West on 2 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 204W. A regional split is not available.

CABINET OFFICE

E-Envoy

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the budget is for the e-envoy; and how many staff he has. [85066]

Mr. Alexander: In respect of 2002–03, the Office of the e-envoy was given a current expenditure budget of £17.429 million. The Office of the e-envoy was also allocated £30 million capital expenditure from the Capital Modernisation Fund (CMF). As at 2 December 2002 the Office of the e-Envoy employed a total of 145 staff. This figure is rounded to full time equivalents.

Ministerial Performance

Mr. Allen: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what recent steps he has instituted to help Her Majesty's Government's Ministers improve their performance; and if he will make a statement. [86229]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office provides central training for Ministers. This supports them:

operating as a member of the Government team;

managing the strategic policy and communication aspects;

of the job as a member of a departmental team;

working with and through Parliament.

The Programmes for Ministers series provides:

access to expert contributors from government and the wider public and private sector;

discussion with colleagues and sharing best practice;

awareness of current developments in government.

Specific needs of individual Ministers are met on a personal basis.

The Ministerial Code sets out the standards and conduct expected of Ministers.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Medical Students

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total cost is of medical training per student in the United Kingdom; how many medical schools there are in the United Kingdom; how many medical schools have mandatory courses of six years training; how many medical schools have optional six-year training courses; and how many students in the United Kingdom are in receipt of full means-tested funds in each medical school. [85471]

Margaret Hodge: The cost per medical school student will vary according to the type and length of their course. Higher education institutions in the United Kingdom receive public funding from the relevant higher education funding body of between £5,700 and £6,700 per student in each of their non-clinical years, and around £13,000 for each of the clinical years. These include the standard contribution to tuition fees, whether or not these are paid by the student. The national health service also provides some £540 million per year to the hospitals for the clinical training of medical students through its Multi-Professional Education and Training levy.

There are 47 medical courses offered at 30 higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. Of these, 11 are courses lasting six years. The remaining 36 include those for graduate entry and shorter accelerated routes into medicine, as well as courses of five years. Data on the number of students in receipt of full means-tested support in each medical school is not available.

Mrs. Dunwoody: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many medical students are in receipt of maximum non-means tested loans, broken down by medical schools; and how many medical students are in receipt of *(a)* grants and *(b)* loans, broken down by university. [85472]

Margaret Hodge: Data on the support received by medical students is not separately identified.

Asset Management Plans

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will publish the remaining results of the first asset management plans; for what reason publication has been delayed; and if he will publish results of future asset management plans within six months of their completion. [83803]

Mr. Miliband: We will publish the remaining results of the first asset management plans by the end of February 2003. The work necessary to appraise, analyse and collate the information has impacted on the original publication programme.

Subject to the necessary appraisal, we plan to publish the results of future asset management plans within six months of the receipt of all the information.

Autism

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to monitor progress in implementing his Department's good practice guidelines on autism. [84502]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Good Practice Guidance on Autistic Spectrum Disorders, published by the Departments of Education and Skills and of Health, is designed to raise awareness of the disorders and act as a self-audit tool for schools, local education authorities and other providers to help them assess the effectiveness of their autism provision. The Guidance is non-statutory.

Schools and local education authorities have duties to identify, assess and make suitable provision for children with special educational needs, including those with autism. Ofsted regularly inspects the provision made by schools and local education authorities, including that made for children with special educational needs. Where weaknesses are identified in the provision made for children with autism, the Guidance is available to schools and local education authorities to provide pointers to improvement.

Craft Subjects

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans there are to recruit more lecturers to further education colleges in craft subjects. [85462]

Margaret Hodge: As independent organisations it is for individual colleges to recruit their own staff within the context of the overall resources available to them.

We are making a £1.2 billion investment to increase expenditure in FE over the next three years. That is equivalent to a 19 per cent. real terms increase. Colleges will use this investment to increase participation in learning and to improve student outcomes. They will be able to raise standards of teaching and learning, improve the capability of the workforce and become more responsive to the demands of both employers and students. Importantly, they will also have the flexibility to use the resource to meet specific local or subject recruitment needs.

We will continue to fund a range of recruitment and retention initiatives to attract new FE teachers into the profession. These include teaching bursaries for people undertaking post graduate certificates of education and certificates of education to enter FE and golden hellos and the repayment of teacher loans for new teachers in identified shortage subject areas. Although "craft" subjects are not a priority for golden hellos or the repayment of teacher loans, we are keeping the list of shortage subjects under review.

Degrees

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what regulations prevent private institutions from awarding degrees; what *(a)* advice and *(b)* representations he has received on allowing private institutions to award degrees; and if he will place copies in the Library. [84141]

Margaret Hodge: The regulations that limit the awarding of UK degrees are contained within the Education Reform Act 1988, which stipulates that UK degrees can be awarded only by organisations with powers granted by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament. Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 allows the Privy Council to specify any institution

offering higher education as competent to grant degrees. There is no legislation preventing private organisations from applying for degree awarding powers. I have received no representations about allowing private organisations to award degrees. However, the Privy Council has received two applications from private organisations for degree awarding powers. These are currently being considered by the Quality Assurance Agency through the normal process of scrutiny for such powers.

Education Provision (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils have been excluded from schools in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996. [85128]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The information on permanent exclusions is shown in the table. Information on fixed term exclusions is not held centrally.

Number of permanent exclusions—academic years 1996–97 to 2000–01

Chesham and Amersham

	Primary[1]		Secondary[1]		Special[2]		Total	
	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]
1996–97	0	0.00	14	0.18	2	0.66	16	0.10
1997–98	1	0.01	12	0.15	0	0.00	13	0.08
1998–99	0	0.00	16	0.18	0	0.00	16	0.09
1999–2000	0	0.00	15	0.17	1	0.30	16	0.09
2000–01	1	0.01	13	0.14	0	0.00	14	0.08

Buckinghamshire LEA

	Primary[1]		Secondary[1]		Special[2]		Total	
	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]	Number of exclusions	Percentage of the school population[3]
1996–97[4]	5	0.01	42	0.16	2	0.17	49	0.07
1997–98	13	0.03	54	0.20	10	0.85	77	0.10
1998–99	8	0.02	52	0.17	5	0.43	65	0.09
1999–2000	5	0.01	51	0.16	7	0.60	63	0.08
2000–01	11	0.03	55	0.17	6	0.53	72	0.10

[1] Includes middle schools as deemed.
[2] Includes maintained and non-maintained special schools.
[3] The number of permanent exclusions expressed as a percentage of the number (headcount) of pupils in Primary, Secondary and Special schools.
[4] Before local government reorganisation.
Source:
Annual Schools Census

Further Education Lecturers

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many further education lecturers were employed at colleges in England in each of the last five years, broken down by those on *(a)* permanent and *(b)* part-time contracts; and what average hours were worked by each group. [84122]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Information on the number of FE lecturers with permanent and part-time contracts is published in 'Staff Statistics', which is available in the Library of the House.

Lecturers in further education colleges in England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
All lecturers	130,858	139,693	141,755	136,730	134,316
Part-time lecturers	82,100	92,681	95,662	91,108	87,547
Permanent lecturers	59,700	56,600	60,421	60,656	61,779

Note:
Information on the average hours worked by permanent and part-time lecturers is not available.
Source
Staff statistics, summary table and table 4

Graduate Incomes

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 556W, on graduate incomes, if he will place a copy of the working paper, in which the figures of £1,075,000 and £675,000 are calculated, in the Library. [85550]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the library.

Higher Education Students (Warrington)

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many students from Warrington entered higher education in the past five years, broken down by social class. [84231]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The latest available information, covering students who were accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich first degree courses via the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), is shown in the table. Comparable figures for 2002 will be available in January 2003.

The Government are committed to raising the participation of those from social classes which are currently under-represented in higher education, and has introduced Excellence Challenge, including the AimHigher campaign, which is targeted at raising attainment and aspirations among young people who traditionally would not consider going to university.

Students from Warrington LEA who were accepted for entry to full-time and sandwich undergraduate courses in the UK

	Year of entry			
Social class:	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Professional	116	122	116	141
Intermediate	340	370	351	350
Skilled non manual	79	78	94	93
Skilled manual	133	116	126	128
Partly skilled	75	74	67	61
Unskilled	10	8	6	5
Unknown	80	77	93	109
Total	833	845	853	887

Inspection

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to establish a standard framework for inspection bodies in the further education sector. [85461]

Margaret Hodge: The common inspection framework was introduced by the Office for Standards in Education and the Adult Learning Inspectorate on 1 April 2001, as required by the Learning and Skills Act 2000. It sets out the principles applicable to the inspections of all Government funded post-16 non-higher education and training, (except school sixth forms), including the further education sector.

Literacy

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures will be taken to increase the number of 7-year-old children reaching set literacy standards. [85054]

Mr. Miliband: The National Literacy Strategy (NLS) is raising literacy standards in primary schools. In this year's national tests, 84 per cent. of 7-year-olds achieved the level expected for their age—level 2 or above—in reading compared to 80 per cent. in 1998; and 69 per cent. achieved at the upper end of level 2—level 2B or above—compared to 62 per cent. in 1998.

We remain committed to making further improvements in standards. We have introduced a new intervention programme, Early Literacy Support, to help those children in Year 1 who are already struggling with literacy or at risk of developing literacy difficulties later on. We will also continue to review and refine the literacy strategy in response to the latest research and evidence from our most successful schools.

Mature Students

Ian Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial support is available for mature students in higher education in England. [84964]

Margaret Hodge: We have greatly increased the financial support available to mature students. Nearly a quarter of a billion pounds is now spent on support for students with particular financial needs, including mature students, compared to £124 million five years ago. In the academic year 2002–03, in addition to means tested student loans (up to £4,815 in London, £3,905 elsewhere), and tuition fee grants (up to £1,100), full-time mature students can apply for dependants grants (up to £2,225 for an adult or otherwise for an eldest child, more for additional children), an additional dependants grant (£255), child care grant (up to £8,480 for two or more children), school meals grant (up to £275 per child) and travel, books and equipment grant (£510). They can also apply for discretionary support through their HE institution, in the form of £500 access bursaries, hardship funds and hardship loans. A single parent with two children in receipt of the full student loan and maximum child care grant could receive about £15,800 each year, plus discretionary support.

Part-time HE students studying on at least 50 per cent. (or more) of a full-time equivalent course are eligible for means tested fee waivers, student loans of £500 and discretionary help from the hardship funds. There are also generous non means-tested allowances for both full-time and part-time disabled students.

These arrangements are generous but overly complicated. From 2003–04 they will be simplified. A new grant (the Parents Learning Allowance worth up to £1,300) will replace the access bursary, the additional dependants grant and the travel, books and equipment grant and child dependants grant and school meals grant will be replaced by child tax credits and passported free school meals from the Inland Revenue. From 2004–05, hardship funds and loans will be replaced by grants from a new Access to Learning Fund. These streamlined arrangements will in some cases provide students with more help than they currently receive.

NVQs

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many people *(a)* enrolled for and *(b)* completed national vocational qualifications in *(i)* plumbing, (ii) bricklaying, (iii) bridge to construction (or intermediate construction award), (iv) painting and decorating and *(v)* wood occupations, in each year since the establishment of the courses. [83770]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

Performing Arts

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills on what basis Government funding is allocated for small specialist performing arts institutions in *(a)* music, *(b)* acting, *(c)* dance, *(d)* performance technology and *(e)* sound technology; and if he will make a statement. [82110]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 21 November 2002]:* The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responsible for determining the allocation of grants to higher education institutions. In general, the HEFCE fund similar courses at similar rates irrespective of which higher education institution is providing the course. However, in the case of specialist institutions, additional funding is provided to reflect the nature of the institution and the characteristics of the courses provided. Guidance on the general funding methodology for specialist institutions was published in HEFCE circular 98/10 following advice from the Specialist Institutions Advisory Panel. Criteria for the funding of specialist performing arts institutions were published in HEFCE circular 99/41 and were based on detailed analysis of the costs and characteristics of the provision. The council does not distinguish between the different art forms in its funding methodology, and the amount of additional funding for these institutions varies according to how closely they meet the criteria set out in the guidance. HEFCE have also made public criteria for the funding of very high cost institutions specialising in music, dance and drama. The supplementary funding for specialist institutions is kept under review to ensure that the levels remain appropriate.

Reception Classes

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many four year olds there were in reception classes in each of the last 10 years for which figures are available. [85432]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The information is not available in the form requested.

The percentage of four year olds in classes not designated as nursery classes in maintained primary schools in England between 1993 and 2002 is shown in the table.

Number and percentage[1] of 4-year-olds in classes not designated as nursery classes[2] in maintained primary schools. January 1993–2002—England

	Number of 4-year-olds educated in infant classes in maintained primary schools	*Percentage of 4-year-olds educated in infant classes*
1993	[3]	[3]
1994	[3]	[3]
1995	[3]	[3]
1996	343,400	52
1997	345,200	53
1998	351,000	56
1999	353,900	57
2000	349,400	57
2001	[3]	[3]
2002[4]	358,300	60

[1] Number of 4-year-olds in classes not designated as nursery classes expressed as a percentage of the 4-year-old population.
[2] Includes reception and other class provision for 4-year-olds but excludes designated nursery classes.
[3] Not available.
[4] Provisional.

Since 1998, there has been a Statutory Duty on all LEAs to secure sufficient provision for all four year olds, whose parents want one, in their area. It is for each local education authority in consultation with their early years and child care partnership to plan and organise such provision: places are made available in the maintained, private, voluntary and independent sectors.

Latest figures on under 5s' provision in England were published in Statistical First Release "Provision for children under five years of age in England —January 2002 (provisional estimates)", a copy of which is available from the Library or the Department's website www.dfes.gov.uk/statistics.

School Closures

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research has been done on the impact of closing schools on *(a)* the educational attainment of former pupils in their new schools, *(b)* local communities and *(c)* areas of social deprivation. [85552]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Decisions on whether to close schools are taken by the local School Organisation Committee or, if the committee cannot agree unanimously, by the independent Schools Adjudicator. Guidance issued by the Secretary of State requires both bodies to consider a range of factors in making their decision. For school closures, the factors include the effect on standards of educational provision, the need to preserve access to a local school for rural communities and access to community facilities, particularly in areas of social deprivation. The Department has not commissioned any research into the impact of school closures. However, where a failing school is closed, it is usual for the former pupils to show greatly increased attainment or better rates of progress at their new schools.

School Laboratories

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the allocations to each local authority from the £60 million School Laboratories for the 21st Century Scheme. [85674]

Mr. Miliband: The table lists the allocations for school laboratories.

£000

LEA Name	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Barking and Dagenham	127	127
Barnet	200	200
Barnsley	145	145
Bath and North East Somerset	137	137
Bedfordshire	246	246
Bexley	168	168
Birmingham	555	555
Blackburn with Darwen	121	121
Blackpool	103	103
Bolton	185	185
Bournemouth	121	121

£000

LEA Name	2000–01	2001–02
Bracknell Forest	95	95
Bradford	302	302
Brent	153	153
Brighton and Hove	134	134
Bristol, city of	177	177
Bromley	195	195
Buckinghamshire	279	279
Bury	134	134
Calderdale	154	154
Cambridgeshire	269	269
Camden	130	130
Cheshire	383	383
Cornwall	275	275
Coventry	201	201
Croydon	170	170
Cumbria	291	291
Darlington	93	93
Derby	155	155
Derbyshire	387	387
Devon	327	327
Doncaster	204	204
Dorset	224	224
Dudley	195	195
Durham	289	289
Ealing	157	157
East Riding of Yorkshire	209	209
East Sussex	245	245
Enfield	194	194
Essex	657	657
Gateshead	137	137
Gloucestershire	319	319
Greenwich	152	152
Hackney	108	108
Halton	115	115
Hammersmith and Fulham	98	98
Hampshire	551	551
Haringey	129	129
Harrow	111	111
Hartlepool	98	98
Havering	159	159
Herefordshire	118	118
Hertfordshire	579	579
Hillingdon	163	163
Hounslow	166	166
Isle of Wight	113	113
Isles of Scilly	51	51
Islington	105	105
Kensington and Chelsea	76	76
Kent	703	703
Kingston upon Hull, city of	165	165
Kingston upon Thames	111	111
Kirklees	233	233
Knowsley	125	125
Lambeth	103	103
Lancashire	591	591
Leeds	386	386
Leicester	185	185
Leicestershire	352	352
Lewisham	134	134
Lincolnshire	357	357
Liverpool	296	296
Luton	134	134
Manchester	221	221
Medway	189	189
Merton	103	103
Middlesbrough	115	115
Milton Keynes	136	136
Newcastle upon Tyne	170	170
Newham	171	171
Norfolk	364	364
North East Lincolnshire	133	133
North Lincolnshire	128	128

£000

LEA Name	2000–01	2001–02
North Somerset	138	138
North Tyneside	141	141
North Yorkshire	332	332
Northamptonshire	360	360
Northumberland	216	216
Nottingham	150	150
Nottinghamshire	431	431
Oldham	174	174
Oxfordshire	308	308
Peterborough	144	144
Plymouth	186	186
Poole	106	106
Portsmouth	122	122
Reading	96	96
Redbridge	181	181
Redcar and Cleveland	126	126
Richmond upon Thames	106	106
Rochdale	152	152
Rotherham	195	195
Rutland	65	65
Salford	142	142
Sandwell	194	194
Sefton	198	198
Sheffield	260	260
Shropshire	173	173
Slough	105	105
Solihull	160	160
Somerset	251	251
South Gloucestershire	166	166
South Tyneside	126	126
Southampton	138	138
Southend-on-Sea	130	130
Southwark	122	122
St. Helens	139	139
Staffordshire	464	464
Stockport	169	169
Stockton-on-Tees	145	145
Stoke-on-Trent	156	156
Suffolk	358	358
Sunderland	196	196
Surrey	450	450
Sutton	147	147
Swindon	133	133
Tameside	159	159
Telford and the Wrekin	124	124
Thurrock	108	108
Torbay	113	113
Tower Hamlets	152	152
Trafford	162	162
Wakefield	201	201
Walsall	204	204
Waltham Forest	143	143
Wandsworth	124	124
Warrington	149	149
Warwickshire	282	282
West Berkshire	132	132
West Sussex	351	351
Westminster	107	107
Wigan	202	202
Wiltshire	241	241
Windsor and Maidenhead	117	117
Wirral	224	224
Wokingham	128	128
Wolverhampton	169	169
Worcestershire	295	295
York	121	121
Total	29,998	29,998

School Leavers (Careers)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what comparison has been made of places for careers among school leavers by the careers service in coalfield areas, compared to the national average. [82885]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Information in the following table has been taken from the annual activity survey of all school leavers in the autumn of the year they complete compulsory education undertaken by Careers Services and Connexions Partnerships. This data relates to all school leavers from the 2000–2001 academic year. It has not been possible to match the data exactly to the coalfield areas; data is collected by Education Authority and has been aggregated to provide the closest match possible. Details of areas included are given in the footnote to the table.

The table shows that in the coalfield areas, young people are less likely to be settled in full time education, or training and rely more heavily on government supported training than in non- coalfield areas. The table also shows a higher rate of unemployment for young people living in these areas.

Percentages

	Total of non coalfield areas	[1] *Total of coalfied areas*	*England*
Full-time education	72.3	67.9	71.7
Government supported training	3.6	7.4	4.0
Employment	11.9	12.5	12.0
Not settled in full time education training or employment	7.2	8.4	7.3
Of which:			
Part-time employment/training	0.5	0.4	0.5
Unemployed	5.5	6.4	5.6
Not active in labour market	1.1	1.7	1.2
No response/move away	5.1	3.8	5.0
Survey total	508,098	74,788	582,886

[1] The closest approximation of the coalfield areas includes: Coventry, Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Barnsley, Doncaster, Rotherham, Wakefield, Merseyside, St. Helens, Darlington, Durham, Northumberland, Sunderland

Student Exchange Programmes

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the European Commission's proposal, COM (2002) 401 final, and the subsequent Council decision to invite students from third countries to participate in European exchange programmes. [85056]

Margaret Hodge: I welcome the European Commission's proposal to establish "Erasmus World", which should provide UK universities and colleges with opportunities to attract overseas students, and will enable UK universities to forge useful partnerships with their counterparts in other EU countries. The UK and other member states have expressed some reservations about the funding of the proposal. The Danish Presidency of the European Union has recently circulated a revised version of the proposal. We are considering our position in the light of this.

Students (Benefits)

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions regarding extending the eligibility criteria for benefits to students in higher education. [82419]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* We have regular discussions with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about specific student support and benefits issues. Social security is available to certain students in DWP vulnerable groups such as the disabled and lone parents but the general principle is that support for higher education students comes from the education system. There are no plans to change this.

Student support is taken into account in deciding upon the level of benefit payable, but much of the additional financial support for such vulnerable students, for example child care grant, is disregarded for benefit purposes.

Surplus School Places

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the part played by consideration of best value in determining whether surplus schools should be closed. [85554]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Surplus places can represent poor use of resources. This is why the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister sets annual Best Value Performance Indicators for the percentage of surplus places in an LEA each year. Decisions on whether to close schools are taken by the local School Organisation Committee or, if the Committee cannot agree unanimously, by the independent Schools Adjudicator. Guidance issued by the Secretary of State requires both bodies to consider a range of factors, including standards and access.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what financial penalties are in place if local education authorities have surplus school places. [85557]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Local education authorities receive funding based on pupil numbers and there are no financial penalties for having surplus school places. While resources devoted to maintaining surplus school places can sometimes be more effectively used to support schools in raising standards, we recognise that in some cases it may not be possible to remove all surplus places due to demographic changes and falling rolls.

Technology and Science College Status

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the reason underlying the decision not to shortlist the application by *(a)* Belvidere School and *(b)* Mary Webb School for technology college and science college status. [85643]

Mr. Miliband: In the judgement of our independent assessors, these schools did not meet the published criteria set out in the "Guide for Schools" available to all schools applying for specialist college designation in 2002–03. Both schools received written feedback from the Department on their individual applications. The feedback should provide a helpful basis on which to make a stronger revised application.

University Entrants

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of sixth formers in schools in Sittingbourne and Sheppey went to university in *(a)* 1997–98, *(b)* 1998–99, *(c)* 1999–2000 and *(d)* 2000–01. [85006]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Figures for the number of school leavers who go on to higher education are not collated centrally on a constituency basis. The available figures for Great Britain, showing the proportion of under 21-year-olds who enter higher education for the first time from either sixth forms or FE colleges, are given in the table. There was an increase in the index in 1997–98 related partly to changes in the funding arrangements for higher education, with students choosing to enter HE rather than wait until 1998–99. There was a corresponding reduction in 1998–99 before the entry rates started to increase again in 1999–2000. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01, total HE students in English universities and colleges rose by 83,000.

Age Participation Index (API)[1] for Great Britain

	Percentage
1997–98	33
1998–99	31
1999–2000	32
2000–01	33

[1] The API is defined as the number of GB domiciled initial entrants to full-time and sandwich undergraduate HE aged under 21, expressed as a percentage of the average number of 18 and 19-year-olds in the population.

HOME OFFICE

Anti-asbestos Campaign

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) which anti-asbestos campaigners were investigated by MI5 between 1972 and 1980; [83485]

(2) if the records compiled during the 1970s on the anti-asbestos campaigners will be opened to the public under the 30-year rule; [83487]

(3) whether MI5 files on anti-asbestos campaigners are still live. [83486]

Mr. Blunkett: It has been the longstanding policy of successive Governments to neither confirm nor deny reports concerning Security Service operations. However, the Service has made clear that it has never investigated people simply because they were office-holders or members of campaigning organisations or pressure groups.

Antisocial Behaviour

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many individuals were convicted of offences relating to *(a)* graffiti, *(b)* excess noise and *(c)* fly tipping in each of the last 10 years; and what were the (i) maximum and (ii) minimum penalties imposed. [84312]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The available information for England and Wales is shown in the table, and covers the years 1991 to 2000. It is not possible, in the statistics collected centrally, to distinguish offences relating to graffiti from other offences of criminal damage.

Statistics for 2001 will be available in December.

Number of defendants convicted of offences related to noise and fly tipping at all courts, England and Wales 1991–2000

Offence description	*Principal statute*	*Year*	*Number of persons convicted*	*Minimum penalty imposed*	*Maximum penalty imposed*
Noise on construction sites, operating loudspeakers in the street, exceeding permitted noise level after service of notice and other summary offences	Control of Pollution Act 1974, sections 60 and 62 and Noise Act 1996	1991	33	Absolute discharge	£1,000 fine
		1992	43	Absolute discharge	£1,000 fine
		1993	41	Conditional discharge	£2,000 fine
		1994	44	Conditional discharge	£3,000 fine
		1995	48	Absolute discharge	£3,000 fine
		1996	65	Absolute discharge	£3,500 fine
		1997	58	Conditional discharge	£3,500 fine
		1998	61	Absolute discharge	£4,000 fine
		1999	72	£50 fine	£4,000 fine
		[1]2000	38	Conditional discharge	£2,500 fine
Prohibition on authorised or harmful deposit, treatment or disposal etc. of waste (fly tipping)	Environmental Protection Act 1990 sections 33(6), 33(8), 33(9) and 34	1991	4	£200 fine	£500 fine
		1992	18	Conditional discharge	£1,388 fine
		1993	104	Absolute discharge	£10,000 fine
		1994	124	Absolute discharge	3 months imprisonment
		1995	202	Absolute discharge	18 months imprisonment
		1996	262	Absolute discharge	18 months imprisonment
		1997	237	Absolute discharge	18 months imprisonment
		1998	296	Absolute discharge	2 years imprisonment
		1999	317	Absolute discharge	8 months imprisonment
		[1]2000	393	Absolute discharge	18 months imprisonment

[1] Excluding any convictions at magistrates courts in Staffordshire.

Note:
All data are given on a principal offence basis.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on problems affecting asylum seekers in Clearsprings houses in the UK; [84655]

(2) what contract Clearsprings have with the Home Office; [84649]

(3) who monitors the performance and the running of homes run by Clearsprings [84654]

(4) how much Clearsprings receives for looking after asylum seekers in the UK; [84653]

(5) what guidelines he sets for Clearsprings in receipt of housing for asylum seekers. [84652]

Beverley Hughes: Clearsprings Management Ltd has a contract with the National Asylum Support Services (MASS) to provide accommodation for destitute asylum seekers. The contract is due to expire in March 2005. I am unable to give details about payments to Clearsprings under the terms of this contract since this information is commercial in confidence. Clearsprings Management Ltd is required to operate within the conditions of their contract with NASS. All properties supplied under contract must comply with all planning and other regulations set by the relevant local authority. NASS is responsible for monitoring the performance of Clearsprings Management Ltd. In particular all properties supplied by the company under contract to NASS will be inspected to ensure they meet the specification laid down in the contract. The contract also includes performance measures which the company is expected to show that it is meeting. NASS can impose financial penalties if either a property is shown to have defects or the company is not meeting its performance targets. I am not aware of any major problems with accommodation provided by Clearsprings Management Ltd. The company is meeting the terms of its contract with NASS and any problems with their accommodation are rectified within agreed timescales.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers have completed all stages of their application and are awaiting removal from the country; and if he will make a statement. [84880]

Beverley Hughes: The requested information is not held centrally and could only be obtained through examination of individual case files thereby incurring a disproportionate cost.

The demarcation between the end of the appeals process and the beginning of the removal process is not clear-cut. When asylum appeals have been dismissed, the scope for further legal challenge undoubtedly acts as an obstacle to removal, although by no means the only one. Other limiting factors in the removals process include difficulties in securing travel documentation and legal issues arising from judicial and human rights reviews.

There are measures in place to counter these barriers and subsequently expedite removal.

Mr.Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the average time between completion of all stages of the asylum seeking process and notice of removal being issued was in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [84882]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the time between completion of the asylum process and the issue of a removal notice may only be obtained by examination of individual case files at disproportionate costs.

Different timescales apply for issuing a notice of removal following completion of the asylum process, according to the type of case. For example the timescale will differ for detained cases under the expedited appeals process, those on monthly reporting, and others whose determinations are served to the last known address.

The initial programme of work to serve appeals in person has now been expanded nationally. The process allows for a six-week deadline for determinations to be served. Statistics are maintained for this particular workstream.

The number of applications for judicial review that are specifically against removal directions is estimated at 30–35 a month. The opportunity to apply for Judicial Review, is usually sufficient to cause arrangements issued on more than one occasion.

Mr. Howard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his oral answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 616, to the Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser), if he will withdraw his proposal to use the former police station in Shorncliffe road, Folkestone as a 24-hour reporting centre for asylum seekers. [85562]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* I refer the right hon. and learned Member to the reply I gave on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 972W. There are no plans to withdraw the proposal for use of the former Police Station in Shorncliffe road, Folkestone, as a Home Office reporting centre, which forms part of a wider strategy to bring about improved contact with asylum seekers while their claims are under consideration and to control and counter illegal and clandestine entry into the United Kingdom.

Cannabis

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are held in prisons in England and Wales for cannabis-related offences; and how many people were received into prisons in England and Wales in 2001 for cannabis-related offences. [83678]

Hilary Benn: Data on the number of people sentenced to immediate custody for drug offences involving cannabis are shown in the table.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for cannabis offences which can be separately identified, England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1]

Offence description	*Statute*	*Sentenced to immediate custody*				
		1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]
Production or being concerned in production of a controlled drug (cannabis)	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, sections 4(2) and 6(2)	178	233	216	206	156
Supplying or offering (or being concerned in) to supply a controlled drug (cannabis)	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, section 4(3)	628	650	656	573	405
Having possession of a controlled drug (cannabis)	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, section 5(2), as amended by Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, section 157, schedule 8, part II	204	268	410	451	361
Having possession of a controlled drug (cannabis) with intent to supply	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, section 5(3)	983	1,129	1,284	1,112	808
Permitting premises to be used for unlawful purposes (cannabis)	Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, section 8	17	18	27	25	9

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Child Abuse

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the prevalence of child abuse in the home within different categories of family configuration and marital status; [85102]

(2) what research into the prevalence of child abuse in the home has been funded by Central Government in the last five years; and which of these studies break down their results by family configuration and marital status. [85115]

Hilary Benn: Central Government have funded or directly undertaken several research studies into different aspects of child abuse in the last five years, but none specifically into the issue of prevalence within the home.

With regard to family configuration, a three-year study, jointly funded by the Home Office and the University of Birmingham, looked at the issue of repeated abuse during childhood (Hamilton and Browne, 2000). The index sample consisted of 400 children referred to police child protection units. The vast majority (91 per cent.) lived with their biological mother, 44 per cent. with their biological father and 39 per cent. with both natural parents. However, the study did not indicate the marital status of the relationship or the presence of a step-parent.

Civil Contingency Planning

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funds have been allocated for the next financial year to cover CBW civil contingency planning in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [83532]

Mr. Blunkett *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Several Departments have responsibilities relating to management of the consequences of chemical and biological attacks, and these Departments are obliged to plan for carrying out those responsibilities. Like all civil contingencies work, this planning is part of Departments' mainstream activity and spending. The different elements of the response to a Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) incident are well co-ordinated and are regularly exercised to ensure their effectiveness.

My right hon. Friend (John Denham), Minister of State in the Home Office, is responsible for co-ordinating efforts to improve the United Kingdom's ability to respond to CBRN attacks, and is supported in this by the Home Office CRBN Team.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 14 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mr. Amjed Abu-Jazar. [85139]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 6 December 2002,

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 25 September from the right hon. Member Manchester, Gorton, with regard to the National Asylum Support Service. [85144]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 4 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 14 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mihai Tudoreslu. [85145]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 4 December 2002,

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 16 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Mrs. Inder Kavr Singh Taz. [85147]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 6 December 2002,

Criminal Injuries

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the consequences of the case of R (H) v Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority. [84650]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office was not a party to this action, which was brought against the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (CICA). Under the terms of the Criminal Injuries Compensation Scheme approved by Parliament, the CICA and the complementary, independent Appeals Panel are exclusively responsible for the administration of the scheme, the interpretation of the scheme rules and the determination of individual applications. Ministers do not comment on, or intervene in, the administering bodies' handling of individual cases.

However, I understand from the CICA that they have not yet received a copy of the judgment in writing. They will decide what action might be appropriate when they have had a chance to consider the written judgment in detail, and whether there are wider issues for the overall running of the scheme in which the Home Department needs to be involved.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will write to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam regarding the Criminal Records Bureau. [84809]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* I am sorry for the delay in responding to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam, and I will be writing to him shortly.

Custody Plus

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the likely impact of custody plus on the number of people sentenced to a period of imprisonment of under 12 months in each of the next five years. [84306]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Final decisions have not yet been made about when the sentencing reforms in the Criminal Justice Bill—including custody plus—will be implemented.

In modelling the potential impact of the new sentences, it has been assumed that the number of offenders receiving custody plus under the new framework will be broadly similar to the numbers of offenders sentenced to imprisonment of under 12 months now but that a small number of those offenders currently receiving sentences of under 12 months would receive sentences of over 12 months in the new framework, while some would receive community sentences. In addition we have assumed that a quarter of those currently receiving sentences of between one and three months would receive custody minus. The Government will encourage sentencers to use penalties other than custody wherever appropriate.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the study that considered expanding Victim Support's helpline to 24 hours, referred to in Annex 1 of the joint Home Office/Women's Unit publication, "Living Without Fear: An Integrated Approach to Tackling Violence Against Women. [85312]

Hilary Benn: Staff and volunteers manning Victim Support's Victim Support line provide support and information to anyone affected by crime. The phone lines are open from 9 am–9 pm Monday to Friday, 9 am–7 pm weekends, and 9 am–5pm on bank holidays. Calls are charged at local rates and are confidential.

A study of calls to the Victim Support line has not provided evidence to suggest that there is a high volume of callers attempting to call the helpline outside the hours that it is already available.

Drug Testing (Prisoners)

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to introduce mandatory drug testing for prison inmates on reception. [85037]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* Reception testing is currently available under the mandatory drug testing programme.

Drug Treatment Orders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many drug treatment and testing orders have been issued; at what cost; and how many of the orders have been successfully completed. [84307]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*: The workload information required is provided in the table:

Number of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (DTTOs) Issued between 1 October 2000—31 October 2002[1]	*Orders completed at 31 October 2002)*	*The number of orders revoked for non-compliance.*	*Current caseload (at 31 October 2002)*	*Orders revoked for other reasons*
9,510	1,041	3,794	[2]4,273	402

[1] Latest date for which figures are available

[2] Note this figure does not incoude the caseload from the pilots.

The average cost of a drug treatment and testing order is approximately £6,000.

The current drop-out rate for non-compliance at 39 per cent. is not unexpectedly high. The DTTO is a tough and demanding community sentence that is aimed at serious problem drug misusers who commit crime to fund their habit. It was expected, given the intensity of the order, that a number of offenders would fail to last

the course. The evidence suggests that for those who complete the order, their reduced levels of crime and drugs misuse are largely sustained over time.

Drugs Trade

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking in conjunction with other EU countries to curtail the trade in narcotics. [82935]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The United Kingdom (UK) has a strategy to counter drug trafficking through end-to-end enforcement policies, concentrating on class A drugs as the drugs which cause greatest harm. In doing this we work closely with other European Union (EU) countries in preventing drugs from entering both the EU and the UK. We have drug liaison officers in most EU member states and have provided assistance to EU candidate countries in their development of drug strategies and enforcement capabilities. We are planning to post drug liaison officers to some of these countries too.

The UK played a major role in the mid-term review of the EU Drugs Action Plan, which sets out the EU Drug Strategy. The review concluded that there is a need for more concerted action at EU level on the most significant drugs and this should be done to tighter deadlines. It makes clear the need for continuing work in Afghanistan to eliminate the poppy crop, an area in which the UK has been co-ordinating international efforts.

The UK has co-sponsored with other member states an EU Framework Decision on joint investigation teams, which provides a formal basis for closer co-operation between EU member states' criminal investigation authorities. The UK is also pushing hard for an agreement on a Framework Decision which will establish common definitions for offences and penalties for trafficking drugs and precursor chemicals in the EU.

Information and analysed intelligence on drug trafficking and related money laundering is collated and provided by Europol which acts in support of EU member states' law enforcement agencies.

Hepatitis C

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will undertake a study of the proportion of prisoners who are positive for hepatitis C *(a)* on reception and *(b)* on discharge. [85038]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) undertook an unlinked, anonymised survey of the prevalence of blood borne viruses among prisoners in England in 1997–98. This indicated that nine per cent. of adult men, 11 per cent. of women and 0.6 per cent. of male young offenders had evidence of previous exposure to Hepatitis C. The need for further studies in this area is kept under review.

Khawaja Badar Rauf

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to make a decision in the case of Khawaja Badar Rauf (IND reference number R341351); and if he will make a statement. [83823]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 5 December 2002.

Opioid Addiction

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will update Prison Service Order 3550 to take account of advances in the treatment of opioid addiction with buprenorphine; [85042]

(2) in how many prisons buprenorphine is made available for opioid substitution treatment. [85043]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* Prison Service Order 3550 introduced a new Prison Service Standard for Clinical Services for Substance Misusers. This already provides that, as new evidence becomes available on the chemical management of detoxification or abstinence, establishments should develop further treatment guidelines which are in line with those available in the national health service (NHS).

Buprenorphine is included in treatment protocols, developed in conjunction with the NHS, at six Prison Service establishments. This broadly reflects the extent of its current usage in the community.

Osama bin Laden

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he proposes to take over the circulation of a letter purporting to be written by Osama bin Laden on a UK website operated by an individual, details of whom have been supplied to him; and if he will make a statement. [83844]

Mr. Blunkett: I have been in close touch with the relevant police and security authorities, about the work they have undertaken surveilling, monitoring and evaluating evidence that might be used in any prosecution. As my hon. Friend knows, the detailed operational functions lie with those authorities. Decisions on prosecutions lie with the Crown Prosecution Service. I have always made it clear that those who step over the line will be prosecuted.

Outreach Programmes

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding from his Department has been provided to Outreach programmes for young offenders provided by ACFA in the financial year 2001–02; what will be provided in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04 and *(c)* 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [82960]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The Youth Justice Board, funded by the Home Office, paid £600,000 in 2001–02 for work done in 2000–01 by the Army Cadet Force Association's Outreach programme. The Home Office have committed £60,000 for 2002–03

and subject to satisfactory performance plan to contribute £60,000 in 2003–04. No payment is planned for 2004–05.

Paedophiles

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to propose amendments to the law to increase the maximum sentence for paedophiles convicted of abusing children; what measures are in place to ensure that police have the details of known paedophiles in an area where a child has gone missing; what proposals he has to ensure that internet service providers that allow paedophile web sites to operate on their systems are prosecuted; how much has been spent on combating internet child exploitation since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [83222]

Hilary Benn: The criminal law is a devolved matter for Scotland and recent proposals for changes to the law in England and Wales are different from those in Scotland.

For offences committed in Scotland, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill will increase the maximum penalties available to the courts to 10 years for taking and distributing indecent images of children and to five years for possession, (which are both offences under-the Civic Government (Scotland) Act 1982). The Bill will also implement certain of the recommendations arising out of the recent report of the Expert Panel on Sex Offending, chaired by Lady Cosgrove. The Executive is committed to tackling all forms of child abuse and keeps this area of the law under review.

In England and Wales, recent proposals in the Government command paper "Protecting the Public" outlined our plans for comprehensive legislative reform of sex offences. Protection for children will be strengthened by proposed new offences of unlawful adult sexual activity with a child, familial sexual abuse of a child, sexual grooming and commercial sexual exploitation of a child, alongside the non-consensual offences of rape and sexual assault, among others. The proposed penalties for these offences, which in many cases are higher than penalties for existing offences, will clearly demonstrate the abhorrence with which society views sexual activity with children. Legislation to implement these proposals is planned for the New Year.

In answer to your second point, the Sex Offenders Act 1997, which applies to the whole of the UK, places requirements on sex offenders who have been cautioned, convicted or found guilty by reason of insanity in respect of sex offences against children and other serious sex offences. Offenders convicted of a relevant offence must report to a police station prescribed by regulations within three days of the date of their conviction, caution etc. or their release from prison, and notify the police of their name (and any aliases), home address and date of birth. They are also required to notify any changes to their details within 14 days. Failure to comply is a criminal offence with a maximum penalty of five years imprisonment.

The Sex Offenders Act applies to sex offenders cautioned, convicted or found guilty by reason of insanity after 1997. Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, when the police consider that a sex offender has behaved in a way that gives reasonable cause to believe that it is necessary to protect the public from serious harm from him, they can apply to a court for a Sex Offender Order to be made. The order will place restrictions upon his behaviour and activities and requires the offender to 'register' with the police for the duration of the order. An order lasts a minimum of five years and can be indefinite.

In the event that a child is abducted, the Government welcomes the pilot scheme based on the Amber Alert system used by some states in America, to try and ensure the safe return of the child. It was launched on 14 November and is known as 'Child Rescue—Sussex Police'. It involves a joint effort by police, the media and the public. Its intention is to notify the general public that a child has been taken, so they look out for the child, the abductor or any vehicle used in the abduction. They then report any relevant information to the police.

Decisions on taking prosecutions against internet service providers are a matter for the police and the Crown Prosecution Service. An internet service provider (ISP) which knows of the presence of an indecent image of a child on their system and does not remove or disable access to it expeditiously on becoming aware of it, would be at risk of prosecution under the Protection of Children Act 1978. The internet industry funds the Internet Watch Foundation to assess images which have been referred to it and notify ISPs and the police of those that are illegal. The Foundation also provides its members with a list of newsgroups which should not be carried because they contain or appear to offer indecent images of children. These arrangements apply across the UK as a whole.

Operational decisions on allocation of police resources to combating child exploitation rest with police authorities and chief officers and no central records exist to determine how many cases have been investigated or the resources allocated to them. The new National Policing Plan reinforces the recommendation in the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children that police forces and authorities should review the role, remit, location and status of child protection units to ensure that child protection is dealt with to a consistently high standard. We have also set up a National High Tech Crime Unit within the National Crime Squad to provide additional support to local forces in investigating the most technically sophisticated crimes, including internet child protection. As well as policing resources we have worked with industry and child protection organisations through our Task Force on Child Protection on the Internet to tackle this issue, for example producing Codes of Practice and running public awareness campaigns targeting children and their parents.

Combating the exploitation of children by offenders who use the internet to facilitate the abuse, is an integral part of the work of the police in tackling child sexual exploitation. The Government have provided specific

resources for the National High Tech Crime Unit but this is not broken down across the different areas of their work.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to find the suspected paedophiles at large whose details were given to the police six months ago. [84547]

Hilary Benn: Police forces across the UK are prioritising and tracing e-mail addresses for investigation, assisted by the National Crime Squad.

It is not appropriate for me to provide more significant details of what are, and will be for some time, ongoing investigations.

Ministers are monitoring the law enforcement response and the progress of this investigation.

Parenting Orders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parenting orders have been imposed, broken down by each constabulary, in each year since their introduction. [83172]

Hilary Benn: 2,488 Parenting Orders were made between September 1998, when piloting started, and March 2002. The Orders were available nationally from June 2000. We have the breakdown by constabulary area for the year April 2001 to March 2002, which is shown in table.

Constabulary	*Parenting Orders*
Avon and Somerset	17
Bedfordshire	15
Cambridgeshire	22
Cheshire	1
Cleveland	45
Cumbria	4
Derbyshire	8
Devon and Cornwall	5
Dorset	9
Durham	16
Dyfed/Powys	11
Essex	39
Gloucestershire	1
Greater Manchester	200
Gwent	10
Hampshire	103
Hertfordshire	24
Humberside	8
Kent	34
Lancashire	20
Leicestershire	50
Lincolnshire	2
Merseyside	12
Metropolitan	165
Norfolk	29
North Wales	25
North Yorkshire	3
Northamptonshire	0
Northumbria	85
Nottinghamshire	9
South Wales	21
South Yorkshire	17
Staffordshire	12
Suffolk	36
Surrey	1
Sussex	27
Thames Valley	22
Warwickshire	0
West Mercia	21
West Midlands	45
West Yorkshire	39
Wiltshire	3
Total	1,216

Persistent Offenders

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persistent offenders he estimates there are in England and Wales aged *(a)* under 18 years, *(b)* 18 to 20 years and *(c)* 21 years and over. [84296]

Hilary Benn: [*holding answer 9 December 2002*]: Recent data from the Police National Computer shows that: in England and Wales, there is a group of about 6,600 persistent offenders aged 18–20, and 26,800 aged 21and over; and that about 4,800offenders aged under 18 years had been convicted of six or more recordable offences in the previous 12 months.

Police and CPS

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he plans to take to improve the integration of police and CPS functions. [84397]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* There has already been considerable progress towards the co-location of the police and the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in criminal justice units. Our aim is that all criminal justice areas should have co-located units by April 2004. Such co-location means improvements to the way in which cases are prepared for court, and have led to good working relationships; in which advice can be sought quickly on more difficult cases, and have also resulted in considerable savings in casefile preparation. Such a set-up will also support the new arrangements in which the CPS take over from the police responsibility for charging. The evidence of piloting these arrangements is that there are improved working relationships between the police and the CPS and more focused investigations. Ready access to legal advice and improved understanding means that cases, which previously would not have resulted in a charge, will now be taken to court. The outcome is fewer discontinued cases and earlier guilty pleas. The Criminal Justice Bill contains provision to put these arrangements on a statutory basis.

Prisoners

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures the Government are taking to rehabilitate prisoners who are drug addicts. [84546]

Hilary Benn: Her Majesty's Prison Service has in place a framework to address the needs of prisoners with low, moderate and severe drug misuse problems. This includes detoxification services which are available in all local and remand prisons, a drug service known as CARATs (counselling, assessment, referral, advice and throughcare) and voluntary drug testing which are both

available across the prison estate. There is also a range of intensive treatment programmes available in 60 prisons.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prisoners who have taken the Alpha Course in prisons have re-offended. [84749]

Hilary Benn: This information is not available and could be collected only at disproportionate cost.

Prisons

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what emergency accommodation he plans to use to ease prison overcrowding; [82132]

(2) when the next batch of new prison places will become available; and how many there will be; [82134]

(3) if he will make a statement on the use of police cells to house those *(a)* sentenced and *(b)* remanded in custody by the courts; [82136]

(4) what plans he has for the expansion of places in Her Majesty's prisons; [82137]

(5) what the total *(a)* operational capacity, *(b)* prison population and *(c)* certified accommodation capacity in prisons is. [82138]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* As at 27 November 2002, the useable operational capacity of the Prison Service was 72,684; the total prison population was 72,500 (excluding 160 prisoners held in police cells) and the in use certified normal accommodation was 64,608.

Following the unexpected rise in the prison population, the Prison Service is using police cells for keeping both remand and sentenced prisoners in safe custody. The number of police cells used in this way (under Operation Safeguard) peaked at 448 on the night of 29 October 2002. Since then, new accommodation has been brought into operation, which has enabled the Prison Service to reduce its use of police cells.

By 27 November 2002, the number of prisoners being held in police cells had fallen to 160.

By providing additional capacity, along with sentencing reform and other measures to contain the rise in the prison population, the Government aim to limit prison overcrowding to manageable levels agreed with the Prison Service.

We have recently announced that £60 million will be made available to provide 740 places at existing prisons by March 2004. This is in addition to funding from the 2002 budget to provide an extra 2,320 places this year.

We have also approved Prison Service plans for two new prisons, which will provide 1,290 places by 2004–05. The first is scheduled to open in the summer of 2004 at Ashford (near Heathrow) and will be a female prison of 450 places. An 840-place prison for 360 female and 480 male prisoners is scheduled to open at Peterborough in Cambridgeshire in the summer of 2005.

Sexual Offences

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a judicial direction that consent means free agreement. [84288]

Hilary Benn: Consultation with the Judicial Studies Board has confirmed our view that it would be inappropriate to incorporate a standard direction on consent in statute because the exact direction in any particular case will need to vary according to the individual circumstances.

Once the new sex offences legislation is in force, the Judicial Studies Board will be invited to consider whether there needs to be a specimen direction covering the various provisions relating to consent and, if so, what the appropriate terms of such a direction might be.

Vera Baird: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the list of reverse presumption situations in the White Paper Protecting the Public at paragraph 31 will be exhaustive. [84289]

Hilary Benn: The list of circumstances in which it will be presumed that consent is most unlikely to have been present will be exhaustive and will be clearly defined in the Sex Offences Bill. It will not be possible to amend it other than by means of further primary legislation.

However there are clearly numerous other situations in which consent will not be present and the alleged offence will be proveable in court. The list is confined to those circumstances where prima facie the position is so clear that it is justified to provide a rebuttable presumption that consent was not present.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many sexual offences against children were reported in each of the last ten years, broken down by category of offence; and what proportion of these resulted in conviction; [85116]

(2) how many people have been convicted of sexual offences against children in each of the last ten years; and what percentage of the population has been convicted of a sexual offence against a child; [85117]

(3) what assessment he has made of the average number of children abused by each paedophile convicted in the last five years. [85118]

Hilary Benn: The available information, relating to recorded crime and persons convicted in England and in Wales for the years 1991 to 2000 (2000/01 for recorded crime), relates to those offences where the age of the victim is identified by the offence, Statistics for 2001 will be available shortly. Information is not held centrally on the number of children abused by each paedophile convicted, nor on the proportion of the population with convictions for sexual offences against children. Information is not held centrally on the number of children abused by each paedophile convicted, nor on the proportion of the population with convictions for sexual offences against children.

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and persons convicted at all courts of sexual offences against young people where the age of victim is identified by the offence, 1991 to 2000–01
England and Wales– Number of offences and number of persons
Recorded Crime

Offences	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998–99*[1]	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Indictable Offences										
Sexual offences										
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male of a male under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged 16 or 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male aged 18 to 20 with a male aged 16 to 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male with a female under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a female aged 16 or 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Buggery by a male aged 18 to 20 with a female aged 16 or 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Gross indecency by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged under 18	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Gross indecency by a male aged 18 to 20 with a male aged under 18	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Rape of a female aged under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Rape of a male aged under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Attempted rape of a female aged under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Indecent assault on a female under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	315	253	268	275	178	171	148	153	181	155
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	1,949	1,563	1,433	1,446	1,260	1,261	1,112	1,135	1,270	1,237
Incest with a girl under 13	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with firl under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Male aged 21 or over procuring or attempting to procure a male under 18 of gross indecency with another male	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Abduction of unmarried girl under 18	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Gross indecency with boys aged 14 and under	1,147	1,158	1,280	1,512	1,287	1,215	1,269	1,293	1,365	1,336
Gross indecency with girls aged 14 and under	1,147	1,158	1,280	1, 512	1,287	1,215	1,269	1,203	1,365	1,336
Other indictable offences										
Take or make indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Summary Offences										
Possession of an indecent photograph, or pseudo-photograph of a child	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_
Total for England and Wales	3,411	2,974	2,991	3,233	2,725	2,647	2,529	2,581	2,816	2,728

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and persons convicted at all courts of sexual offences against young people where the age of victim is identified by the offence, 1991 to 2000–01
England and Wales—Number of offences and number of persons
Persons convicted[2]

Offences	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998–99*[1]	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
Indictable Offences										
Sexual offences										
Buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	168	163	136	135	85	5				
Attempt to commit buggery with a boy under the age of 16 or with a woman or an animal	26	17	20	16	14	2				
Buggery by a male of a male under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	29	66	70	57	57	51
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged 16 or 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	2	3	6	7	1	5
Buggery by a male aged 18 to 20 with a male aged 16 to 17	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	3_	1	1	1	
Buggery by a male with a female under 16	3_	3_	3_	3_	7	17	21	23	13	13

Notifiable offences recorded by the police and persons convicted at all courts of sexual offences against young people where the age of victim is identified by the offence, 1991 to 2000–01
England and Wales—Number of offences and number of persons
Persons convicted[2]

Offences	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998–99*[1]	*1999–00*	*2000–01*
Buggery by a male aged 21 or over with a female aged 16 or 17	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	2	2		1		1
Buggery by a male aged 18 to 20 with a female aged 16 or 17	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	1					
Indecent assault on male person under 16 years	351	363	293	324	339	355	365	342	337	299
Gross indecency by a male aged 21 or over with a male aged under 18	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	11	11	17	18	10	11
Gross indecency by a male aged 18 to 20 with a male aged under 18	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—			2			
Rape of a female aged under 16	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	113	210	198	221	247	206
Rape of a male aged under 16	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	2	13	24	15	37	24
Attempted rape of a female aged under 16	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	21	35	52	41	44	32
Attempted rape of a male aged under 16	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	[3]—	2	2	5	14	7	2
Indecent assault on a female under 16	1,469	1,331	1,205	1,355	1,446	1,597	1,627	1,505	1,491	1,353
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 13	105	89	76	64	81	54	44	55	52	53
Unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	223	218	170	205	203	207	199	225	189	214
Incest with a girl under 13	68	52	51	35	21	19	19	19	13	12
Inciting girl under 16 to have incestuous sexual intercourse	3	3	1	4	5		3		1	2
Householder permitting unlawful sexual intercourse with girl under 16	1	3	6	2	3		1	2		
Person responsible for girl under 16 causing or encouraging her prostitution etc.	2		1		3	1	1		1	
Male aged 21 or over procuring or attempting to procure a male under 18 of gross indecency with another male	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]		3	6	7	3	4
Abduction of unmarried girl under 16	8	12	6	9	6	3	1	4	1	3
Abduction of unmarried girl under 18						1			1	
Gross indecency with boys aged 14 and under	91	99	80	77	56	53	56	61	73	58
Gross indecency with girls aged 14 and under	128	129	123	112	99	111	153	144	135	
Other indictable offences										
Take or make indecent photographs, or pseudo-photographs, of children	39	44	37	27	44	69	103	82	139	218
Summary Offences										
Possession of an indecent photograph, or pseudo-photograph of a child	43	30	35	36	37	79	81	105	99	77
Total for England and Wales	2,728	2,553	2,241	2,401	2,635	2,916	3,011	2,958	2,962	2,774

[1] New Home Office rules for counting and classifying crime were introduced in April 1998: information on notifiable offences is presented on a financial year basis from that date.
[2] Data are on the principal offences basis.
[3] Counts are not collected centrally for these detailed offences.

Women Prisoners

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are in prison for *(a)* drug offences, *(b)* drug trafficking offences and *(c)* supply offences; and of these groups of women, what percentage (i) have dependent children, (ii) are UK nationals and (iii) are non-UK nationals giving countries of nationality. [82861]

Hilary Benn: Information on the number of women in prison for drug supply offences, unlawful import/export and other drugs offences, and the nationality of these prisoners, is contained in the table.

Statistics on whether women currently in prison for drugs offences have dependent children is not available.

Previous Home Office research (Caddie & Crisp, Imprisoned women and mothers, 1994, Home Office Research Study 162), found that 61 per cent. of women in prison were mothers of children aged under 18 and/or were pregnant. 28 per cent. of sentenced mothers in this study were in prison for drugs offences.

Imprisoned women England and Wales 31 October 2002

Nationality	*Number*	*Unlawful import/ export*	*Drugs supply*	*Other drugs offences*
Antarctica	1	—	—	1
Australia	1	1	—	—
Bangladesh	1	—	1	—
Barbados	1	1	—	—
Belgium	5	5	—	—
Brazil	10	9	—	1
Canada	2	2	—	—
Columbia	6	3	1	2
Dominican Republic	1	1	—	—
Ecuador	1	—	—	1
France	7	5	2	—
Germany	4	3	—	1
Germany	5	5	—	—
Ghana	5	4	1	—
Greece	1	—	1	—
Grenada	2	2	—	—
Guyana	3	3	—	—
India	4	2	—	2
Irish Republic	4	3	1	—
Italy	2	2	—	—
Jamaica	459	397	35	27
Kenya	2	2	—	—
Latvia	1	1	—	—
Liberia	1	1	—	—

Imprisoned women England and Wales 31 October 2002

Nationality	Number	Unlawful import/ export	Drugs supply	Other drugs offences
Montserrat	2	2	—	—
Netherlands	21	20	—	1
Netherlands Antilles	3	3	—	—
Nigeria	17	15	1	1
Not known	9	9	—	—
Pakistan	1	1	—	—
Peru	1	1	—	—
Poland	1	1	—	—
Portugal	7	7	—	—
Singapore	1	1	—	—
South Africa	22	21	1	—
Spain	12	12	—	—
St Christopher and Nevis	1	1	—	—
St Kitts and Nevis	2	2	—	—
St Lucia	1	1	—	—
Stateless	1	1	—	—
Surinam	1	1	—	—
Sweden	2	2	—	—
Switzerland	1	1	—	—
Thailand	1	1	—	—
Tongo	1	1	—	—
Trinidad and Tobago	3	3	—	—
United Kingdom	842	283	320	239
United States of America	9	9	—	—
Venezuela	4	4	—	—
Vietnam	1	—	—	1
Virgin Islands	1	1	—	—
Zimbabwe	1	1	—	—
Total	1,497	857	364	277

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women are held in prisons in England and Wales, broken down by the offences they are held for. [83670]

Hilary Benn: The requested data are shown in the following table. Female prisoners held in prisons in England and Wales on the 31 October 2002, broken down by offence.

Offence Group	Number of female prisoners
Total	4,427
Violence against the person	695
Sexual offences	21
Burglary	305
Robbery	481
Theft and handling	726
Fraud and forgery	133
Drugs offences	1,497
Other offences	460
Offence not recorded	108

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women were received into prison in each of the last three years, broken down by offences. [83671]

Hilary Benn: The number of women first received into prisons in England and Wales over the last three years by offence type is given in the table.

First receptions of females into prison service establishments in England and Wales by offence group

Offence Group	1999	2000	2001
Total	10,982	10,752	12,[illegible]
Violence against the person	1,126	1,182	1,[illegible]
Sexual offences	28	37	[illegible]
Burglary	468	426	52[illegible]

First receptions of females into prison service establishments in England and Wales by offence group

Offence Group	1999	2000	2001
Robbery	254	311	395
Theft and handling	4,135	4,156	4,587
Fraud and forgery	673	619	678
Drugs offences	1,275	1,196	1,452
Other offences	2,063	1,934	2,181
Offence not recorded	958	891	997

Young Offenders

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action his Department will take following the High Court decision that the Children Act 1989 applies to children held in prison; what assessment his Department has made of the *(a)* additional training required of prison officers and *(b)* additional costs to the Prison Service; what time schedule his Department is working towards to implement the High Court ruling in prisons and young offender institutions across England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [85406]

Hilary Benn: The Court upheld and endorsed the Prison Service's policy in relation to juveniles in custody. One sentence in its policy, which was to be changed regardless of the outcome of the judgment, has been found to be wrong. This will now be changed in the context of the judgment. There is undoubtedly a need for more consistency in the provision for young people across the prison estate and work is under way to ensure that this happens. There has been considerable investment across the juvenile estate and resources have been put into all establishments; however, these funds must be allocated according to specific needs and priorities.

The Prison Service has already in place a Child Protection Protocol through which Governors have been required to introduce arrangements to protect children from significant harm, in line with its wish to reflect the principles of the Children Act 1989 and safeguard the welfare of those in its custody. The Court's judgment has found that it is for local authorities to co-operate with the Prison Service in carrying out their duties, subject to the necessary requirements of imprisonment.

Young Offenders Institutions

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been held in segregation cells in each of the prisons in the juvenile estate since April 2000; and of those, how many have been held for *(a)* longer than seven and *(b)* 28 days. [83824]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I shall therefore write to my hon. Friend when it is available.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Bain Inquiry

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the remuneration and expenses paid to each of the members of the Bain Inquiry into the firefighters; and if he will make a statement. [85317]

Mr. Raynsford: Sir George Bain does not wish to be remunerated for his role as chairman of the independent review of the fire service. Sir Anthony Young is being remunerated at a rate equivalent to the daily rate for members of the Central Arbitration Committee. The employers of Sir Michael Lyons are being reimbursed at his usual rate for his time spent working on the review. All three members have their reasonable expenses reimbursed in accordance with the arrangements which normally apply for such inquiries and reviews.

Mr. Galloway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was to public funds of the Bain Inquiry into the firefighters' wage claims; and if he will make a statement. [85318]

Mr. Raynsford: The independent review has not yet completed its work so it is not possible to give a figure for the total costs involved in the review.

British Fire Service

Mr. Wood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the 2001 Pathfinder report into the British Fire Service will be published. [85670]

Mr. Raynsford: The Fire Cover Review Task Group agreed the text of its final report on the pathfinder trials at the end of September, 2002. The Central Fire Brigades Advisory Council will consider the report at a future meeting. If the council endorses the report, it will be published.

Affordable Housing (Chesham and Amersham)

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish *(a)* the current value of the liabilities for pensions of the Fire Service in payment and other liabilities in respect of service to date, *(b)* the amount by which it would increase if firefighters' pay were immediately to increase by 10 per cent. more than the rate of earnings growth allowed for and *(c)* the annual cost of *(b)*, if that were spread over the expected working lifetime of current firefighters; what financial and demographic assumptions were used to make these estimates; and if he will make a statement. [84910]

Mr. Raynsford: The Firefighters' Pension Scheme is administered locally by or on behalf of fire authorities and the information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Brownfield Land

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what targets the Government are introducing, and over what time, to reduce the quantity of brown field land in the UK; and what steps the Government are taking to relax regulatory and fiscal barriers that prevent property developers from acquiring and redeveloping brown field land. [83947]

Mr. McNulty: The best way to reduce the quantity of brown field land is to build on it. The Government have met their target of 60 per cent. of new dwellings on brown field land and intend to maintain at least this level.

Concealed Telephone Masts

Chris Ruane: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many concealed phone masts there are, ranked by county. [85019]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 383–84W, to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Mr. Pickles).

Fire Service

Mr. Paice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many hours retained firefighters are required to work in order to receive the annual retaining fee; [85807]

(2) what the average annual income received by a retained firefighter was during 2001–02 as *(a)* a leading firefighter with 10 years' service and *(b)* a firefighter with 2 years' service; [85808]

(3) what the average number of hours was for which individual retained firefighters were paid the hourly rate during 2001–02. [85806]

Mr. Raynsford: To receive the full annual retaining fee a retained firefighter must be on call at all times. Where the retained member has enrolled on conditions requiring attendance only during limited periods, the retaining fee may be reduced proportionately. Payment is not directly related to hours worked.

Information on the average income received by retained firefighters and the average number of hours for which individuals were paid the hourly rate is not held centrally, and could provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Paice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the impact on the annual income of *(a)* a retained leading firefighter with 10 years' service and *(b)* a retained firefighter with 2 years' service, of the arrangements for the retained service pay, as set out in the fire employers statement of 13 November. [85809]

Mr. Raynsford: As a result of the offer set out in the Fire Brigades Employer Circular of the 12 November the local government employers estimate that all firefighters, wholetime and retained, would have received an increase of 4 per cent. in November 2002. This would have been followed by an increase in the pay bill of 7 per cent. in November 2003, although the amount firefighters actually received would have depended on how much of the pay bill increase was used to reward some staff, for example, with special allowances. Due to changes in their allowances retained firefighters would have typically received 6.4 per cent. more than wholetime firefighters under the arrangements proposed.

Government Offices for the Regions (Staff)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many registered architects, planners and urban

designers are employed in *(a)* each of the Government Offices for the Regions and *(b)* his Department. [85186]

Mr. McNulty: 58 staff currently in post with Government offices have satisfied the requirements of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) for membership, and include one dual qualified architect/planner. (East of England and West Midlands each have three, East Midlands five, North West six, Yorkshire and the Humber seven, South West and London each have eight, North East and South East each have nine.)

Our latest information (Autumn 2002) shows that 24 staff within the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have satisfied the requirements of the RTPI for professional membership.

Information on staff with other professional qualifications is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. There are also 93 active inward secondments to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, many of whom have professional backgrounds.

Large Scale Voluntary Transfers

Sir Nicholas Winterton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to improve the large scale voluntary transfers process; and how many council properties will have their transfer finalised under the LSVT programme during 2002–03. [83802]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is reviewing the various methods available to authorities for meeting the decent home target, including large scale voluntary transfer of their housing. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects that up to 175,000 dwellings in England will transfer during the current financial year.

Local Government Finance Settlement

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the increase in the council tax at standard spending in the local government finance settlement will be limited to the change in retail price index. [86382]

Mr. Leslie: The level of the assumed national council tax is determined by the national total for formula spending, the total of revenue support grant, the distributable amount of business rates and the council tax base.

The increases from year to year in these figures, rather than any inflation assumption, are therefore what determine the increase in the assumed national council tax. Assumed national council tax is simply an assumption used in the distribution of grant; it is not a prediction of actual council tax.

Planning

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on changes he has made to the workings of the planning system by the update of PPG22. [84556]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently preparing the revised planning guidance on renewable energy (PPG22) following informal consultation with a number of interested parties. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to issue the draft guidance in the new year for full public consultation. Until that time, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will not be detailing potential changes to the original.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Pickles: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what criteria the Government will use to determine public support for regional assemblies; [83424]

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what powers elected regional assemblies will have to make changes to the delivery of public services. [85392]

Mr. Leslie: Elected regional assemblies will be responsible for strategic priorities rather than for direct service delivery. But they will add value to service delivery by bringing coherence to, and improving the delivery of, the large number of strategies and partnerships that have developed at the regional level. Assemblies will set the framework for their region and co-ordinate activity on issues such as economic development, planning, housing and transport. An assembly's block grant will allow it to allocate spending according to what it considers as priorities for that region.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether alternatives to elected regional assemblies will be offered as part of the consultation; and if he will make a statement. [85394]

Mr. Leslie: The Government are currently taking soundings to test the level of interest in each region in holding a referendum on establishing an elected assembly.

Chapter 2 of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" sets out the Government's proposals for strengthening all regions; these arrangements will therefore continue to apply in those regions which do not choose to establish elected assemblies.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what economic measures elected regional assemblies will be empowered to take. [85395]

Mr. Leslie: Chapter 4 of the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice" makes clear that improving the economic performance of its region will be at the heart of an elected regional assembly's objectives. This is reflected in the range of powers and functions for which elected assemblies will be responsible. In particular, they will be responsible for the Regional Development Agency in their region. They will also have a range of other responsibilities for regional economic development relating to business support, training and skills, and European programmes.

Assemblies will be able to spend their block grant as they judge best, subject to agreeing a small number of targets covering their key responsibilities. Some additional funds will be available if an assembly meets or exceeds these targets. Elected assemblies will also be able to raise additional funds from a precept on the council tax and will have powers to borrow money, subject to certain limits.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has for *(a)* a question in the referendum on regional assemblies and *(b)* further referendums, on the constitution of regional assemblies. [85396]

Mr. Leslie: Clause 2 of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill sets out the question to be asked in a referendum on regional assemblies. The Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to comment on the intelligibility of any referendum question, and on 25 November the commission announced that the question set out in the Bill meets its guidelines. The commission made some small but constructive suggestions for the wording of the preamble, which the Government will consider carefully and respond to in due course.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends that regions that do not have a referendum on establishing an elected assembly in the first instance should have another opportunity at a later date. In regions where a referendum results in a "no" vote, the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill provides that a further referendum can be held after a period of at least five years has passed starting from the day on which the referendum was held.

Regional Co-ordination Unit

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the cost implications to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* other Departments of implementing the review of area-based initiatives by the Regional Co-ordination Unit; and if he will make a statement. [86253]

Mrs. Roche: Any costs which may arise in implementing the review of area based initiatives are expected to be offset by the savings which will arise from streamlining the administration of fewer funding streams. Those areas receiving support are also expected to benefit from a reduced bureaucratic overhead.

Urban Design Skills

Ms Shipley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to raise the level of urban design skills within the Government Offices for the regions. [85193]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made clear to the House in his statement on 18 July 2002, and subsequently in his address to the Urban Summit, that the quality urban design is a key element in delivering sustainable communities. It is recognised that there is a shortage of urban design skills across the public and private sectors. In the context of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Ministers' document, we will be looking at effective means of raising urban design skills.

Through our support to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE) we are already actively encouraging improved understanding and awareness of the value of urban design. We expect the Commission to promote the highest standards of urban design and use its enabling and review roles to help develop skills and best practice in both the public and private sector.

The Government endorse the "Design Champion" model that is working well in Government Departments and some local authorities to improve the quality of design. Our "Living Places: cleaner, safer, greener" report published in October 2002 stated that, by April 2003, all Regional Development Agencies will be expected to have a Design Champion in place to help them achieve their objective to promote excellence in urban design. By April 2004 the Government would like to see all major agencies and non-departmental bodies follow suit. Copies of this document are available in Libraries of the House .

Young Runaways

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he plans to take, following the publication of the Social Exclusion Unit's young runaways report, to tackle the issues of abuse at home and bullying that cause children to run away; and whether one of the proposed two flagship schemes will be based in West Sussex. [86429]

Mrs. Roche: The Department of Health is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the action plan in the Social Exclusion Unit's report on young runaways.

The action plan sets out a range of practical steps to prevent children and young people from running away and to tackle issues like abuse and bullying. These steps include better information for schools and teachers, early identification of children and young people who might run away and the development of more effective family support services.

The Green Paper on Children at Risk announced to Parliament by my right. hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 30 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 860, will look further at some of the wider issues that contribute to running away and that put children and young people at risk. The Green Paper will identify radical new options to improve services for children. It will cover all services which work with children and young people including social services, youth justice, as well as the role of schools, families and communities.

No bids for runaways development projects were received from West Sussex.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Automated Credit Transfer

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the daily capacity is of the telephone helpline provided for claimants seeking advice on automatic credit transfer. [86209]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department's customer conversion centre and information line have in place service level agreements to deal with anticipated levels of contact from customers. The service level agreements will ensure that effective customer service is provided and any change in customer contact volumes will be managed.

Benefit Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many suspected benefit frauds have *(a)* been investigated and *(b)* resulted in a successful prosecution as a result of (i) submissions to the Targeting Fraud website and (ii) calls to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline in each year since 1997. [85991]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables.

Targeting fraud website (launched May 2000)

Period	Investigations completed	Successful prosecutions
1 May 2000 to 31 March 2001	184	0
2001–02	673	4
1 April 2002 to 31 October 2002	722	9

Full information on the number of investigations and successful prosecutions resulting from calls to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline is available only from April 2000.

National benefit fraud hotline

Period	Investigations completed	Successful prosecutions
2000–01	35,589	492
2001–02	108,986	768
1 April 2002 to 31 October 2002	58,592	432

Source:
Fraud Information By Sector system

EU Employment Barriers

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the informal barriers to employment for British workers in the EU. [84576]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The main informal barriers relate to such problems as language or culture and are therefore not readily solved. However, the UK Government take up individual cases where any barriers seem to be unreasonable, and intervenes where appropriate when cases come before the European Court of Justice.

The Department has worked with the European Commission to help produce their communication of 28 February 2001 on "New European Labour Markets, Open to All with Access for All" and have contributed to the subsequent House of Lords Select Committee investigation. We will continue to look to improve our understanding of this issue so that we can raise the employment opportunities available to all UK jobseekers.

Free movement of people is one of the four freedoms within the internal market of the European Union. Within the free movement title of the EC Treaty, Article 39 states that free movement of workers "shall be secured within the Community". This means that workers of the member states are free to accept offers of employment actually made in another member state, and to remain in another member state for the purposes of carrying out employment. However, Article 39 does not apply to employment in the public service.

The main EU regulation giving effect to free movement rights for workers of EU member states is EEC Regulation 1612/68. This guarantees migrant workers equality of treatment with nationals of the host country in respect of:

The right to take up an activity as an employed person;

The right to negotiate and conclude an employment contract;

Full and free access to the host country labour market;

Assistance from public employment offices;

Enlargement and recruitment conditions;

Conditions of employment and conditions governing re-employment, social and tax advantages, vocational training, retraining, and clauses contained in collective or individual contracts of employment;

Membership of trade unions and the exercise of rights attaching thereto;

Housing; and

Access of children to education and vocational training.

The regulation guarantees, subject to certain conditions, the right of the migrant worker's family to live in the host country.

Nevertheless, provided they fulfil their obligations under EU legislation, member states can and do place restrictions on the free movement rights of EU citizens. In particular, Article 39(3) of the EC Treaty allows member states in some circumstances to restrict the movement and residence of workers on the grounds of "public policy, public security or public health".

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will simplify the procedures for the payment of Incapacity Benefit to councillors in receipt of councillors' allowances. [84622]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Incapacity Benefit rules recognise councillors' particular obligations and all work carried out in connection with their elected office is disregarded in deciding entitlement. Any allowances paid are taken into account only if they exceed the permitted work rules limit of £67.50 in any week.

In March 2002, new guidance on the treatment of councillors' allowances was issued to decision makers. This simplifies procedures by allowing the averaging and estimation of expenses, thereby reducing the need for a weekly calculation.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answers of 27 November 2002, Refs 82508, 82511 and 82513, if he will list the additional job entry target point scores which apply in respect of each client group in each of the 60 local authority areas referred to; and if he will make a statement. [85292]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The job entry target point scores are helping Jobcentre Plus to achieve the objectives laid out in its Business Plan for 2002–03. One of the Agency's goals is to help people of working age in the most disadvantaged groups and areas to move closer to the labour market, compete effectively for, and remain in work.

It is these groups and areas that have been given highest weight. Awarding additional points in this way gives extra incentives to build Jobcentre Plus performance in difficult labour markets and towards those people who are hardest to help back into the labour market.

Details of the point scores are in the table.

Client Group	*Points per job entry*
Participants in the New Deal for Lone Parents	12
Other jobless lone parents	12
Participants in the New Deal for Disabled People	12
Other people with disabilities receiving benefit[1] (other than those receiving Jobseeker's Allowance)	12
Other jobless people receiving benefit[1] (other than those receiving Jobseeker's Allowance)	12
Participants in the New Deal for people aged 50+	8
Participants in the New Deal for people aged 25+	8
Participants in the New Deal for Young People aged 18 to 24	8
People helped into work through Employment Zones	8
Other people with disabilities	8
Other people who have been receiving Jobseeker's Allowance for six months or more.	8
People who have been receiving Jobseeker's Allowance for up to six months	4
Other Jobless people not claiming benefits	2
People already employed, changing jobs	1
Additional Points	
People receiving Jobseeker's Allowance who remain off Jobseeker's Allowance four weeks after being helped into work	1
People living in 60 specified Local Authority areas.	2

[1] The benefits are: Income Support, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Bereavement Benefit and Invalid Care Allowance.

National Insurance

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the basis for the calculation by his noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, of the amount of money saved by a typical married woman who opted to pay National Insurance contributions at the reduced rate. [86072]

Mr. McCartney: My noble Friend quoted an illustrative example comparing what a married woman would have paid in full and reduced rate National Insurance contributions if she had earned around £4,000 in 1977 rising evenly to around £27,000 in 2002. The saving of £18,000 in this case is the total cash saving and has not been adjusted upward to take account of inflation over the period. The exact amount of savings any married woman will enjoy depends on her level of earnings because the amount of National Insurance contributions is calculated based on earnings.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people had benefits withdrawn for failing to accept all options under *(a)* New Deal for Young People, *(b)* New Deal 50 plus and *(c)* New Deal 25 plus. [83511]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* New Deal 50 plus has always been a voluntary programme and so there are no benefit sanctions for not participating.

Between January 1998 and September 2002, 64,106 sanctions, to withdraw any Jobseeker's Allowance in payment, had been imposed under the New Deal for Young People. Between April 1998 and June 2002, 21,607 sanctions to withdraw benefit had been imposed under the New Deal 25 plus. We record only the total number of sanctions imposed and not the number of people sanctioned. Some people are sanctioned more than once.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of entrants to New Deal for Young People were functionally illiterate in *(a)* its first year and *(b)* the latest period for which figures are available. [83512]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* We estimate that at least 32 per cent. of all unemployed people have literacy, language and/or numeracy needs, which in part prevent them from improving their employability and finding secure work. Information is not available specifically on the level of illiteracy among entrants to the New Deal for Young People.

Jobcentre Plus screens around 15,000 people a week for literacy and/or numeracy needs. Clients who need help with their literacy and/or numeracy can access job focused training to ensure they are able to develop the skills they need to find and retain work. From April 2001 to January 2002, more than 4,400 young people received basic skills help in the New Deal for Young People. In the same period 10,000 began basic skills training though other programmes or voluntary New Deals.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the improvements in employability of those on each New Deal; and if he will make a statement. [83514]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The New Deals are delivering services tailored to meet the needs of individuals, giving people the skills, confidence and motivation they need to help them find work.

We have in place a wide-ranging programme of evaluation of our New Deals. This evaluation examines the benefits that New Deals are providing, including the increased likelihood of participants moving into work. Evaluation reports are placed in the Library as they are published.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have entered the New Deal gateway *(a)* once, *(b)* twice and *(c)* three times or more in respect of (i) New Deal for Young People, (ii) New Deal 50 plus, and (iii) New Deal 25 plus. [83515]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The New Deal 50 plus does not have a gateway period.

At June 2002, 738,950 people had started on the gateway of the New Deal for Young People programme.

Of these 101,160 clients (16.7 per cent. of all gateway starters) have entered the gateway twice and 16,040 (2.7 per cent. of all gateway starters) have entered the gateway three times or more.

At June 2002, 482,680 people had started on the gateway of the New Deal 25 plus. Of these 55,990 clients (13.6 per cent. of all gateway starters) have entered the gateway twice and 7,050 (1.7 per cent. of all gateway starters) have entered the gateway three times or more.

Many participants will leave the programme before they reach the gateway stage (e.g. by finding work following their initial interview) so the numbers entering the gateway are significantly lower than the number entering the programme.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will provide the information given in his Answer to the hon. Member for Hertsmere of 31 January, *Official Report*, column 537W, in respect of 2001–02. [86056]

Malcolm Wicks: During 2001 and 2002 a total of 11,183 sentences were imposed. Of these, 648 were custodial sentences and 3,067 were community sentences. The remaining 7,468 comprised a range of punishments including conditional discharge, probation, suspended imprisonment and payment of compensation.

Source:

Jobcentre Plus Fraud Information By Sector system

New Deal Costs

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total expenditure has been to date on *(a)* New Deal for Young People, *(b)* New Deal 50 plus and *(c)* New Deal 25 plus. [83516]

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the gross annual cost is of each of the New Deal programmes since they were first established; how much of this cost has been met by the proceeds of the windfall tax; and what projections have been made for future years. [81795]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The information requested is in the table.

Expenditure on the New Deals[1]

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*[2]	*Total 1997 to 2002*	*Of which: Windfall Tax*	*Planned*[3] *spend 2002–03*
Young People	50	268	378	368	285	1,347	1,080	354
25 plus	0	24	108	128	226	486	420	303
50 plus[4]	0	0	5	20	15	40	40	16
Lone Parents	0	21	41	41	36	139	135	142
Disabled People	0	5	20	10	10	45	45	58
Partners	0	0	5	10	10	25	25	26

[1] Includes expenditure in Northern Ireland.

[2] 2002–03 figures reflect planned gross expenditure, including Windfall Tax. Future New Deal allocations are currently being revised to reflect the outcome of Spending Review 2002.

[3] New Deal 50 plus expenditure does not include employment credits, which are met from Annually Managed Expenditure.

Pensions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list *(a)* Green Papers, *(b)* reviews and *(c)* consultations or pensions since 1997. [81794]

Mr. McCartney: We produced a Green Paper—Partnership in Pensions in 1998. Quinquennial reviews of occupational and personal pension schemes: review of certain contracted out terms took place in 1998 and 2001. A quinquennial review of the pensions ombudsman took place in 2000. The Pickering review took place in 2002.

The Pension Credit: a consultation paper was produced in November 2000. It is a general requirement to consult on all draft amendment regulations on occupational pensions and the following list details consultations of the new Department for Work and Pensions compiled from August 2001. A detailed list of consultations before this date is not readily available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Title of consultation	*Date*
Occupational pension scheme winding up notices and reports (etc) regulations 2001	August 2001
Occupational and personal pension schemes (disclosure of information) amendment regulations 2001	August 2001
The minimum funding requirement: The next stage of reform. consultation on the draft occupational pension schemes (minimum funding requirement and miscellaneous amendments) regulations 2001	September 2001
Private pensions	October 2001
Simplification (Pickering)	
Bulk transfer of accrued pensions rights without member consent	December 2001
Consultation on three recommendations in the Myner's report—"institutional investment in the UK—a review (issued by Treasury 2001)"	February 2002
Member nominated trustees and directors	February 2002
Modernising annuities	February 2002

Title of consultation	*Date*
Occupational and personal pension schemes (contracting-out) miscellaneous amending regulations	April 2002 (Fegs)
Quinquennial review occupational pensions regulatory authority (Opra)—consultation	May 2002
The future of the residential allowance component of income support, minimum income guarantee, jobseeker's allowance	*May 2002*

Notes: The following point should be noted :
(i) The Government's code of practice on written consultation applies to written consultations which have a national impact on policy and services from 1st January 2001. This is in addition to our unique obligations as a Department to consult the Social Security Advisory Committee on certain legislative changes. Such changes may, or may not be subject to a public consultation.
(ii) All public consultations are published on the DWP website and can be found on www.dwp.gov.uk/consultations/2002/index.htm.

Post Office Card Accounts

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many personal invitations documents for post office card accounts will be printed; [86210]

(2) what proof of identity will be required for future holders of a post office card account who are in receipt of pensions and benefits. [86215]

Malcolm Wicks: Customers who wish to open a post office card account will be issued with a personal invitation document to take to their post office branch where they will then be handed a post office card account application form to fill in.

Customers will need to prove who they are when opening a post office card account by presenting items such as a current passport, a full current driving licence or a council tax or utility bill. The personal invitation document can also act as a form of identification. We have said repeatedly that anyone who wants to open a card account will be able to do so, so there is no need to "ration" post office card accounts by restricting the number of personal invitation documents that are printed.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what criteria are being employed in the decision to approve promotional literature for the post office card account; [86212]

(2) when he will make a decision approving the promotional literature for the post office card accounts. [86213]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions will be writing to customers over the next two years when it is their turn to change to direct payment into their account. Customers will be provided with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the different types of accounts and enables them to choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances.

All of our information material includes references to post office access and post office card accounts; there is no need for any specific promotional literature for the post office card account. The post office have also produced customer information which mentions the post office card account and have plans to produce further material.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements are being made for those pensioners and benefit claimants who wish to apply for a post office card account who have *(a)* hearing difficulties, *(b)* impaired sight, *(c)* serious learning difficulties, *(d)* mental illness and *(e)* seriously restricted mobility. [86217]

Malcolm Wicks: There will be a range of accounts available for people. We will provide customers with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to direct payment. Customers, including those with a disability, will then be able to consider the options available and choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances. They will be asked to provide details of their chosen account so that the Department can begin to pay their benefit or pensions by direct payment.

Post office card account customers will also be able to give third party access to a nominated individual who will be able to access their account via a second card and a separate PIN.

It has always been recognised that there will be some customers who are unable to use any of the banking options or the post office card account. For these people we are currently exploring the options available to ensure they receive their benefit at outlets which will include the post office.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the procedure for opening a post office card account; and whether he plans to take action to simplify it. [86474]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department for Work and Pensions will be writing to customers in Great Britain over the next two years when it is their turn to change to direct payment into an account. Customers will be provided with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the different types of accounts and enables them to choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances.

Customers who wish to open a post office card account will need to contact the Department to discuss their account options with an adviser. They will then be issued with a personal invitation document. This document should then be taken to a post office branch where the customer will be given a post office card account application form to complete.

Overall the process of applying for a post office card account is already straightforward and no more onerous than that of applying for a basic (or other) bank account.

Similar arrangements will be put in place for customers living in Northern Ireland by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Statistics

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answers of 27 November, Refs 82508, 82511 and 82513, if he will rank the *(a)* unemployment rates and *(b)* ethnic minority population statistics of each 60 local authorities referred to in respect of (i) the United Kingdom and (ii) each nation of the UK. [85293]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The information is in the table.

Many of the local authorities with the lowest employment rates are also among the local authorities with the highest ethnic minority populations. The local authorities listed as having high ethnic minority populations are therefore the 30 local authorities with the highest ethnic minority populations that do not already feature in the list of the 30 local authorities with the lowest employment rate.

Percentage

Local authorities with lowest employment rates	*Employment rate*
Tower Hamlets (E)	55
Knowsley (E)	55
Merthyr Tydfil (W)	56
City of Glasgow (S)	57
Blaenau Gwent (W)	57
Newham (E)	57
Easington (E)	58
Hackney (E)	58
Liverpool (E)	59
Manchester (E)	59
Middlesbrough (E)	59
East Ayrshire (S)	61
Neath Port Talbot (W)	62
Sunderland (E)	62
Newcastle upon Tyne (E)	62
South Tyneside (E)	63
Redcar and Cleveland (E)	63
Pembrokeshire (W)	63
Halton (E)	64
Southwark (E)	64
Kingston upon Hull, City (E)	64
Nottingham (E)	64
Islington (E)	65
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff (W)	65
Salford (E)	65
Hartlepool (E)	66
North Lanarkshire (S)	66
West Dunbartonshire (S)	66
Dundee (S)	66
Caerphilly (W)	67

Local authorities with highest minority ethnic population	*Population*
Birmingham (E)	157,990
Brent (E)	98,297
Ealing (E)	85,407
Leicester City (E)	63,889
Bradford (E)	60,694
Barnet (E)	58,832
Lambeth (E)	58,458
Redbridge (E)	57,153
Harrow (E)	54,580
Westminster, City of (E)	52,805
Haringey (E)	52,712
Croydon (E)	47,935
Lewisham (E)	44,678
Hounslow (E)	43,733
Waltham Forest (E)	43,233
Wandsworth (E)	37,384
Luton (E)	33,679
Enfield (E)	33,496
Camden (E)	33,007
Sandwell (E)	32,370
Kensington and Chelsea (E)	32,261
Leeds (E)	31,681
Kirklees (E)	31,436
Wolverhampton (E)	30,275
Merton (E)	29,636
Hammersmith and Fulham (E)	28,652
Hillingdon (E)	27,608
Sheffield (E)	26,224
Greenwich (E)	25,738
Coventry (E)	23,172

Notes:
1. (E) = England, (S) = Scotland, (W) = Wales
2. Jobcentre Plus does not operate in Northern Ireland

Source:
Labour Force Survey

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and how it has changed since the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [83444]

Maria Eagle: DWP confirmed its commitment to sustainable development by publishing a sustainable development policy statement in July this year. The 2nd DWP annual sustainable development report, published on 25 November, also introduces the departmental strategy for sustainable development that has been developed. This contains targets for improvement and sets out how the Department will continue to contribute to sustainable development. Both of these documents have been placed in the Library.

WSSD outcomes and first views on follow-up will be reflected in the annual report on UK progress on sustainable development for 2002. The DWP Strategy will be reviewed regularly to ensure that it continues to meet the aims and objectives of the UK strategy for sustainable development. The Introduction to the DWP strategy contains specific information on the World Summit on Sustainable Development. This will be updated to reflect the outcomes and as each element of the Strategy is reviewed outcomes from WSSD will be reflected as appropriate.

HEALTH

Youth Provision (Battersea)

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assistance is available to young people resident in Battersea who have left care homes or foster parents over the age of *(a)* 16 and *(b)* 18 years. [85522]

Jacqui Smith: The assistance available to young people resident in Battersea who have left care homes or foster parents over the age of 16 or 18 is governed by the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

This Act came into force in October 2001 and is accompanied by the Children (Leaving Care) (England) Regulations 2001 and associated guidance. The regulations and guidance set out the framework for young people who leave local authority care.

Both the Act and the regulations and guidance are available in the Library.

Food Supplements

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he will make it his policy to seek an amendment to the Food Supplements Directive prior to its full implementation to allow member states to permit onto their own national markets those products which fall outside the technical restrictions of that Directive but which the competent authority accepts as safe and appropriately labelled; and if he will make a statement. [84523]

Ms Blears: The Government has no plans to seek any amendments to the Food Supplements Directive. It has already secured provisions which enable Member States to allow the continued sale of products which do not comply with the compositional requirements up to 31 December 2009.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nutrients and nutrient sources on the United Kingdom market are absent from the list of permitted nutrients included in the annexes to the Food Supplements Directive; and what estimate he has made of the cost of *(a)* commissioning the research and *(b)* producing a dossier to the standards required by the European Scientific Committee for Foods for consideration for approval to be given for the addition of such missing nutrients to the annexes in the future. [84525]

Ms Blears: According to information provided by industry, the list of permitted nutrients included in the annexes to the Food Supplements Directive excludes six nutrients (six minerals) and some 270 individual nutrient sources used in food supplements currently on the United Kingdom food supplements market. The costs of producing dossiers will largely depend upon the amount of new safety data that needs to be gathered, and will vary between individual cases.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he has received from *(a)* industry and *(b)* the Food Standards Agency a list of those nutrients missing from the lists of approved nutrients and nutrient sources contained within the annexes of the Food Supplements Directive; what information he has received from industry as to which of those nutrients are the subject of projects to prepare adequate dossiers for consideration by the European Union Standing Committee for Foods; and what steps he intends to take to ensure the remaining nutrients are added to those annexes in the future. [84574]

Ms Blears: United Kingdom industry representatives have sent to the Food Standards Agency a list of those nutrients missing from the lists of approved nutrients and nutrient sources in the annexes to the Food Supplements Directive. The same representatives have also sent to the Agency a list of dossiers being considered by industry for preparation and submission to the EU Scientific Committee for Foods (SCF). These dossiers cover 51 sources of 17 vitamins and minerals. As required by the Directive, the Food Standards Agency will forward to the Commission any such dossiers submitted to the Agency by industry for submission to the SCF.

Mobile Phones

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research his Department has undertaken into the effects of radio waves on leukaemia cells, with particular reference to mobile phone users. [85018]

Ms Blears: The Department has not undertaken research into the effects of radio waves on leukaemia cells.

The independent expert group on mobile phones examined exposures from both mobile phones and base stations and experimental and epidemiological studies on possible health effects. It concluded that the balance of evidence to date suggests that exposures to radio waves below national and international guidelines do not cause adverse health effects to the general population.

The expert group also proposed that gaps in knowledge were sufficient to justify a precautionary approach to the development of this technology and made recommendations for further research. A comprehensive research programme has now been established in this country under an independent programme management committee (PMC). Out of more than 120 submitted applications the PMC has approved 1 5 research proposals to date. This research includes studies of the effects of radio waves on cells and studies of the incidence of leukaemia and other cancers in populations. Information can be found on the mobile telecommunications and health research web site (www.mthr.org.uk). The World Health Organisation's international electromagnetic fields project lists the research being carried out in a number of other countries (see www.who.int/emf)

GM Foods

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what is the budget for the Food Standards Agency debate on GM foods; who will be contracted to conduct the debate; and how the Government's own debate on GM foods will interact with that of the FSA. [85148]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency is providing an independent contribution to the Government's debate on genetically modified (GM) foods. The Agency's contribution will consist of several elements including a citizen's jury and surveys on attitudes of young people and those on low incomes to GM foods, the details of which have yet to be finalised. The Agency has estimated that this will cost approximately

£110,000. It has agreed to provide updates to the independent GM debate steering board and the results of the Agency's work will be discussed in public at an FSA Board meeting before the Government's GM debate concludes.

Adoptions

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many inter-country adoptions there were by British citizens in each of the last three years, broken down by country. [85527]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not held centrally. Children habitually resident outside the United Kingdom may be adopted by British residents in the child's state of origin where the adoption order is recognised under UK law or brought to the UK by British residents for the purposes of adoption in the UK courts. British citizens living outside the UK may also adopt children habitually resident outside the UK through procedures agreed with the child's state of origin. Figures are only held for the number of applications involving a home study assessment in the UK and sent to the Department for processing. Not all of these applications are by British Citizens.

The table shows how many overseas adoption applications the Department has received in each of the last three years.

Country name	*Number of applications*
Applications received by country from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2000	
Algeria	1
Armenia	1
Belarus	1
Bulgaria	3
Cambodia	1
Canada	1
China	176
Colombia	1
Ghana	1
Guatemala	24
India	14
Iran	1
Jordan	1
Kazakhstan	2
Latvia	1
Lithuania	1
Macedonia	1
Mexico	1
Morocco	3
Peru	1
Philippines	3
Romania	23
Russia	14
Singapore	1
Sri Lanka	2
Thailand	45
Ukraine	2
USA	15
Vietnam	10
Total applications received	351
Applications received by country from 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001	
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1
Brazil	2
Bulgaria	3
China	176
Colombia	4
Ethiopia	1
Georgia	1
Guatemala	13
Hong Kong	1
India	19
Mexico	1
Morocco	1
Pakistan	4
Peru	1
Philippines	7
Poland	1
Portugal	1
Romania	5
Russia	13
South Africa	1
Sri Lanka	7
Thailand	29
Turkey	1
Ukraine	1
USA	22
Vietnam	11
Total applications received	327
Applications received by country from 1 January 2002 to 2 December 2002	
Armenia	1
Brazil	1
Bulgaria	4
Cambodia	4
Chile	1
China	126
Colombia	1
Guatemala	17
India	19
Lithuania	1
Madagascar	2
Malaysia	1
Mauritius	2
Mexico	1
Morocco	3
Nepal	1
Pakistan	2
Philippines	4
Poland	1
Romania	3
Russia	14
Samoa	1
South Africa	2
Sri Lanka	1
Taiwan	1
Thailand	19
Turkey	1
Ukraine	2
USA	18
Vietnam	15
Total applications received	269

Agency Staff

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the total cost was of hiring agency staff to carry out operating department practitioner duties *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the north-west region in the last year for which figures are available. [85434]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The Department collects information on the cost to the national health service of temporary workers, by category but not the duties undertaken nor the hospital department they are employed in.

Ambulance Personnel

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former ambulance personnel are on retirement pensions; and how many ambulance personnel there are in service. [82172]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. The number of staff who have taken a retirement pension since the establishment of ambulance trusts, up to 8 November 2002, is 1,645. The number of ambulance staff in service at 30 September 2001 was 16,920.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many assaults on ambulance staff were recorded in each of the past five years. [85770]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the type of and levels of violent incidents by individual staff group is not collected centrally, but may be held at a local level by national health service employers. Data on violent incidents involving all staff in the NHS was not collected on a national basis prior to 1998.

The results of the 2000–2001 survey of reported violent or abusive incidents, accidents involving staff and sickness absence in NHS trusts and health authorities in England have been placed in the Library, along with a report setting out the Government's proposed action in light of the findings. The survey found that there were an estimated 13 reported violent or abusive incidents per 1,000 staff per month in ambulance trusts, compared to an estimated ten such incidents for all NHS trusts.

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what dedicated facilities and support are available to children diagnosed with ADHD in the UK. [84584]

Jacqui Smith: Children with ADHD normally receive help and support from within the spectrum of child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) which range from primary care, including school and social services interventions, to specialist and inpatient services. Child and adolescent psychiatrists, and increasingly paediatricians, provide specialist diagnostic and treatment services for children with ADHD, supported by members of multidisciplinary teams.

A number of voluntary bodies also provide information, advice and support specifically for parents and children with this disorder. The Department provides grant-aid to the ADHD National Alliance which helps to coordinate voluntary sector activity and development work in this field.

Arrangements for Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the devolved administrations. Whilst the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Mark Tami: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimates he has made of the number of school-aged children diagnosed with ADHD. [84586]

Jacqui Smith: Information on numbers diagnosed is not collected centrally. The prevalence of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) of all types is estimated at around five per cent. of school-aged children, approximately 345,000, six to 16 year olds in England.

BCG

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether all teenagers in England and Wales are being offered BCG vaccinations; and if he will make a statement. [81774]

Ms Blears: BCG is recommended and available for children between the ages of 10 to 14 years as part of the school immunisation programme.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of breast cancer patients have been waiting less than two months between urgent referral and the start of treatment in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region. [85301]

Ms Blears: Data is not yet collected centrally on performance of this target. The standard of a maximum wait of two months from urgent referral to first definitive treatment for breast cancer comes into effect at the end of December 2002. Central monitoring will begin in 2003 and data will be published on a quarterly basis next year. Data on current cancer waiting times targets is published on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/cancerwaits.

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list Health Authorities/PCTs that have received funding from the Cancer Care Plan for specialist palliative care, announced in May 2000, together with the amounts received. [84996]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The NHS Cancer Plan pledged that the national health service contribution to the costs of specialist palliative care, including hospices, would increase by £50 million by 2004. Funding for specialist palliative care is included in the overall increased NHS investment for implementing the Cancer Plan and is, therefore, included in baseline allocations to health authorities (HAs) and primary care trusts (PCT). Each HA and PCT has received increased funding.

As mentioned in my earlier reply to the hon. Member on 3 December 2002,we have made available an extra £10 million for specialist palliative care in 2002–03 to support the work the National Cancer Director is undertaking with the NHS and the voluntary sector to develop proposals for a new approach to specialist palliative care funding and planning. A list of the allocations made to each PCT from that extra funding has been placed in the Library.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many extra *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* managers have been employed by NHS trusts using the extra money allocated for the improvement of cancer services. [83701]

Mr. Hutton: Information specifically on the number of staff employed by national health service trusts using the money allocated for the improvement of cancer services is not available.

A table showing the increase in hospital and community health services (HCHS) medical staff employed in the cancer specialties in NHS trusts, primary care trusts (PCTs) and the National Blood Authority, excluding staff who work elsewhere in the NHS, between 2000 and 2001 follows. Information on staff groups other than HCHS medical staff working in cancer services is not collected centrally.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Medical staff working in the cancer specialties[1] employed in NHS trusts, PCTs and the National Blood Authority in England as at 30 September each year

	2000	*2001*	*Difference*
Medical staff employed in the cancer specialties	5,650	6,090	440

[1] Excludes hospital practitioners and clinical assistants most of whom are GPs

Note:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.

Source:
Department of Health Medical and Dental Workforce Census.

By 2003–04 we will be making an additional £570 million available to support the implementation of the NHS Cancer Plan. These increased resources will enable PCTs to decide where NHS resources are best spent in line with local priorities in providing high clinical standards and good value for money.

The Government are implementing a range of measures to improve recruitment and retention of all staff, including nurses. Since 1997, the nursing work force has grown by 39,520. Between September 1999 and March 2002 there was an approximated net increase in nurses working in the NHS of 28,740—the NHS Plan target and Manifesto commitment have been reached two years early. The increase in nurse numbers will enable the recruitment of additional cancer-site specific nurse specialists, chemotherapy nurses, district nurses, palliative care nurse specialists and additional nurses on wards caring for cancer patients.

Care Expenditure

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent, adjusted for inflation, on *(a)* homecare, *(b)* secure accommodation, *(c)* fostering, *(d)* day care, *(e)* nursing care and *(f)* residential care for *(i)* children, (ii) 18 to 64 year olds and (iii) people aged 65 and over in each year since 1997–1998 in (A) Cumbria, (B) Devon, (C) East Riding of Yorkshire, (D) Herefordshire, (E) Lincolnshire, (F) North Yorkshire, (G) Northumberland, (H) Rutland, (I) Shropshire, (J) Wiltshire and (K) England. [85566]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Care Home Inspectors

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health *[pursuant to his answer of 28 November, Official Report, column 408W]*, on care home inspectors, how many *(a)* established care home inspector posts and *(b)* vacancies there were in each of the last five years. [86258]

Jacqui Smith: The available information on the number and whole time equivalent (WTE) of professional and support staff and the number of posts vacant in England is shown in the table for the years 1998–1999 to 200–2001. Data for 2001–2002 is not available.

The data for 2000–2001 are not directly comparable with previous years as they do not include the inspection of provision of under eight activity.

Staffing trends in registration and inspection units England: all inspection units

	Number			*Whole time equivalent (WTE)*			*Posts vacant (WTE)*		
	1998–1999	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*	*1998–1999*	*1999–2000*	*2000–2001*
Professional staff	2,120	2,035	1,580	1,880	1,790	1,410	80	95	45
of which: registration/ inspection officers	[1]—	1,220	895	[1]—	1,100	820	[1]—	70	30
Support staff	795	790	680	695	670	560	40	45	40

Note:
[1] not available

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 28 November, Official Report, column 408W, on care home inspectors, what types of premises the inspectors are required to inspect; and how many of each type of establishment there are, by region. [86259]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) inspects children's homes, care homes, independent hospitals, independent clinics, independent medical agencies and fostering agencies. It also carries out welfare inspections of boarding schools and further education colleges accommodating under-18 year olds. The NCSC is also responsible for the inspection of local authority adoption and fostering services. Provisions in the Care Standards Act 2000 relating to inspection of domiciliary care agencies, nurses agencies, residential family centres, and voluntary adoption agencies have not yet been commenced.

Information on the number of different types of establishment is not yet available.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 28 November, Official Report, column 408W, on care home inspectors, how many

vacancies have been unfilled for *(a)* up to one month, *(b)* one to three months, *(c)* three to six months, *(d)* six months to one year and *(e)* one year or more. [86261]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not available. The National Care Standards Commission does not currently hold retrospective data relating to vacancies.

Carers Grant

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been available in the carers grant for each of the last five years; how much was unallocated; and how much will be allocated to the carers grant for each of the next three years. [86293]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the table. The entire grant was allocated.

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	20
2000–01	50
2001–02	70
2002–03	85
2003–04	100
2004–05	125
2005–06	185

Change Agent Team

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the members of the Department of Health's Change Agent Team. [86371]

Jacqui Smith: As of 5 December, members of the change agent team are: Richard Humphries (Director), Fran McCabe, Maureen Allan, Anne Ashby, Janet Crampton, Ruth Eley, Moira McGrath, Fiona McLeod, Liz Sargeant, Elizabeth Foley, Michael Padgham.

Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to introduce legislation to give children the same legal right of protection for assaults as adults; and if he will make a statement. [83220]

Jacqui Smith: The law governing assault is the same for adults and children, except only in respect of the "reasonable chastisement" defence of the physical punishment of children. Use of this defence is now governed by the outcome of the European Court of Human Rights ruling in the case of A. *v.* United Kingdom, which was heard on appeal from the domestic courts. Since the Human Rights Act 1998 came into force in the UK in October 2000, the Courts have been obliged to take note of the outcome of the European Court of Human Rights ruling. Following the A. *v.* UK case, certain factors must be taken into account by the Courts when considering whether a punishment may be described as reasonable chastisement. These factors include the nature and duration of punishment, its physical and mental effects and the state of health and age of the child. The Government believe that parents have the right to decide for themselves whether or not they wish to use physical punishment in bringing up their children. The law is therefore formulated to allow them to make that choice, while affording protection for children against unacceptable forms of physical punishment.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children have been diagnosed obese since 1997; and what percentage of these children were diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes. [84544]

Ms Blears: The prevalence of overweight and obesity is increasing in children in England. No exact figures on how many children are obese are available, although analyses of the Health Survey for England (1999) showed the prevalence of obesity was 10 per cent., at age six rising to 17 per cent., at age 15. There are also no figures available on the numbers of children who are obese and have Type 2 diabetes. There is however evidence to suggest that the rise in the number of children with Type 2 diabetes is in proportion to the number who are obese.

The Government are committed to tackling the rising trend in childhood obesity and have put in place cross-Government programmes of work to improve eating habits and increase physical activity levels. One Government Department cannot tackle obesity on its own. The Department of Health is working with other Government Departments and a wide range of other partners at national, regional and local levels.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received from non-Members on the reform of the child protection system; and if he will make a statement. [85138]

Jacqui Smith: We receive many representations on this important issue although exact numbers are not available.

The Government is aware that a wide range of views about the reform of child protection have been submitted for consideration by the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, and we look forward shortly to receiving Lord Laming's report. The recommendations of the Victoria Climbié Inquiry, together with those contained in the Joint Chief Inspectors report Safeguarding Children will provide the Government with an authoritative basis for any reforms to child protection that may need to be made and, if reform is necessary, the Government will implement it.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the introduction of the Children Act 1989 in prisons following the High Court ruling on 29 November; and what extra resources his Department will make available to social services departments to ensure its implementation. [86288]

Jacqui Smith: Mr. Justice Munby's judgment, handed down on 29 November, ruled that the Children Act 1989 applied to children in prison, subject to the requirements of imprisonment. This was the Department's own view, set out in its statement to the court.

The Department therefore sees no immediate need to revise existing guidance to councils with social services responsibilities or to review resource allocations. However, we will, together with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Department,

carefully study Mr. Justice Munby's judgment, in the context of the recommendations of the joint chief inspectors' report, "Safeguarding Children".

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children in care have access to the internet at home, broken down by local authority. [85155]

Jacqui Smith: We do not hold central information on how many children in care have access to the internet. However, £20 million has been made available from the capital modernisation fund to increase access to information and communication technology (ICT) for children in and leaving care. The majority of this money is being paid to local councils over this year and next as part of the Quality Protects programme (details in the circular LAC(2001)28). The remainder is supporting the development of "CareZone" by the Who Cares? Trust. "CareZone" will provide a range of interactive, secure, on-line services for children in care.

Local authorities' Quality Protects management action plans, submitted in January 2002, included details of their plans for increasing access to ICT. The average position reported by councils was that just under half of their looked after children had access to a computer where they lived. This was projected to rise to three-quarters by 2004.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children's hospice funding was paid by his Department in each year since 1997. [85637]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally. However, a survey conducted by the association of children's hospices indicated that children's hospices derive, on average, some 5 per cent., of their funding from national health service sources.

Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what budget estimates have been submitted by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health; what specific allocations have been made; what factors have been taken into account in his estimate of the budget required by the Commission; what his estimate is of the staffing levels required by the Commission for *(a)* general support for patients forums, *(b)* cross forum working by patients forums, *(c)* independent complaints advocacy and *(d)* community development; and what budget allocations are proposed for each of these budget heads; and if he will make a statement. [84887]

Mr. Lammy: Funding decisions for the next three years will be announced shortly. I will write to the hon. Member when final decisions have been made.

Community Health Councils

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when community health councils will cease to exist; and when patients forums will be established. [84884]

Mr. Lammy: The abolition of Community Health Councils (CHCs) is a matter for the Government and we hope to be able to make announcements about the timetable for the abolition very soon. The timetable for the establishment of patients' forums is a matter for the Commission and it is one of the issues currently being considered by the Commissions designate chair, designate chief executive and the interim team. We will be working closely with the Commission to ensure that there is a smooth transition from CHCs to patients' forums.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 3 October 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Karen Smith; [81713]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 3 October 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Karen Smith. [83426]

Mr. Milburn: I replied to my right hon. Friend on 4 December 2002.

Deafness

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in England and Wales are deaf in one ear. [86294]

Jacqui Smith: While the Department does not collect that information, the Institute of Hearing Research recently conducted a survey of ear, nose and throat conditions. This suggested that around 17 people in every 1,000 have moderate to severe hearing difficulty or no hearing at all in one ear, but no difficulty in the other ear.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the organisations from which he has received representations regarding the proposed delayed discharge fines. [83848]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* A summary and a list of respondents to the consultation on reimbursement around delayed discharge have been placed in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the impact on the number of delayed discharges of the introduction of fines over the next three years. [83852]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The proportion of older people waiting to be discharged from hospital on any one day has reduced from around 14 per cent. in 1996 to just under 8.9 per cent. today. The Government are determined to tackle the problem of delayed discharges and that is why we have brought legislation forward to deal in line with it. This is in line with the commitment in the NHS Plan to end widespread delayed discharges by 2004. Furthermore, the priorities and planning framework 2003–06 envisages delayed transfers of care will reach minimal levels by 2006.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information he collates on a regional basis regarding delayed discharge and emergency readmissions; and if he will list the figures for Q1 2002–03. [85046]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* None. The information is collected by primary care trust only. The Q1 data for 2002–03 are in the Library.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to distribute the £100 million from the NHS to social services to recompense for delayed discharge. [85234]

Jacqui Smith*[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The distribution of this funding is still under consideration and will be announced as soon as possible.

Duplex Scans

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current waiting time is for Duplex scans at Maidstone Hospital. [85481]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The information requested on current waiting times for duplex scans is not held centrally. However, I am advised by Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority that no waiting list operates when such scans are considered to be clinically necessary. These are carried out as needed.

Herbal Medicines

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many products now on free sale will be required to be licensed when the European directives on nutritional supplements on herbal remedies come into effect; and whether grandfather rights will be given to products already on free sale; [83839]

(2) what steps he intends to take to secure a continued route to market, other than full pharmaceutical licensing, for those products which are not able to demonstrate they have been on the European market for the period specified by the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive, but which are able to demonstrate a tradition of safe use in another country. [84524]

Ms Blears: Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements does not require licensing of any products.

There is currently no requirement for the Medicines Control Agency (MCA) to be notified of unlicensed herbal remedies placed on the market under section 12(2) of the Medicines Act 1968 and therefore there is no information available on the number of products placed on the market under this provision and which may fall within the terms of the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products. We expect that some broad pointers as to the likely numbers of products for which registration might be sought will emerge from continuing discussions between the MCA and the herbal sector, particularly in the light of further refinements to the text during continuing negotiations.

There is no provision within the Directive for grandfather rights to be given as such. However, in the MCA's consultation on the proposed Directive earlier this year, the herbal sector was invited to submit examples of products which are currently legal but which may fall outside the terms of the proposed Directive. Analysis to date of the responses suggest that there will be few existing herbal medicine on the United Kingdom market which, while having 30 years use, are unable to meet the proposed requirement that at least 15 years use should have been within the European Union. This assessment also takes account of the proposed five year transitional period for products already on the market, during which time evidence of traditional use can continue to be accumulated.

A recent proposed amendment from the European Parliament, which we will support, would reduce the required minimum period of EU usage from 15 years to 10 years. This would further reduce any possibility that products currently on the UK market would fall outside the Directive solely by virtue of the required minimum period of EU usage.

Where non industrially produced unlicensed herbal remedies are supplied following one to one consultation in accordance with the terms of section 12(1) of the Medicines Act 1968 there is no requirement to demonstrate traditional usage of the remedy.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received on, and how many were *(a)* for and *(b)* against, the proposed new EU directives on nutritional supplements and herbal remedies from *(i)* small and medium enterprises, (ii) large manufacturers, (iii) drug firms and (iv) the public. [83842]

Ms Blears: Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements came into force on 12 July 2002 and must be transposed into member states' national legislation by 31 July 2003. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is currently consulting on draft implementing Regulations.

During lengthy negotiations on the Directive the FSA received a large number of representations from a wide range of stakeholders expressing a range of views.

We have also received a large number of representations about the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products. It is not possible to provide a breakdown of responses in the categories requested as many of those commenting have made specific comments rather than directly indicated support for, or opposition to, the proposed Directives.

To the best of our knowledge, we have not received any representations, either for or against the Directive, from any manufacturers not already involved in the manufacture of products in the natural health sector.

The position of representatives of United Kingdom manufacturers of herbal remedies was set out in a letter from the Herbal Forum to my noble Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) on 18 November. The membership of the Forum, which covers small, medium and large businesses operating in the sector, comprises the Health Food Manufacturers' Association, the Proprietary Association of Great Britain, the British Herbal Medicine Association, the Council for Responsible Nutrition, the Natural Medicines Manufacturers' Association, the Ayurvedic Trade Association, the Trade Association of Producers and Suppliers of Ayurvedic Products from India, the Chinese Medicine Association of Suppliers, the European Herbal Practitioners Association, the Aromatherapy Trade Council, and the Small Growers and Producers Association.

The Forum indicates its view that the traditional medicines sector needs appropriate regulation in order to ensure that the public is properly protected against inferior quality products which the current system can allow on the market. The Forum also says that its members appreciate the need for the proposed Directive, while outlining a number of areas of specific concern that it wishes to be addressed through the continuing European negotiations or at national level. We welcome the stated intention of the Forum to continue to work constructively with the Government and the MCA in particular, to address the various issues identified.

We have received a wide range of representations from stakeholder interest groups in herbal sector in the form of letters and through points made in discussions with Ministers and with the MCA. The stakeholders cover many interests including, manufacturing, retailing, consumers, herbal practitioners, other complementary and alternative medicine groups, pharmacists, doctors, other health care professionals and academics. Some have been supportive of the Directive or have been supportive subject to the resolution of specific concerns. Others have raised specific points without indicating an overall view of the Directive. A minority has indicated strong opposition. Among representative groups wholly or broadly supportive of the Directive are the British Herbal Medicine Association, Consumers Association, the Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain and the European Herbal Practitioners Association. Representative groups expressing strongest opposition to the Directive include Consumers for Health Choice (CMC) and the National Association of Health Stores (NAHS).

In a number of meetings Ministers have held with a wide range of stakeholders directly involved in the sector the position taken by the majority of interest groups has been that the UK should support the Directive as being in the interests both of the sector and of consumers, while arguing for additional flexibility on a number of issues; and that the Directive should be interpreted and implemented in a way which minimised regulatory impact, consistent with the protection of public health. A minority of stakeholder groups has expressed strong opposition, citing fears in particular that the Directive would have an adverse effect on specialist health food retailers and consumer choice.

Representations from individual companies also express a wide variety of positions, ranging from strong support to concern or opposition.

We have received around 1,300 letters, mainly from the public, opposing the Directive. Many of these express the fear that large numbers of herbal remedies would no longer be available as a result of the Directive. A significant proportion specifically indicate support for the position against the Directive taken by CHC or the NAHS. We have received a number of petitions expressing a similar point of view. A number of these representations from the public also express opposition to the Food Supplements Directive.

We have in addition received around 400 letters from the public opposing the possibility of traditional use registration applying to flower essences. This followed a statement by the MCA, in response to a request from a company, that it might be possible in principle for a company to secure a traditional use registration for a product. Nearly all those writing were concerned that the possibility of a company making a successful application implied a requirement that all flower essences should be registered under the Directive. This however is not the case.

Food Standards Agency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many products which are accepted as safe by the Food Standards Agency he expects to *(a)* be removed from the United Kingdom market and *(b)* have to be substantially reformulated when the full provisions of the Food Supplements Directive are implemented; and what estimate he has made of the costs of such compliance. [84573]

Ms Blears: The impact of the Directive on the future availability of products currently on the United Kingdom market will depend upon future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and on maximum levels of nutrients in food supplements. The Food Standards Agency is currently consulting on a maximum reformulation cost assessment of £4 million based on an assumption that no further nutrient sources are approved.

Foster Care (Recruitment)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 136W, regarding recruitment of foster

carers, what methods he used to conclude that the profile of foster care had been raised by the recruitment campaign. [84761]

Jacqui Smith: The method used to conclude that the profile of foster care had been raised by the recruitment campaign was through the number of responses received by the national call centre by people requesting further information. It was clear that people rang in because of their interest in the positive role of foster care as described in the campaign through television, radio and other media coverage.

General Practitioners

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age is of GPs in the Havering Primary Care Trust area; and how many will reach retirement age before 2006. [85076]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

General medical practitioners by age in Havering primary care trust and England as at 31 March 2002

Number (Headcount)

		Of which: Aged					
England	*Total*	*Under 30*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–49*	*50–54*
All Practitioners[1]	32,011	1,305	3,557	5,497	6,272	5,376	4,633
Of which:							
NHS Plan group[2]	28,950	341	2,648	4,859	5,894	5,259	4,594
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]	27,956	285	2,441	4,698	5,774	5,140	4,525
UPEs aged 66 and over[4]	309	—	—	—	—	—	—
Havering Primary Care Trust							
All Practitioners[1]	126	3	7	28	12	21	15
Of which:							
NHS Plan group[2]	116	0	4	24	12	21	15
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]	114	0	4	22	12	21	15
UPEs aged 66 and over[4]	5	—	—	—	—	—	—

Number (Headcount)

	Of which: Aged					
	55–59	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70+*	*Unknown*	*Average age*
England						
All Practitioners[1]	3,379	1,419	506	66	1	44.7
Of which:						
NHS Plan group[2]	3,365	1,419	506	65	0	45.8
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]	3,281	1,358	454	0	0	45.8
UPEs aged 66 and over[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—
Havering Primary Care Trust						
All Practitioners[1]	23	11	6	0	0	47.6
Of which:						
NHS Plan group[2]	23	11	6	0	0	48.8
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]	23	11	6	0	0	49.0
UPEs aged 66 and over[4]	—	—	—	—	—	—

[1] All Practitioners include UPEs, Restricted Principals, GP Registrars. Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA). PMS Others and GP Retainers.
[2] NHS Plan GPs include UPEs. Restricted Principals. Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Others.
[3] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
[4] UPEs have to retire as a principal by the age of 70. Those that are aged 66 plus in the 2002 census will have to retire (as a principal) by 2006.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs have worked in the NHS since 1997, broken down by nation of the UK. [84603]

Mr. Hutton: The number of general practitioners who have worked in the national health service in England in each year since 1997 is set out in the following table. Information for GPs working in Scotland and Wales are the responsibilities of the devolved Administrations. While the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved, responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

General medical practitioners in England; 1997 to 2002

numbers (headcount)

	1997	1 October 1998	1999	30 September 2000	2001	31 March 2002
All practitioners[1]	—	—	30,959	31,369	31,8[illegible]	32,011
Of which						
Practitioners (excluding GP retainers)	29,389	29,697	29,987	30,252	30,685	30,858
NHS plan group[2]	28,046	28,251	28,467	28,593	28,802	28,950
Unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[3]	27,099	27,392	27,591	27,704	27,843	27,956
GP registrars	1,343	1,446	1,520	1,659	1,883	1,908

[1] All practitioners include unrestricted principals equivalents (UPE), restricted principals, GP registrars, assistants, salaried doctors, persona medical services (PMS) others and GP retainers.
[2] NHS plan GPs include UPEs, restricted principals, assistants, salaried doctors and PMS others. The base year for NHS plan starts at 1999.
[3] UPEs include GMS unrestricted principals, PMS contracted GPs and PMS salaried GPs.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to encourage more GPs to set up practice in East Lancashire; and if he will make a statement. [82547]

Jacqui Smith: The Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Primary Care Trust is working together with the Hyndburn and Ribble Valley and Blackburn with Darwen Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) on a number of initiatives, both long and short-term, to help recruit and retain general practitioners in East Lancashire. All three PCTs are actively pursuing initiatives around personal medical services and the local implementation finance initiative, but are also developing individual ways of encouraging more GPs into East Lancashire. Examples include:

Blackburn with Darwen PCT, which is looking at the skill mix in its practices to make optimum use of the relevant professional skills, such as nurse triage;

Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale PCT, where three new GPs have been appointed and are due to start practising in February 2003. The PCT is working closely with its neighbouring PCTs by providing mentoring support to all new GPs; and

Hyndburn and Ribble Valley PCT, which has established a work force and training sub group of the professional executive committee. The work force sub group is leading the work towards the production of a work force development plan.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average number of GPs per 1,000 of the population was in *(a)* rural and *(b)* urban areas in each year from 1997 to 2002; [84498]

(2) what the average number of GPs per 1,000 of the population in *(a)* Shropshire and *(b)* the UK was in each year from 1997 to 2002. [84497]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 2 December 2002]:* The table shows the number of General Practitioners in Shropshire and England, and rural and urban areas in 2001. Population figures for earlier years are currently being revised by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), in light of results from the 2001 national population census. 2001 Census based population estimates for mid-year 2001 were published in October 2002, however it is not possible to provide figures for earlier years on a comparable basis. Revised population estimates for earlier years are expected to be published by ONS in February 2003. Information for GPs working in Scotland and Wales are the responsibility of the devolved Administrations, while the institutions in Northern Ireland are dissolved responsibility rests with Ministers in the Northern Ireland Office.

Average number of GPs per 1,000 population

	All practitioners[1]
Shropshire	0.62
England	0.65
Rural areas	0.69
Urban areas	0.64

[1] All Practitioners include Unrestricted Principles and Equivalents, Restricted Principals, GP Registrars, Assistants, Salaried Doctors, Personal Medical Services, Others and GP Retainers.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Health Protection Agency

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses *(a)* positive and *(b)* negative he has received to the consultation on the creation of the Health Protection Agency. [86028]

Ms Blears: We received 215 responses to the consultation paper. Many of them provided detailed comments on various aspects of the proposal: it is not possible to categorise them simply as either "positive" or "negative". An account of the points made in the responses, and of the decisions we are taking in the light of them, will be made available as soon as possible.

Home Help

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition of intensive home help is; and how many people have been receiving intensive home help in each year since 1994. [86291]

Jacqui Smith: From 1999 intensive home care/home help is defined as six or more visits with more than 10 contact hours per household per week. Prior to this the definition was six or more visits with five or more contact hours.

The information centrally available is on households, not individuals. The number of households receiving intensive home help/home care in a typical week in September is shown for England in the table for both

definitions. Data for the current definition is available only from 1998 to 2001. Data for 2002 is not yet available.

Number of households receiving intensive home help/home care, 1994 to 2000. England, survey week during September

rounded numbers

Year	*6 or more visits and 5 or more contact hours*	*6 or more visits and more than 10 contact hours*
1994	74,760	—
1995	94,100	—
1996	107,910	—
1997	112,940	—
1998	133,840	58,140
1999	138,530	63,070
2000	143,450	72,100
2001	156,010	76,400

Source:
HH1 form

Hospital and Nursing Home Costs

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his latest estimate is of the average cost per week of *(a)* keeping a person in hospital and *(b)* keeping that person in a nursing home in Leeds. [83476]

Jacqui Smith: The average cost of a seven day stay in hospital in the specialty of elderly medicine is £1,015. For 2000–01, the average gross total cost to Leeds Metropolitan Council of supporting someone in nursing care was £412 per week.

Notes:

1. Sources of information:

(a) West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority.

(b) Department of Health

2. This cost does not include any intensive medical inputs.

3. Figures are for 2000–01, and refer to Leeds Metropolitan Council. The figure given is an average figure for older people and adults under 65 with physical disabilities, mental illness or learning disabilities. These four client groups are listed in descending order of expenditure/activity, the dominant group being older people. The average figure for this group alone is £382.

Medical Degrees

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with university authorities and ministers at the Department of Education and Skills concerning the number of students applying for medical degrees. [83296]

Mr. Hutton: I met the Minister of State for universities and lifelong learning on 27 November. Matters relating to medical education were discussed.

The Department and the higher education funding council for England have set up a group to monitor the progress medical schools are making in delivering the extra medical school places announced between 1999 and 2001.

The Open University Centre for Education and Medicine has recently published a report entitled, "An analysis of trends in Applications to Medical Schools", which was commissioned by the Department.

Recent information published by the universities and colleges admissions service shows that between October 2000 and October 2002, the number of home applicants to study medicine has increased by 51.6 per cent.

Mental Health

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research is being carried out by his Department into how individual personal choice might be improved on mental health. [82970]

Jacqui Smith: There is no research currently being carried out by the Department or the Medical Research Council into how personal choice might be improved on mental health.

However, the implementation of mental health policy, as set out in the National Service Framework and the NHS Plan, will have the effect of increasing the amount of choice for service users.

For example, the 1,000 graduate primary care workers will increase the availability of psychological therapies in the primary care setting, providing a cost-effective alternative to medication for many people with common mental health problems such as depression.

Strengthening specialist community mental health services by the delivery of 50 early intervention teams, 220 assertive outreach teams and 335 crisis resolution teams by 2004 will mean that greater numbers of people with mental health problems will have the option to be treated in their own homes, or alternative accommodation close to home, rather than having to be admitted to hospital in order to gain access to the care they need.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of mental health patients were given physical health checks in each health authority in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [86150]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how mental health service users are consulted on the effectiveness of complementary therapies. [86151]

Ms Blears: National health service organisations are expected to put in place procedures for seeking the views of users of services they provide that are timely and meaningful to the communities they serve, and for taking service users' views into account alongside other factors when planning future services.

To support the NHS in performing this duty, the system for patient and public involvement has been reformed, and new mechanisms and structures have been developed. The national patient survey programme is an example of one of the mechanisms that is supporting the new system. It is being developed so that in future it will include a focus on the patient experience of mental health service users.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients attending GP clinics he estimates have mental health problems. [86156]

Jacqui Smith: No formal assessment of the proportion of patients with mental health problems attending general practitioner clinics has been undertaken by the Department. However, the NHS plan refers to evidence from independent research suggesting that as many as one in four consultations are with people with mental health problems. More detail about this evidence is presented in guidance published recently for primary care and other services on "Gateway" workers. It is available on the mental health website at www.doh.gov.uk/mentalhealth.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of carers of mental health patients have been given a carer's assessment. [82752]

Jacqui Smith: The Department does not hold this information centrally. Assessments are the gateway to carers receiving help. The assessment is the responsibility of the statutory sector to arrange and agencies should work together to ensure that a carer has one assessment which will enable them to access all services. The recently issued guidance, "Developing Services for Carers and Families of People with Mental Illness", will help local mental health services ensure that this is achieved.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what support and advice is given to mental health service users to become advocates for other mental health service users. [86153]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework states that specific arrangements should be in place to ensure both service user and carer involvement and advocacy arrangements. Decisions about the involvement of mental health service users as advocates remains the responsibility of local services. However, the NHS plan testifies to the emphasis that the Government are keen to place on the involvement of patients at all levels in the national health service. Furthermore, a proposal in the draft Mental Health Bill provides that where someone is subject to the powers in the Bill they have a right of access to a specialist mental health advocate.

The Department is also providing three year funding for the United Kingdom advocacy network to develop standards in independent advocacy whereby they are establishing programmes of regional training courses for advocates which includes service users.

National Institute for Clinical Excellence

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he is implementing to ensure that one or more performance indicators are assigned to each piece of NICE guidance so that progress in implementing the guidance can be effectively monitored. [86374]

Mr. Lammy: All technology appraisal guidance issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) which was initiated after October 2000 includes specific audit advice and measurable criteria to be used in local reviews. A similar approach is being adopted by NICE for clinical guidelines.

NHS Staff (Reservists)

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in respect of contingency planning to deal with the call up of NHS staff as medical reservists, for how many *(a)* doctors, *(b)* nurses and *(c)* other medical staff cover would have to be arranged; and what assessment he has made of how this would affect performance targets for NHS institutions. [83399]

Mr. Hutton: No decisions have been made about the call-up of medical reservists and so it is not possible to make any estimates concerning what cover may be needed. The Department would liase with the Ministry of Defence on any requirement to call up medical personnel. Together, we would work closely with the national health service trusts concerned to minimise disruption as far as possible.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many calls the NHS Overseas Nurses Advice Line has received since it was established; and what the average cost to the NHS is per call. [84895]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* To date the National Health Service Overseas Advice Line has received 53 calls which have required advice.

The NHS Overseas Nurses Advice Line is funded by the Department of Health. The average cost per call for this financial year will not be available until March 2003.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many nurses left the NHS last year, broken down by nation of the UK. [84545]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of nurses leaving the national health service each year is not available. The non-medical workforce census collects data on staff in post as at 30 September each year but does not distinguish between leavers and recruits.

The Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) publishes an annual statistical report which includes information about the number of nurses and midwives leaving the register. This data can be found on the NMC website at www.nmc-uk.org.uk.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much was *(a)* budgeted for and *(b)* spent on NHS nursing and midwifery staff in each year since 1996–97 in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region; [83720]

(2) how much was *(a)* budgeted for and *(b)* spent on agency nursing and midwifery staff in the NHS in each year since 1996–97 in (i) England and (ii) each NHS region. [83721]

Mr. Hutton: Information about staffing budgets is not held centrally. It is for primary care trusts, in partnership with health authorities and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Funding for nurses, midwives and health visiting staff will have been made available in health authority unified allocations. Table 1 sets out these allocations for England and the average annual increase in each year.

Information outlining the expenditure on national health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff is shown in table 2.

Information outlining the expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff is shown in Table 3. The figures in table 2 include all agency staff and any other staff not directly employed by the individual NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts. We are unable to disaggregate agency nursing costs.

Table 1: England allocation and cash increase 1996–97 to 2002–03

Year	Allocation (£000)	Cash increase (£000)	Percentage
1996–97	20,886,002	766,228	3.81
1997–98	21,816,441	824,521	3.93
1998–99	22,895,307	1,028,244	4.70
1999–2000	31,192,915	1,932,040	6.60
2000–01	34,234,888	2,792,354	8.88
2001–02	37,157,382	3,039,979	8.91
2002–03	41,468,469	3,704,200	9.88

Note:
The allocations for 1999–2000 onwards are not comparable with those for 1996–97 to 1998–99 which cover hospital and community health services (HCHS) only. 1999–2000 was the first year of unified allocations which cover HCHS, prescribing and discretionary general medical services.

Table 2: Expenditure on NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff England, 1996–97 to 2000–01

Region	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Northern and Yorkshire	831,340,241	850,015,207	902,854,418	997,003,489	1,087,774,444
Trent	638,295,285	652,938,065	683,240,140	748,449,639	791,095,390
West Midlands	647,197,186	661,729,190	684,544,989	746,590,274	809,642,109
North West	908,283,904	932,480,126	976,794,428	1,064,401,204	1,148,750,339
Eastern	583,429,006	584,789,352	607,820,759	664,906,741	720,152,396
London	1,109,678,665	1,147,415,728	1,186,661,273	1,287,889,856	1,378,785,300
South East	950,338,890	963,640,965	1,003,409,193	1,095,639,106	1,181,989,752
South West	625,822,737	622,034,275	664,540,071	725,391,300	784,221,142
England Total	6,294,385,914	6,415,042,908	6,709,865,271	7,330,271,609	7,902,410,872

Sources:
1. Annual financial returns for NHS trusts, 1996–97 to 2000–01
2. Annual financial returns for health authorities, 1996–97 to 2000–01
3. Annual financial returns for primary care trusts, 2000–01

Table 3: Expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (inc. agency, etc.)—England

Region	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
Northern and Yorkshire	6,028,667	6,714,833	7,504,774	9,670,403	11,687,978
Trent	5,960,334	7,697,702	10,064,129	12,885,286	16,582,418
West Midlands	16,939,663	20,265,855	26,503,757	32,564,528	37,964,326
North West	9,570,017	13,211,621	17,857,451	23,917,194	31,022,389
Eastern	14,055,474	15,719,904	22,670,380	30,951,975	42,387,041
London	108,202,417	111,628,043	130,573,228	180,665,901	202,308,850
South East	21,586,155	29,963,665	41,469,988	52,808,574	66,046,899
South West	9,153,908	11,136,944	15,581,455	18,192,822	27,431,981
England Total	191,496,635	216,338,567	272,225,162	361,656,683	435,431,882

Sources:
1. Annual financial returns for NHS trusts, 1996–97 to 2000–01
2. Annual financial returns for health authorities, 1996–97 to 2000–01
3. Annual financial returns for primary care trusts, 2000–01

Patient Discharge

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow of 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 413W, on patient discharge, when he expects to publish the revisions to the hospital discharge workbook; how long the consultation stage has taken; and who has been consulted on the redrafting. [86257]

Jacqui Smith: A revised version of the hospital discharge workbook will be published shortly. As part of the review process, a number of wide-ranging stakeholder meetings have been held over the last few months with practitioners and managers, national professional and carer bodies, and with people who have been responsible for promoting good practice in their localities.

Patients Forums

Mr. Hinchliffe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his estimate is of the cost of recruiting the membership of patients' forums. [84885]

Mr. Lammy: It is the responsibility of the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health to recruit members to patients forums. It will be for the Commission, within its available budget, to determine the cost of recruitment.

Prison Cells

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what proportion of *(a)* young offender institutions and *(b)* adult prisons changes have been made to the physical cell environment to reduce ligature points. [84011]

Hilary Benn: Cell windows and beds are considered high risk, as statistically they are more used to attach ligatures. Ligatures can however be attached to many other elements of a cell structure and installed furniture. Establishments use local funding to address individual ligature attachment points, but unless a cell has been installed as a full "safer cell" its efficiency in reducing ligatures cannot effectively be measured, and are therefore not monitored.

The number of safer cell installations to date is as follows:

Adult male—2,100 cells

Juvenile and Young Offender Institution—610 cells

In addition 880 adult male safer cells are planned to come on line in 2003–04.

The Prison Service is currently working on a number of initiatives that will enable safer cell and reduced risk cell furniture to be more easily available to establishments. Work has commenced on the production of prototypes for large-scale production of safer cell furniture. The current initiative is hoped to reduce the current cost of safer cell furniture installations by approximately one third. Work is continuing with the Prison Service Industries to produce a range of furniture that is designed to reduce possible ligature attachments points. The furniture, when approved, will be available to establishments via the normal furniture supply routes.

Public Health Laboratories

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance NHS Chief Executives have been given regarding the need for preservation of public health microbiology in relation to the proposed establishment of a Health Protection Agency. [84253]

Ms Blears: The Chief Executive of the National Health Service and Permanent Secretary of the Department, Nigel Crisp, has written to NHS chief executives saying that the public health activities of Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratories transferring to NHS trusts are to be protected and maintained.

The regional public health microbiologists, to be appointed within the Health Protection Agency (HPA), will be working with the NHS trusts to ensure that all the microbiology laboratories within NHS—not only those transferred from the PHLS—play their full public health role.

The establishment of the HPA is intended to enhance public health microbiology and to position the protection of public health in the mainstream of NHS activities. This is just one element of the Chief Medical Officer's strategy for combating infectious diseases, "Getting Ahead of the Curve".

Retention of Hospital Doctors

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital doctors left the NHS in each of the last four years on grounds of *(a)* retirement, *(b)* early retirement, *(c)* ill health and *(d)* taking up an alternative post. [84889]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The number of hospital and community doctors in England and Wales who have received a retirement pension before or after age 60 and on the grounds of ill-health for each of the financial years 1998 to 2002 is in the table.

Year	*Before 60*	*From 60*	*Ill-health only*	*Total*
1999	125	479	102	706
2000	114	418	97	629
2001	176	522	111	809
2002	157	540	122	819
Total	572	1,959	432	2,963

Temporary Nursing Staff (Wages)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the nursing wage bill was spent on temporary nursing staff in *(a)* England and *(b)* each NHS region in each of the last six years. [85298]

Mr. Hutton: The table contains data outlining the expenditure on non-national health service nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff as a proportion of the total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff. The non-NHS figures include all agency staff and any other staff not directly employed by the individual NHS trusts, health authorities and primary care trusts. A regional breakdown prior to 1996–97 is not available.

Expenditure on non-NHS nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff as a proportion of total nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff—England 1995–96 to 2000–01

Region	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Northern and Yorkshire	n/a	0.007	0.008	0.008	0.010	0.011
Trent	n/a	0.009	0.012	0.015	0.017	0.021
West Midlands	n/a	0.026	0.030	0.037	0.042	0.045
North West	n/a	0.010	0.014	0.018	0.022	0.026
Eastern	n/a	0.024	0.026	0.036	0.044	0.056
London	n/a	0.089	0.089	0.099	0.123	0.128
South East	n/a	0.022	0.030	0.040	0.046	0.053
South West	n/a	0.014	0.018	0.023	0.024	0.034
England total	0.026	0.030	0.033	0.039	0.047	0.052

n/a = Not available

Sources:

1. Annual financial returns of NHS Trusts, 1995–96 to 2000–01
2. Annual financial returns of district and regional health authorities and the special health authorities for the London postgraduate teaching hospitals, 1995–96
3. Annual financial returns for health authorities, 1996–97 to 2000–01
4. Annual financial returns for primary care trusts, 2000–01

Theatre Staff

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many operating department practitioner vacancies there are *(a)* in England and *(b)* in the north-west region. [85433]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 7 December 2002]:* Separate information about operating department practitioners is not collected centrally. Vacancies for operating theatre staff, which include operating department practitioners, in England and the north-west are shown in the following table.

Department of Health vacancies survey, March 2002 qualified operating theatre staff vacancies in NHS trusts in England and the north-west regional office area—3 month vacancy rates

	England	*North-west*
Operating theatre staff (excluding HA staff)		
3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	4.8	3.6
3 month vacancy rate (number)	210	20
Staff in post (wte)	4,110	540
Staff in post (hc)	4,300	560

1. Three month vacancy information is as at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
3. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey and the Consultant Census, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data are from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001
6. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by health authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from trusts, PCTs and special health authorities.
7. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
8. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
9. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
10. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.

Sources:

Vacancy numbers and rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002 and Consultant Census March 2002.

Non medical staff in post: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census September 2001

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the consultations undertaken by his Department prior to the announcement that operating department practitioner trainees should be paid a student bursary or grant rather than a salary. [85435]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The announcement concerning operating department practitioner (ODP) trainees set out new additional arrangements by which students would be eligible to apply for national health service funded bursaries. This does not remove or preclude existing routes for employees wishing to pursue ODP education through secondment opportunities funded by their employers.

The announcement was made following consultation by the association of operating department practitioners on the changes to registerable qualifications and the need to find new education routes to support the increased numbers of ODPs required to deliver service commitments.

Vulnerable Adults

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action he has taken under the Protection of Children Act 1999 to protect vulnerable adults with mental impairment from *(a)* sexual and *(b)* physical abuse. [85413]

Jacqui Smith: Section 10(1) of the Protection of Children Act 1999 was never enacted to protect vulnerable adults with mental impairment from abuse. This provision was later repealed by the Care Standards Act 2000, which made provision to protect all vulnerable adult groups.

Waiting Times

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information is made available on current waiting times for treatment for types of cancer; and what plans he has to publish such information in the future. [84969]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan set out new goals to reduce waiting times for cancer treatment. The first step in reducing cancer waiting times was the introduction of the two week waiting time standard from urgent general practitioner referral to outpatient appointment for cases of suspected breast cancer from April 1999 and for all urgent cases of suspected cancer from 2000.

From December 2001 targets of a one month maximum wait from diagnosis to first treatment for breast cancer and a one month maximum wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for children's cancers, testicular cancer and acute leukaemia were introduced. From December 2002, there will be a maximum two month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment for patients with breast cancer. By 2005 there will be a maximum two month wait from urgent general practitioner referral to first treatment and a one-month wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers.

Existing monitoring arrangements and published data cover the two week standard and the December 2001 targets. Data will be published on further Cancer Plan targets as data collection is rolled out. Data are published on the Department website.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what extra resources have been allocated to the implementation of the two week waiting time target for referral of patients with *(a)* breast cancer, *(b)* prostate cancer and *(c)* other types of cancer. [84972]

Ms Blears: £10 million was made available for each of the financial years 1999–2000 and 2000–01 to support implementation of the two week outpatient waiting time standard. From 2001–02 the additional £10 million was put into health authority baseline financial allocations. An additional £30 million was also made available for each of the financial years 2000–01 and 2001–02 to further support the two week standard and the modernisation of cancer services. The additional

funding was not identified for individual tumour types. It is for health authorities to identify their priorities and target resources appropriately, in this case towards meeting the two week standard.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients in NHS units in Chesham and Amersham waited longer than *(a)* four and *(b)* 24 hours in accident and emergency in each of the last 12 months; and what proportion they were of the total; [81199]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress on reducing waiting lists at NHS units in the Chesham and Amersham constituency; [81195]

(3) if he will make a statement on progress on visiting times for accident and emergency services at NHS units in the Chesham and Amersham constituency. [81193]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Action continues to be taken to improve waiting times in the accident and emergency department of Wycombe General Hospital, which is the main provider of accident and emergency services to the people of Chesham and Amersham. The chief executive of South Buckinghamshire National Health Service Trust has personally led the Reforming Emergency Care agenda, with support from Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority's service improvement managers and the Modernisation Agency.

Quarterly data relating to waiting times in accident and emergency departments will be published for the first time shortly. Data on total time in accident and emergency will be published for the second quarter of 2002–03.

I am advised by Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority that South Buckinghamshire NHS Trust has been performing well. Waiting time figures at April 2002 showed a reduction of 6.8 per cent. from the previous year. Currently the trust is performing above target in this area.

Wycombe Hospital

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed discharges there were from Wycombe hospital in each year since 1997. [85530]

Ms Blears: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 10 December 2002

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Feroz Abbasi

14. **Geraint Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Mr. Feroz Abbasi, a constituent, will return to the UK; and whether Mr. Abbasi is being offered legal representation. [84334]

Mr. MacShane: We remain in regular contact with the US authorities over the situation of the British detainees at Guantanamo Bay. We have had no indication from the US authorities concerning Mr. Abbasi's return to the UK. Mr. Abbasi is not being offered access to legal representation at Guantanamo Bay.

Kashmir

15. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Governments of India and Pakistan on Kashmir. [84335]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary regularly raises our concerns in relation to Kashmir with the Governments of India and Pakistan, including during his most recent visit to the region on 18 to 20 July, and in his meetings with Indian Foreign Minister Sinha on 30 and 31 October in London, and with new Pakistani Foreign Minister Kasuri on 2 December in Bonn. Kashmir was also among the range of issues discussed during my visit to India on 16 to 20 October.

Iran

16. **Laura Moffatt:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action he has taken to help the Iranian authorities to improve their human rights record. [84336]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We frequently raise human rights issues with the Iranian authorities at all levels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the subject with the Iranian Foreign Minister on 2 December.

We support the EU-Iran dialogue on human rights, with the aim of bringing about improvements in Iran's respect for human rights.

We support dialogue with practical bilateral assistance (£230,000 since last year) through NGOs, for the judiciary, Prison Service and growth of civil society.

Middle East Peace Process

17. **Helen Southworth:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the impact of recent developments in Israel on the peace process. [84337]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We look to the next Israeli Government, whoever leads it, to engage with the Palestinians and the international community in the implementation of the Quartet roadmap within the timeframe set out by President Bush on 24 June.

26. **James Purnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the roadmap process for peace in the middle east. [84346]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Quartet (the US, EU, UN and Russia) are agreeing a roadmap for progress towards a comprehensive settlement by 2005. They will be meeting on 20 December to review progress. When the roadmap is published, we will work with the international community to implement it. A conference of the parties involved in the peace process should be a key element of that roadmap.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress is being made towards establishing a Middle East Peace Conference to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. [84328]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Quartet (the US, EU, UN and Russia) are agreeing a roadmap for progress towards a comprehensive settlement by 2005. They will be meeting on 20 December to review progress. When the roadmap is published we will work with the international community to implement it. A conference of the parties involved in the peace process should be a key element of that roadmap.

Sudan

18. **Rob Marris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what help he is offering to further the reconciliation process in Sudan. [84338]

Mr. Rammell: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, North-West (Mr. Best).

No Fly Zones (Iraq)

19. **Mr. Gray:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on allied action in the event of Iraqi attack against allied airplanes in the no-fly zone. [84339]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since late 1998, Iraq has waged a systematic campaign to shoot down allied aircraft patrolling the no-fly zones. This is contrary to international law and inconsistent with UN resolutions. We only take action to protect our aircrew. UK and US pilots are authorised to respond to Iraqi attack in self-defence.

Cyprus

20. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on UN plans for a settlement in Cyprus. [84340]

Mr. MacShane: I understand the United Nations has tabled today to the two leaders in Cyprus an adjustment to their proposal of 11 November for a settlement to the

Cyprus problem. We fully support the United Nations' efforts to secure a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement in Cyprus.

We now have within grasp an historic opportunity to reunite Cyprus, and to invite a reunited Cyprus to accede to the EU at the Copenhagen European Council this week.

I urge the two leaders not to let this opportunity slip between their fingers.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the removal of Turkish troops from Cyprus as part of a settlement. [84357]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Government support the UN proposals for a comprehensive settlement in Cyprus, which allow for there to be between 1,000 and 9,999 troops from both Greece and Turkey on the island. It is of course for the two sides in Cyprus to agree a settlement, but we believe the UN proposals to be workable and fair.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what advice his Department provides to UK nationals of the Greek Cypriot community wishing to claim compensation for loss of land incurred as a consequence of the 1974 invasion; and if he will make a statement. [85380]

Mr. Straw: The proposals from the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan for a comprehensive settlement of Cyprus include arrangements for compensation to those who lost land in 1974. Her Majesty's Government are strongly urging both sides to settle on the basis of the UN plan. When, and if, a settlement has been agreed Her Majesty's Government will ensure that UK citizens who may qualify for compensation are properly informed.

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is with regard to the granting of compensation to those Greek Cypriots who lost land as a consequence of the 1974 invasion; and if he will make a statement. [85381]

Mr. Straw: The Government fully support the UN proposal for a comprehensive settlement to the Cyprus Problem. Our aim is for a reunited Cyprus to be invited, at the Copenhagen European Council, to accede to the EU. We are urging both sides to come to a settlement before 12 December.

The UN proposals contain provisions on the four core issues, including property and territory, which involve difficult compromises on both sides. While it is for the two sides in Cyprus to agree on details, the Government are of the view that the UN Secretary-General's proposals protect the interests of both sides and are a basis for agreement.

Taiwan

21. **David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has held with the Government of the People's Republic of China about Taiwan. [84341]

Mr. Rammell: On 15 July, my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary told the Chinese Foreign Minister that our position on Taiwan had not changed. We acknowledged the Chinese position that Taiwan is a province of the People's Republic of China, but we conducted discussions with the Taiwanese authorities on WTO-related trade issues.

West Africa

22. **Mr. Purchase:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Government of France on relations between the UK and France in West Africa. [84342]

Mr. Rammell: In September at the UN General Assembly, the Foreign Secretary and his French counterpart, Mr. Dominique De Villepin, jointly hosted a breakfast seminar on "New Partnership for Africa's Development" (NEPAD) with Foreign Ministers from 10 African countries.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary last met Mr. De Villepin on 7 October to discuss the strengthening of the St. Malo accord and Franco-British co-operation in Africa. The Foreign Secretary thanked Mr. De Villepin for French assistance in evacuating British nationals caught up in the crisis in Ivory Coast.

This discussion also touched on issues such as further practical co-operation in the areas of conflict management, and the implementation of the peace and security aspects of the G8 Africa Action Plan.

Furthermore, the Foreign Secretary has regular exchanges with Mr. De Villepin on a range of African issues, either by telephone or correspondence.

Our two countries are working together in the United Nations and through the European Union to ensure an holistic and strategic approach by the international community to conflict management in Africa. Indeed, we aim to further cement our co-operation in Africa at the Franco-British summit early next year.

Central Africa

23. **Mr. Tom Clarke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Rwanda, the Congo and the Great Lakes region. [84343]

Mr. Rammell: The Great Lakes are dominated by the DRC and Burundi conflicts. The Pretoria Agreement (30 July) has seen Rwandan forces leave DRC. The DRC Government must now deal with the anti-Rwandan militia in DRC, and agree a transitional Government with the rebels (MLC and RCD-Goma).

In Burundi, South African and Tanzanian mediation has sought a ceasefire between the Government and the FDD/FNL rebels. Agreement was reached on 3 December with the FDD. Questions remain on how this will be implemented and the implications for the FNL.

Hong Kong

24. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on proposals to alter the basic law on Hong Kong, with particular reference to Article 23. [84344]

Mr. Rammell: The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government has published outline proposals—but not yet draft legislation—on implementing Article 23. We have made clear to them that any legislation should be consistent with the principles of the Sino-British Joint Declaration on Hong Kong and the two UN human rights covenants.

Bangladesh

25. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Bangladeshi Government over religious persecution in that country. [84345]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Our High Commission in Dhaka monitor closely reports of human rights abuses in Bangladesh. They have raised allegations of attacks against minorities on several occasions with the Bangladesh Government, both at a senior level in Dhaka and with regional government officials, encouraging them to investigate all allegations fully. This issue was also included in discussions in October between the visiting UK branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and senior members of the Bangladesh Government. The High Commissioner was present.

Iraq

27. **Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment his Department has made of the way commercial oil interests would be affected by a war against Iraq. [84347]

Mr. Rammell: No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq. However, if military action were to occur, we do not believe that the loss of Iraqi oil supplies, even for an extended period of time, would significantly disrupt the fundamental balance of supply and demand in the world market.

Human Rights

28. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the human rights position in *(a)* Tibet and *(b)* China. [84348]

Mr. Rammell: We continue to have serious concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet. We welcome, however, the releases this year of several Tibetan prisoners, including Ngawang Choepel, Chadrel Rinpoche, Jigme Zangpo and Ngawang Sangdrol. All of these were on the list of individual cases of concern that we have raised with the Chinese Government. We have also welcomed, along with EU partners, the recent visit of the Dalai Lama's representatives to China. We encourage both sides to continue to use dialogue to find a peaceful resolution to the Tibetan issue.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised human rights issues when he visited China in July; my hon. Friend the Minister did the same when he visited in September; there have been two further rounds of the UK/China Human Rights Dialogue (in May and November) at which a wide range of human rights issues were discussed, including Tibet.

Visas (China)

29. **Mr. Connarty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the new regime in China with respect to progress with changes to the visa regime. [84349]

Mr. Rammell: Although the 16th Communist Party Congress in Beijing last month appointed a new Party leadership, China's new state leadership will not be elected until the National People's congress in March 2002. We have no plans to change our visa regime for Chinese nationals wishing to enter the UK.

Amina Lawal

30. **Ms Atherton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Nigerian Government in the case of Amina Lawal. [84351]

Mr. Rammell: In September my noble Friend Baroness Amos, the Minister for Africa, raised with President Obasanjo HMG's concerns about the harsh sentences imposed under the Sharia penal codes. She emphasised the strength of feeling against them in the UK and reiterated HMG's opposition to the death penalty in all circumstances. The High Commission, together with EU partners, regularly raises our concerns about the sentences with the appropriate authorities in Nigeria.

Turkey

31. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to visit Turkey to discuss Turkey's relations with the EU; and if he will make a statement. [84352]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary visited Ankara on 3 and 4 December and held meetings with the Turkish President, Prime Minister and other leaders.

He reaffirmed the UK's strong support for Turkey's membership of the EU and expressed the hope that the Copenhagen European Council would offer a firm date for accession negotiations to begin. He made clear that this would be on the basis of Turkey fulfilling the relevant criteria.

Democratic Republic of Congo

32. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the report of the UN Export Panel in respect of the exploitation of resources of the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84353]

Mr. Rammell: The UK and other members of the Security Council are waiting for information to substantiate the claims made in the panel's latest report.

The current panel's mandate expired on 18 October, and there is now no mechanism in place to take forward the panel's work. We are pressing, through discussions at the UN for a speedy resolution to this problem.

35. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the UK is doing to secure international action to help prevent war crimes in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84356]

Mr. Rammell: The UK has supported the establishment of the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC is best placed to consider appropriate action to address accusations of war crimes committed in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

UN Counter-Terrorism Committee

33. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the work of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the United Nations. [84354]

Mr. Rammell: Under UK chairmanship, the UK Counter-Terrorism Committee has now reviewed 180 initial and 100 follow-up reports from states setting out the actions they have taken to comply with UNSCR 1373. The committee has sent 206 letters requesting further information on these points to states and international organisations.

The committee has focussed in its initial reviews on states' abilities to counter the financing of terrorism, and their progress in ratifying the 12 UN Counter-Terrorism conventions.

The committee has also begun to compile requests from states for technical assistance towards reaching the standards set by UNSCR 1373. The committee continues to discuss such requests with suitable potential donors.

EU Enlargement

34. **Joyce Quin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a further statement on EU enlargement. [84355]

Mr. MacShane: I refer my right hon. Friend to the answer I gave earlier in the House today to my hon. Friend the Member for Falkirk, West (Mr. Joyce).

Exports

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assistance his Department's posts have given to British companies seeking to export to South East Asia in the last six months. [84358]

Mr. Rammell: During the period of 1 June 2002 to 30 November 2002, commercial staff in posts in South East Asia met and briefed 1,091 individual British business visitors; responded to 57 chargeable inquiries from British companies; received, briefed and provided support to 285 participants in 22 trade missions and 339 participants in 22 events under the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad scheme; visited 370 local companies to introduce British goods and services; issued 606 sales leads to British customers of Trade Partners UK's Sales Leads Service; lobbied on behalf of 44 British companies and organised 36 seminars and other promotional events to introduce British exporters to markets in South East Asia.

Sierra Leone

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on Sierra Leone. [84359]

Mr. Rammell: Good progress has been made in restoring peace to Sierra Leone. Disarmament was completed and the war declared over in January 2002. Credible and peaceful elections were held in May. Nonetheless, much remains to be done to consolidate the fragile peace. The UN peacekeeping mission, UNAMSIL, remains deployed throughout the country. It has begun to withdraw, in a phased process, which should last 18–20 months.

The UK continues to play a leading role in building a lasting peace. Key post-conflict challenges include helping the Government of Sierra Leone to:

reform the security sector;

train and strengthen the capacity of the armed forces and police;

reintegrate former combatants, returning refugees and the internally displaced;

tackle corruption;

promote justice (including through the establishment of the Sierra Leone Special Court) and reconciliation (through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission);

introduce policies for managing and securing the diamond fields;

strengthen democratic institutions and civil society;

put in place effective public administration and management of public finances, rebuild the country's basic infrastructure and services; and

develop industry and the economy.

The UK is committing over £120 million of development assistance, including substantial budgetary support, to Sierra Leone over the next three years. This is in addition to our ongoing commitment of over 100 UK military personnel to the UK-led International Military and Advisory Training Team (IMATT). We continue to provide substantial support to humanitarian agencies.

The ongoing conflict in Liberia, and President Taylor's regime, which has not yet met the demands of the Security Council and continues to breach UN sanctions, remain a threat to the peace in Sierra Leone. Through the Liberia Contact Group and other mechanisms we are seeking a peaceful solution and real reform in Liberia.

Burundi

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the status of the ceasefire talks between CNDD-FDD and the transitional Government of Burundi. [84645]

Mr. Rammell: A ceasefire agreement was signed on 2 December 2002 in Arusha between the CNDD-FDD and the Transitional National Government of Burundi.

Iraq (Human Rights)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the evidential basis is

for his statements on pages 4, 8 and 9 of his document "Saddam Hussein: Crimes and Human Rights Abuse", concerning the treatment of women. [85625]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 5 December 2002]*: There is no statement about Iraqi women on page 4 of the report. Statements on pages 8 and 9 of the report are from sources including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other NGOs.

Private Finance Initiative

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what PFI/PPP projects each of the security services has been engaged in; and if he will make a statement. [86231]

Mr. Straw: The only PFI project involving the security and intelligence agencies is the provision and servicing of new accommodation for GCHQ.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will ask the Church Commissioners to benchmark the employment rights of UK clergy in comparison to those in other EU countries. [85515]

Mr. Bell: This would be a matter for the Archbishops' Council's Ministry Division. The Council has no plans to do so. Such a benchmarking exercise would be difficult to devise in view of the very wide range of employment rights applicable to clergy in other EU countries. Some clergy have little formal protection while others are employed on the equivalent of civil service terms.

Tenancy Rights

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will make a statement on the tenancy rights of clergy who live in church properties. [85179]

Mr. Bell: Incumbents have ownership as a corporation sole of their parsonage houses, although their power to dispose of their houses is qualified. Their ownership ends on resignation, retirement or with pastoral reorganisation, or on removal from office for disciplinary offences, pastoral breakdown or if they become too infirm to continue in ministry. The rights and responsibilities of incumbents with respect to their houses are laid down in the Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure 1972.

Team rectors have the same security as incumbents for the term of years for which they are appointed. Unless they resign or reach retirement age, they can only be removed from office during the period of their licences for disciplinary offences, on grounds of serious pastoral breakdown or infirmity.

Other clergy, about 40 per cent., do not have freehold of office. They include priests in charge and assistant curates. They may occupy their accommodation by virtue of licences under which they themselves would ordinarily make no rental payment. In these circumstances an occupier would not be entitled to remain in possession after the licence came to an end.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will name those persons she appointed to public bodies in October. [84925]

Ms Hewitt: The names of the individuals appointed to DTI public bodies during the course of October, the bodies to which they were appointed and the effective date of the appointments have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Broadband Advisers

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the application of Nolan Rules to the appointment of *(a)* a city councillor and *(b)* deputy chairman of a regional assembly as a full-time DTI regional broadband advisor. [85244]

Mr. Timms: The 12 men and women appointed as regional broadband advisers or coordinators, who form part of the UK Broadband Task Force, are contract employees or secondees from industry and not civil servants. They were selected on merit through open competition and a range of backgrounds was sought to give the Task Force the necessary mix of skills and experience. In the case of the South West region, the political activities of the successful candidate were set out in full in his application.

Carbon Trust

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what funding has been allocated by the Carbon Trust; and who has received allocations. [83436]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

The Carbon Trust was launched in April 2001 to support UK business and the public sector in reducing their Carbon emissions while maintaining competitiveness. The Carbon Trust is a private non-profit company that receives funding of around £50 million per annum from Defra and the Devolved Administrations. About two-thirds of its current funding comes from recycled receipts from the Climate Change Levy. As a private company the management of its programmes and decisions on the allocation of funding, are a matter for the Carbon Trust Board.

Counterfeit Goods

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been for trading counterfeit goods, broken down by type, under the Trademarks Act 1994, in each year since 1994. [85308]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Information about the number of prosecutions under the Trade Mark Act 1994 is not currently collated centrally and would cost a disproportionate amount to collect.

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions there have been for trading counterfeit goods, broken down by type, under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, in each of the last ten years. [85309]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Annex D1 of the Office of Fair Trading's Annual Report 2001 contains details of local authority prosecutions under the Trade Descriptions Act 1968 for 1 January 2001 to 31 December 2001 (www.oft.gov.uk/News/Annual + report/annexes.htm). These tables are compiled from information supplied voluntarily by the local authority trading standards service and environmental health departments.

Departmental Posts

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many ethnic minority persons are employed at each grade in her Department. [84924]

Ms Hewitt: We monitor ethnicity through a voluntary survey of staff. The latest data show that 659 persons have indicated that they are of ethnic minority origin. The table gives a breakdown of that number according to DTI ranges.

DTI Range	*Number of persons*
2	44
3	60
4	180
5	67
6	122
7	39
8	69
9	29
10	30
11	14
Senior civil servant	5
Total	659

DTI Ranges	*Civil Service Grade Equivalent*
2	AA
3 and 4	AO
5 and 6	EO
7 and 8	HEO
9	SEO
10	Grade 7
11	Grade 6
Senior civil servant	

Foreign Investment

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the recent comments of the Chief Executive of British Trade International, regarding the effect on foreign investment of regulation. [85408]

Ms Hewitt: Sir Stephen Brown's comments on regulation were seriously misrepresented by *The Times*. Sir Stephen stated that inward investors liked the UK's light regulatory regime and low taxation compared with our continental neighbours. The UK is the number one location in Europe for inward investment. We aim to keep it there.

Insurance Premiums

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what plans she has to meet representatives of the building, construction and roofing industries to discuss the level of insurance premiums; [85824]

(2) what assessment she has made of the impact of changes in insurance costs on construction and building *(a)* profitability and *(b)* training; [85826]

(3) what her Department estimates will be the impact on employment in the construction industry as a result of changes in insurance premium tax. [85822]

Mr. Wilson: Earlier this year my hon. Friend the Minister for Construction met my noble Friend Lord Pendry and a delegation from the National Federation of Demolition Contractors (NFDC) to discuss rising insurance premiums and the impact on the demolition industry. There have also been a number of meetings between construction industry trade associations and my officials to discuss concerns about increased premiums in the Industry. We are keen to have the views of all affected industries, including building, construction and roofing, on the forthcoming review of the Employer Liability Insurance scheme being led by the Department of Work and Pensions. This review was announced by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer in his pre-budget report and further details will be announced shortly.

There is no simple answer to the impact of changes in insurance costs on construction and building profitability or levels of training.

The rise in insurance premiums is due to a number of factors, including the rise in the use of litigation, insurance companies clawing back losses from previous years (September 11 effect); a change in risk profiles within industries (effect of asbestos risk and other occupational injuries within construction); and better modelling of individual company risk. We do not yet know, however, which of these effects predominates.

The impact on profitability and training will depend on which of these effects predominates.

There has been no change to the current 5 per cent. rate of insurance premium tax (IPT) since July 1999. I am not aware of any impact on employment in the construction industry as a result of changes to the IPT rate before that date.

Trade Promotion

Dr. Strang: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what facilities exist for the promotion of trade between the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand; which Australian companies have over £10 million invested in the UK; and which UK companies have over £10 million invested in Australia. [85696]

Nigel Griffiths: Trade Partners UK (TPUK) organises a wide range of activities designed to promote trade between the UK and Australia, Canada and New Zealand. These include assisting British companies through schemes like the Outward Mission Support Scheme, the Inward Mission Support Scheme, and the Support for Exhibitions and Seminars Abroad Scheme. Much of this assistance is aimed at helping companies to prepare for and enter these overseas markets for the first time.

An example of this is Export Canada. This is specifically aimed at SMEs that are new or inexperienced exporters; it is a mentoring programme which outlines the current state of the market for companies' products/services, and offers advice on marketing in North America and exhibiting at trade fairs.

The TPUK network delivers services coordinated by British Trade International, the organisation set up in May 1999 to take lead responsibility within Government for trade development and promotion.

The DTI has been notified of the following Australian companies that have indicated that they would invest £10 million or more over a three year period in the UK. These are AMP, Amcor Packaging (Europe) Ltd., Colonial Ltd., Hamilton Oil Company Ltd., Lend Lease Corporation Ltd., QBE Insurance Group Ltd., Medical Imaging Australia Ltd., Sims Mclntyre Metals Ltd., Sky Television Plc, Spotless Group Ltd., and Wine Planet.

Numerous British companies have significant investment in Australia. However the DTI does not collate such information and no comprehensive record of investment by UK companies in Australia is held centrally. According to figures from the Office of National Statistics, the book value of UK investment in Australia at the end of 2000 was £10 billion.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Combined Heat and Power

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the installed capacity for combined heat and power in the UK is; and how many combined heat and power plants in the United Kingdom *(a)* currently operate and *(b)* are due to become operational before 2010. [85109]

Mr. Morley: The DTI's UK Digest of Energy Statistics gives a figure of 4,801 MWe at the end of 2001 for good quality CHP capacity in 1,573 plants. The number of plants currently operational is largely unchanged. There is no Government estimate of the number of plants due to become operational before 2010.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce the funding for the Horticultural Research Institute for the next five years. [85214]

Mr. Morley: We are now studying the results of a public consultation exercise on the Quinquennial Review of Horticulture Research International which was published on 23 September. We hope to be able to make an announcement shortly.

Cod Stocks

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research she has evaluated into the effect of the three-year-old cod recovery programme in the Irish Sea on cod stocks. [84451]

Mr. Morley: The Government have reviewed the information collected for the annual assessment of stocks by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea and groundfish surveys conducted this year. There is some evidence that fishing mortality has reduced and that there has been a small increase in cod spawning stock biomass—although the latter is still well outside safe biological limits. There is, however, no definitive evidence that these are due solely to the recovery plan nor that they can be sustained without further significant action.

Coffee Market

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will raise the coffee rescue plan at the forthcoming International Coffee Organisation meeting. [85548]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Oxfam launched its report "Mugged: poverty in your coffee cup", which included their coffee rescue plan, at the International Coffee Organisation on 18 September 2002 . The plan has, therefore, already been raised in that forum. The UK is currently engaged in dialogue with interested parties about the Oxfam report.

DEFRA will represent the UK at the meeting of the ICO on May 2003, as part of the EU delegation. The UK will use its input into the meeting to continue to press for greater sustainability in coffee production.

Departmental Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the grants funded by her Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if she will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82184]

Alun Michael: Across the whole range of DEFRA's responsibilities there are a considerable number of grants available to individuals and groups and their size and scope varies enormously. For that reason the information requested is supplied by subject area as follows

Land Use and Rural Affairs

The table gives the breakdown of DEFRA's direct expenditure by grant scheme. Because of disproportionate cost, these figures do not include grant schemes administered by our non-departmental public bodies and agencies in pursuance of their responsibilities carried out on DEFRA's behalf. These include the Countryside Agency, English Nature, National Parks, Broads Authority and the regional development agencies.

Grant Scheme[1]	Funding 2001-02 (£000)	New awards in 2001-02
Leader II	1,200,000	0
Objective 5b	24,500,000	0
Objective 1	37,660,000	36
Farm waste grant scheme	23,000	5
Farm business advice service	7,000,000	4,411
Planning consultancy advice scheme	107,000	134
ERDP (10 schemes)	167,200,000	26,089
Rural stress action plan	300,000	3
Total	237,990,000	30,678

[1] The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the Department to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally.

Environment

Grant scheme[1]	Funding 2001-02 (£)	Awards
Darwin Initiative for Biodiversity Projects	3,000,000	31 new projects 47 existing projects
Section 13 of the Industrial Development Act	112,000	6 awards
National Security in the Water Industry	2,900,000	15 projects
"Environmental Know-How" Fund (Funded jointly with DfID. DEFRA funded £2 million of the total grants in 2001-02)	6,975,000	42 projects
Environmental Action Fund	4,200,000	112 grants
Energy Saving Trust (funded jointly with DTI, DfT and the devolved Administrations, as well as by the private sector).	22,000,000[2]	About 10 per cent. of DEFRA's funding was used for grants.
Home Energy Efficiency Scheme (now marketed as the Warm Front Team)	Over 154,000,000	Installed heating and insulation measures in some 310,000 fuel poor homes

[1] The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the Department to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally.
[2] About 10 per cent. of which was used for grants.

Fisheries

DEFRA administers the EU fisheries grants in the Objective 1 areas of Cornwall and Merseyside and in the areas of England outside Objective 1. Figures are held by calendar year, not financial year. The amounts of EU and national grant awarded in 2001, and the numbers of awards were as follows:

EU fisheries grants[1]	EU and national grant (£) in 2001	Awards
Cornwall	2,752,835	40
Merseyside	2,250	1
Areas of England outside Objective[1]	6,802,764	46

[1] The administration of grant programmes is carried out by a number of different units within the Department to which a range of staff make a contribution. It is not possible to provide an accurate estimate of these costs centrally.

Food and Farming

Grant Scheme	Funding 2001-02 (£)	Awards	Admin. costs
Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme	13,860,399	890	35,554
Agriculture Development Scheme[1, 2]	877,762	28	—
Sector Challenge Scheme[2, 3]	104,085	8	—

[1] Grants awarded between 1999 and 2000—28 beneficiaries received payments totalling £877,762 in 2001-02.
[2] Changes in the organisation of work mean that a separate administration figure for these schemes could be provided only at a disproportionate cost.
[3] Grants awarded in 1997—eight beneficiaries received payments totalling £104,085 in 2001-02 (this scheme is now closed)

Environment Agency

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who sets the annual Environment Agency budget in the Wessex region; and who is responsible for controlling budgets in regions. [86221]

Mr. Meacher: The Agency does not have a Wessex region. That region of the former National Rivers Authority (the Agency's predecessor body) was subsumed within the Agency's south west region on its establishment in 1995.

With the exception of its flood defence functions, the Environment Agency determines its own regional budgets. The delivery of local plans within budget are managed by the appropriate Agency regional management team led by the Regional Director.

Budgets for the Agency's flood defence function are set by local executive flood defence committees who also receive progress reports. Although the Wessex region disappeared, a Wessex region flood defence committee remains.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if she will calculate the total percentage reduction in the number of days at sea proposed by the European Commission for 2003 for vessels capturing and landing *(a)* over 100 tonnes of cod and *(b)* less than 100 tonnes of cod in the (i) North Sea, (ii) Irish Sea, (iii) West of Scotland Waters, (iv) ICES Area VIId and (v) ICES Area VIIe; [85504]

(2) if she will calculate the percentage reduction in the number of days at sea proposed by the European Commission for 2003 for vessels capturing and landing *(a)* over 100 tonnes of hake and *(b)* less than 100 tonnes of hake in the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea area covering the northern hake stock. [85503]

Mr. Morley: The Commission has now adjusted its proposal and no longer envisages a distinction between vessels landing over 100 tonnes of cod or hake and others. We are seeking clarification of the Commission's proposals before undertaking the calculation requested.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what arrangements are proposed by the European Commission for 2003 to restrict fishing effort for the capture of cod and landing of cod using static gear as a method of capture in the *(a)* North Sea, *(b)* West of Scotland Waters, *(c)* Irish Sea and *(d)* ICES Area VII. [85505]

Mr. Morley: The Commission proposal for effort control envisages limitation of vessels by kilowatt/days. However, the Commission has also indicated that as part of its proposals to reduce discards, it will bring forward proposals next year for technical measures aimed specifically at limiting effort by static gear.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions are being proposed by the European Commission to the number of days at sea during 2003 for vessels under 10 metres in overall length capturing and landing cod in the ICES Sea Areas *(a)* North Sea, *(b)* Irish Sea, *(c)* West of Scotland Waters, *(d)* Area VIId and *(e)* Area VIIe. [85506]

Mr. Morley: The Commission proposals envisage cuts in the total number of kw/days for each Member State whose vessels fish cod or hake. However, the Commission proposes that it should be left to Member States to determine which vessels should be restricted in their time at sea and thus whether under 10 metre vessels should be subject to controls.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what restrictions are being proposed by the European Commission for 2003 for vessels capturing and landing cod within the UK 6—mile and 6–12 mile limit in the sea areas *(a)* North Sea, *(b)* Irish Sea, *(c)* West of Scotland Waters, *(d)* Area VIId and *(e)* Area VIIe. [85507]

Mr. Morley: The measures include the annual TACs and quotas regulations, the cod and hake recovery plans and the discard action plan.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which sections of the Fisheries Act 1981 and its amendments and attachments will be used to continue the present fisheries management system if no new system is put in place by 1 January 2003. [85509]

Mr. Morley: If no new system is put into place on 1 January 2003, the existing CFP arrangements will roll over automatically with one exception. The arrangements providing for restricted access to the six and twelve mile zones will lapse. The Fisheries Act 1981 has no relevance in this regard.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of *(a)* sand eel and *(b)* Norway pout Norway has been allowed to catch in European Union waters in each of the last five years. [85510]

Mr. Morley: The data requested are set out in the table.

tonnes

	Norway pout	*Sand eel*
1998	20,000	30,000
1999	20,000	30,000
2000	20,000	30,000
2001	10,000	30,000
2002	5,000	35,000

Mr. Walter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she intends to take to prevent the killing of dolphins in UK waters as a result of fishery bycatch. [86255]

Mr. Morley: Reducing the incidental bycatch of small cetaceans will require action on the part of all member states involved in the fisheries concerned, not just the UK. Defra has already committed some £140,000 for trials into the use of exclusion devices developed by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in pelagic trawl fisheries. The trial has been resumed in order to refine the system and further assess the grid's effectiveness in protecting dolphins and maintaining fish catch rates. If SMRU's trials are not successful, we will look at other mitigating measures and I do not rule out any approach at this stage—including arguing for restrictions on fishing, gear or seasonal closures.

Flooding Incidents

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many incidents of flooding have occurred in the last three years where raw sewage was involved in the contamination of people's homes and property; and if she will make a statement. [85871]

Mr. Morley: OFWAT collects information on the number of properties which have been subject to internal sewage flooding. In 2001–02, there were 4,957 properties flooded in this manner, in 2000–01 7,120 properties, and in 1999–2000, 7,126 properties. The dry winter in 2001–02 contributed to the lower figure in this year.

Greenhouse Gas Emissions

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the United Kingdom greenhouse gas emissions were in *(a)* 1990 and *(b)* in each year since 1997; what percentage of these emissions came from the electricity supply industry in (i) 1990 and (ii) in each year since 1997; and what her most recent estimate is of how annual UK greenhouse gas emissions in 2010 will differ from 1990 levels. [85421]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The table shows the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions in 1990 and from 1997 to 2000, the last year for which data are available, and also the percentage of these emissions that came from the electricity supply industry. The rise in emissions between 1999 and 2000 were mainly due to

an increased use of coal in the energy mix because of maintenance and repair at nuclear and combined cycle gas turbine stations and higher gas prices.

We estimate that the policies and measures outlined in the climate change programmes may help us reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by 23 per cent. below 1990 levels by 2010, which would be equivalent to about 160 million tonnes of carbon.

	1990	1997	1998	1999	2000
Greenhouse gases	207.8	191.0	190.7	180.8	181.1
Percentage of emissions from electricity supply industry	27.7	21	21.6	21.8	23.6

Horticulture

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her strategy for horticultural renewal and development. [85216]

Mr. Morley: We plan to publish early next year for public comment, a draft Science and Innovation Strategy. This will be accompanied by more detailed proposals for programmes of research including horticulture.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish Professor Sir Colin Spedding's "Vision for Horticulture". [85217]

Mr. Morley: Sir Colin Spedding's report "A Vision for Horticulture" was published in draft for consultation on 29 January. The final version of the report, which was substantially unchanged from the draft, was submitted to the Department in March and is available on the Defra website and in the Library of the House.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the cost was of the East Malling Organic Horticultural Research Unit; and when it was completed. [85215]

Mr. Morley: The Organic Research Centre cost £2.761 million of which £2.261 million was provided, following a competition for projects, by the Treasury's Capital Modernisation Fund; and £500,000 by the East Mailing Trust for Horticultural Research. The Centre was completed in August 2002 and opened on 20 September 2002.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* annual salary will be of restructuring HRI after its quinquennial review. [85218]

Mr. Morley: The costs of restructuring HRI will depend on the options chosen for successor organisations. We are considering these and hope to make an announcement shortly.

Organic Farming Schemes

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 166W, on organic farming schemes, if she will list the beneficiaries under the Organic Farming Scheme and the Organic Aid Scheme as a proportion of the total number of *(a)* farms and *(b)* farmers, broken down by region. [85344]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Information on the Organic Farming Scheme and the Organic Aid Scheme is held by beneficiary. The latest numbers that we have by beneficiary are as at November 2002 and are as follows:

Region	Total
East Midlands	178
Eastern	160
London	1
North East	51
North West	149
South East	285
South West	873
West Midlands	256
Yorks/Humber	120
Grand Total	2,073

The latest information that we have for the total numbers of *(a)* holdings and *(b)* farmers is taken from the June 2001 Agricultural and Horticultural Census. The figures show the total holdings and total full and part-time farmers, partners, directors and spouses if working on the holding.

Region	Total holdings	Total
East Midlands	Total holdings	19,095
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	25,433
Eastern	Total holdings	21,054
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	27,325
London	Total holdings	434
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	543
North East	Total holdings	6,073
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	8,598
North West	Total holdings	21,048
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	28,682
South East	Total holdings	22,461
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	27,673
South West	Total holdings	44,861
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	57,218
West Midlands	Total holdings	23,247
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	31,076
Yorks/Humbs	Total holdings	19,661
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	27,280
Grant Total	Total holdings	177,934
	Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	233,828

Note
Spouses are included only if working on the holdings

PSA Targets

Mr. David Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out *(a)* financial resources against PSA targets and *(b)* staff numbers against PSA targets in her Department. [86274]

Alun Michael: Defra cannot provide information on financial resources and staffing against each its PSA targets and these will include an analysis of the financial resources and staffing required to deliver each target. We expect the Delivery Plans to be ready for implementation by April 2003 following the confirmation of internal budgets for 2003–4.

Raw Sewage

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason raw sewage was pumped into the River Wylye Special Area of Conservation and SSSI at Hanging Langford near Salisbury on 2 December; who authorised it; if she will set in hand immediate research on the environmental impact; and if she will make a statement. [85496]

Mr. Morley: The emergency discharge of sewage into the river was made to avoid sewer flooding of properties, resulting from inundation of the sewerage system, following exceptionally high levels of rainfall. Such discharges are permitted under the Water Resources Act 1991 and do not require prior authorisation.

The Environment Agency was informed of the discharge by the water company and inspected the site on 2 December. They found that the water company had provided a screen to minimise the aesthetic effects of the discharge, that the discharge was extremely dilute owing to the volume of water in the system and further diluted by high flow in the river. The Agency is satisfied that the discharge caused no significant environmental impact.

Rural Checklist

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish her Rural Checklist for other Government departments; and if she will list those rural officers in other Government departments responsible for Rural Proofing. [86441]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency's rural proofing checklist is used across Government for rural proofing and can be viewed on the Agency's website at http://www.countryside.gov.uk/ruralproofing/checklist.htm. Hard copies are also available from the Agency's Rural Proofing Studies Unit at Dacre House, Dacre Street, London, SW1H 0DH. This is also the first point of contact for inquiries regarding rural issues. If necessary, inquiries will be referred by the unit to appropriate contacts across Whitehall. A list of names of departmental rural contacts, who meet regularly, is not published as personnel and machinery of Government changes mean that any published list would be out of date fairly quickly.

Rural Transport

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what rural transport projects have been funded by the Countryside Agency in each of the last three years; what the average time was between the submission of funding proposals for such projects and a decision being made; what the average wait has been for allocation of funding for such projects which have been approved; and how many of these projects which have been approved are awaiting the release of funds. [85246]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Agency has funded five transport grant programmes in the past three years on behalf of Defra. The Rural Transport Development Fund merged with the Rural Transport Partnership scheme in March 2001. The Parish Transport Grant has been running since April 2001. These three projects solely fund transport projects in rural areas. Two other schemes, the Wider Welcome and Market Towns programme, fund some transport related projects, but in the following table the data are integrated within the Rural Transport Partnership and Parish Transport Grant figures. This is due to the way the data is collected by the Countryside Agency.

Scheme	*Period*	*Number of projects supported*	*Average time for decision*	*Number of projects awaiting release of funds*
Parish Transport Grant	2001–02	41	10 days	0
	[2]2002–03	76	10 days	109
Rural Transport Development Fund[1]	2000–01	111	[3]—	0
Rural Transport Partnership	2000–01	69	[3]—	0
	2001–02	278	19 days	0
	[2]2002–03	221	10 days	581

[1] Rural Transport Development Fund was merged with the Rural Transport Partnership in April 2001.
[2] Data from 1 April 2002 to 1 November 2002.
[3] Not available.

The Countryside Agency send out grant award letters immediately upon approval. All the projects currently being delivered are awaiting release of some funds, as no more than 90 per cent. of project funding can be released until the project is complete.

Slurry Contamination

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 169W, on slurry contamination, how many fines were issued for slurry contamination and what the average fines were, broken down by region, in each of the last 15 years; [85369]

(2) how many cases of slurry contamination have occurred in each region in each of the last 15 years. [85350]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The table as follows shows the number of water prosecutions involving all types of agricultural pollution (including slurry pollution), by Environment Agency region, for the years 1999, 2000, 2001 and 2002. It is to not practicable to assemble enforcement data before 1 April 1999, when the Agency's National enforcement Database went live. In my answer of 20 November I explained that from the beginning of 2003 the Agency's database will be able to provide information on specific pollutants such as slurry, but information is not currently held at this level of detail.

£

Region	*Number of fines*	*Average fine*
Year 1999		
Anglian	4	4,875
North-West	3	2,667
Southern	1	1,500
Welsh	1	2,500
Year 2000		
Anglian	3	5,333
Midlands	3	15,333
North-West	1	5,000
South-West	4	1,913
Southern	1	2,000

£

Region	Number of fines	Average fine
Year 2001		
Anglian	5	3,800
Midlands	4	4,275
North-East	1	1,000
North-West	2	3,000
South-West	1	3,000
Southern	4	3,625
Thames	2	5,750
Welsh	1	5,000
Year 2002		
Anglian	1	5,000
North-East	1	3,500
Southern	1	3,000

Trawling

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make it the policy of the Government to outlaw *(a)* industrial trawling and *(b)* pair trawling for pelagic species. [84464]

Mr. Morley: Reducing the incidental bycatch of small cetaceans will require action on the part of all member states involved in the fisheries concerned, not just the UK. Defra has already committed some £140,000 for trials into the use of exclusion devices developed by the Sea Mammal Research Unit (SMRU) to reduce the bycatch of cetaceans in pelagic trawl fisheries. The trial will be resumed as soon as the commercial fishery restarts, in order to refine the system and further assess the grid's effectiveness in protecting dolphins and maintaining fish catch rates. If SMRU's trials are not successful, we will look at other mitigating measures, and I do not rule out any approach at this stage—including arguing for restrictions on fishing, gear or seasonal closures.

Urban Foxes

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the RSPCA and other animal welfare groups on the release of captured urban foxes into the countryside; and if she will make a statement. [84624]

Mr. Morley: The Department holds discussions from time to time with the RSPCA and other animal welfare organisations on managing wild mammals, including foxes, where they are perceived to be a problem.

It is not an offence to capture foxes and release them elsewhere, provided the person concerned does not contravene the legislation that provides general protection for wild mammals against cruelty and ill-treatment. The Department does not recommend the use of re-location as a method of managing foxes. This is well understood by groups like the RSPCA who are opposed to this practice. We are not aware of any other established welfare groups who favour relocation as a method of managing foxes. Because of their territorial nature, foxes moved to another area would be likely to fight with any others already established there. This could lead to injury and death among the foxes. Anyone experiencing problems with urban foxes should contact Defra for advice on 0845 601 4523 (local rate).

Waste Management

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she has made of the use of *(a)* waste incineration, *(b)* landfill dumping and *(c)* recycling of household waste in *(i)* Lancashire, (ii) the north-west of England and (iii) the UK. [85328]

Mr. Meacher: Municipal waste tonnages and percentages for the disposal methods requested are in the table.

Thousand tonnes/percentages

	Incineration	Landfill	Recycling/ composting
Lancashire	0.3	685	123
	<0.1%	84%	15%
North West Region	47	3,722	386
	1%	90%	9%
England	2,499	22,072	3,443
	9%	78%	12%

Household waste makes up approximately 90 per cent. of municipal waste in England. Comparable figures for the UK are not available.

Water Abstraction

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to what extent she intends the proposed Water Bill to include a duty on abstractors to use water efficiently, as required by the EC Water Framework Directive. [84739]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Article 11(3)*(c)* of the EC Water Framework requires a programme of measures to promote efficient and sustainable use of water. It does not require a duty on abstractors to use water efficiently. The Water Bill will not place such a duty on abstractors because the Government believe the Environment Agency already has sufficient powers to ensure abstractors use water efficiently.

However, the Water Bill will place a duty on water companies to conserve water in the carrying out of their functions, as one of the measures to meet the requirements of that Article.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Degrees

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the President of the Council what recent discussions he has had with private institutions and organisations on the award of degrees. [86116]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have had none. The Privy Council has received applications from some private organisations for the granting of degree-awarding powers and these are currently being considered.

TRANSPORT

Airfield Security

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what recent representations he has received concerning security at small airfields in the UK; and if he will make a statement; [85521]

(2) what measures the Government are taking to improve security at small airfields in the UK; and if he will make a statement. [85520]

Mr. Jamieson: Although we received few representations regarding the security of smaller aerodromes in the UK in the immediate aftermath of September 2001 attacks, we immediately tightened the security regime for commercial flights by small aircraft. I have received no more recent representations.

Prior to those attacks, commercial aircraft of less than 15 tonnes (maximum take off weight) were outside the requirements of the National Aviation Security Programme. That exemption has been removed, and aircraft of any weight are now subject to the programme.

The operators of such aircraft and the managers of the aerodromes from which they operate have been issued with the relevant directions and guidance, and Department for Transport Inspectors monitor compliance and undertake enforcement, prioritising those locations where the risks are judged greatest. As with all aspects of the regime, these measures are kept under review.

Additional Runway (Heathrow)

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a public exhibition of the proposals for an additional runway at Heathrow in Spelthorne during the extended period of consultations. [85225]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November 2002 *Official Report*, columns 474–75, the consultation on airports capacity will be kept open until we have consulted on options in relation to Gatwick. We will publish a further consultation document in the new year.

We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process when we publish the further consultation paper in the new year.

Advanced Motorcyclists

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department of the role, process and standards of advanced level training for motorcyclists; what discussions have taken place; what representations have been received; and what steps have been taken by his Department as a result. [86088]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government have commissioned independent research into the current provision of motorcycling training. The study included the identification of training organisations, a postal survey questionnaire of all organisations identified, and follow-up face-to-face and telephone interviews. The findings will be considered by the research sub-group of the Advisory Group on Motorcycling, which includes riding and training interests. A report of the research findings should be published in the New Year.

Advisory Group on Motorcycling

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will set out the *(a)* terms of reference and *(b)* results of the Advisory Group on Motorcycling. [85861]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

(a) The terms of reference for the advisory group are:

(i) the safety record of motorcyclists and to agree on measures to be taken to improve safety, including general road user behaviour and consideration of training and licensing arrangements;

(ii) the environmental impact of motorcycles and to agree what measures, if any, should be taken in light of the conclusions reached by the group; and

(iii) the role of powered two wheelers of all sorts in an integrated transport policy including the scope for traffic management measures that are beneficial to motorcyclists and contribute to that policy.

(b) The work of the advisory group is not yet finished. An "Interim Report of the Advisory Group on Motorcycling" was published in April 2001. Copies were placed in the Libraries of the House. The advisory group has still to complete some key work streams, including safety research, congestion research and environmental assessment. Some of this will only conclude during 2004. It will be at that stage that the Government will be able to reach conclusions on the work of the advisory group.

Air Transport

Mr. Kilfoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which five airports in the United Kingdom had the *(a)* highest and *(b)* lowest growth of passenger traffic in the last five years. [85615]

Mr. Jamieson: Comparing passenger numbers in 2001 with those in 1996 the information is as follows:

Airports with highest growth:

Kent International

Dundee

Liverpool

Scatsta

Londonderry

Airports with lowest growth:

Shoreham

Lydd

Carlisle

Gloucestershire

Unst

Air Transport Consultation

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many responses to the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK he had received, broken down by region, by 30 November. [85734]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wellington (Mr. Brake) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 32–33W.

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what gas pipelines are routed through the location of the Midlands New Site set out in the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands; and what plans there are to move them should this option be selected; [85740]

(2) what assessment he has made of the compatibility of the Midlands New Site Option, contained within the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands, with PPG25; [85739]

(3) what plans the Department has to deal with the risk of bird strike from the major gull roost at Draycote Water in Warwickshire in the event of proceeding with the Midlands New Site Option contained within the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands; [85737]

(4) what investigation his Department had made of the potential flooding in the Avon Valley caused by the Midlands New Site Option contained within the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands; and what further investigations his Department will carry out before this option would be proposed. [85738]

Mr. Jamieson: In light of the current consultation on air transport, we will set out in the White Paper our policies on how much airport development is necessary, where this should be located and on what main terms and conditions such development could be taken forward No decisions have been taken.

We will be looking carefully at all the issues raised by consultees in response to the options set out in the Midlands consultation document. Many important issues of detail will need to be addressed by a developer should there be any development and will be for later determination during subsequent statutory planning procedures.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport with reference to the air transport consultation process, if he will place in the Library the extrapolated passenger figures for Birmingham Airport for the period 2031 to 2060 referred to in the document Regional Air Services 3: Midlands Part B Appraisal Final Report section Core Economic Appraisal 2.9.4. [85862]

Mr. Jamieson: The passenger throughputs which could be accommodated at Birmingham International Airport, under the options presented in the consultation document, were appraised under two scenarios, the RASCO Reference Case and SERAS, the South East Constrained Case. The figures for Birmingham Airport are as follows.

	2031	*2041*
SERAS		
Max use	21,307,335	22,000,000
Close	33,973,889	34,000,000
Wide	45,000,000	45,000,000
RASCO		
Max use	20,711,392	22,000,000
Close	31,359,223	34,000,000
Wide	36,726,164	45,000,000

Once capacity has been reached, by 2041, the figures remain at these levels up to 2060.

Airports (Homeowner Compensation)

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to compensate homeowners for the loss in value of their homes, should new airports be built. [86165]

Mr. Jamieson: The principal Acts covering compulsory purchase and compensation are the Land Compensation Acts of 1961 and 1973, the Compulsory Purchase Act 1965 and the Acquisition of Land Act 1981.

For people whose property is required to allow for a proposed development, compansation is payable on the basis that they should be no worse off in financial terms after the acquisition that they were before. This means that they receive compensation for the value of their property based on its open market value if there had been no proposal to acquire their property compulsorily plus the reimbursement of any actual costs and losses incurred as a result of having to move.

In addition, both owner-occupiers and tenants who are displaced from their home as a result of a compulsory purchase, and have occupied the property as their main residence for a year or more, will be entitled to a home-loss payment. In the case of tenants this is currently £1,500 while owner-occupiers receive 10 per cent. of the value of their property subject to minimum and maximum thresholds which are currently set at £1,500 and £15,000. However, both the flat rate payable to tenants and the thresholds for owner-occupiers are currently being reviewed, including proposals for increasing the payments above the present £15,000 ceiling. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister published a consultation document about this on 27 September, inviting comments by 6 January 2003.

People whose property does not need to be demolished may be entitled to compensation to cover depreciation in the value of their land due to physical factors caused by the use of a development, such as noise, smell, smoke and fumes. In this case, compensation for the loss in value would be based upon prices current on the first claim day, which is 12 months after the first use of the public works.

In addition to these rules, the consultation on The Future Development of Air Transport in the South East is seeking views on additional mitigation and compensation measures for people who might suffer noise impacts as a result of an airport development option. These measures are outlined in paragraphs 16.49—16.58 of the main consultation document.

Airports Consultation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he will take to ensure that the eventual recommendations for aviation based on Birmingham Airport will be consistent with the Government's policies for protection of the environment *(a)* locally, *(b)* nationally and *(c)* internationally. [86232]

Mr. Jamieson: The challenge for next year's White Paper is to ensure that airport development is sustainable, that is to say that it achieves a proper balance between economic, social and environmental considerations. Delivering any additional airport capacity will be within the framework of local, national and international policies to protect the environment.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made of the number of residents that would be subjected to levels of pollutants above EU limits, were three additional runways to be built at Stansted. [86262]

Mr. Jamieson: As reported in "The Future of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East" (page 70), it is estimated for three new runways at Stansted that no one would be exposed to an exceedence of the limit for PM_{10} ; and that just over 300 people could be exposed to an exceedence of the limit for NO_2 by 2030. It is likely that this impact could in practice be prevented.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessments his Department has made of the viability of an offshore airport. [86263]

Mr. Jamieson: The SERAS Stage 0 (site search) involved identifying potential new sites to serve the South East and East of England. Over 400 new and existing airport sites, including potential offshore sites, were considered. The most promising options were taken forward into the main SERAS study.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the consultancy firms and consultants he is using to collate the responses to the future of air transport consultation; and what steps he took to ensure there were no conflicts of interests on the part of employees of those consultancy firms. [86368]

Mr. Jamieson: The analysis of the consultation responses will be carried out by a team comprising civil servants and retained consultants, including Arups, Avia Solutions, Halcrow and the Route Development Company. This will enable us to draw on a wide range of expertise covering aviation, surface access, safety and environmental issues. We have asked the consultants to identify any areas of work for other clients which relate to the air transport consultation and therefore might be considered a conflict of interest so that we can ensure they are not involved in appraising these responses. They have also been asked to consult us on any future requests to undertake work which might result in a possible conflict.

Aviation Standards

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what changes there have been to the standards for *(a)* noise limits, *(b)* minimum flying heights and *(c)* monitoring of noise levels for aircraft departing (i) Heathrow, (ii) Gatwick and (iii) Stansted airports since December 2000; and what assessment has been made of the effect of the changes. [86106]

Mr. Jamieson: On 18 December 2000 my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) announced new departure noise limits for aircraft departing from Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted and improved noise monitoring arrangements *Official Report* columns 11–12W). In accordance with that decision, the new night-time noise limit of 87 dB A came into effect during the night quota period (2330–0600 hours) from 25 March 2ooi; all other aspects of the decision, including the new daytime (0700–2300 hours) noise limit of 94dBA and the requirement for aircraft to be at a height of 1000 feet aal (above airport level) at 6.5 km from start of roll, came into effect from 25 February 2001.

The noise limits (including the old night-time noise limit of 89 dBA which continues to appiy 2300–2330 and 0600–0700 hours) apply at the fixed noise monitor positions as determined by my hon. friend.

Included in the announcement of 18 December 2000 was the decision to commence a further review of the departure noise limits and associated noise monitors. The technical work is being carried out by the Environmental Research and Consultancy Department (ERCD) of the Civil Aviation Authority. It is examining a method for assessing the effectiveness of the current monitoring arrangements and any possible improvements, as well as the scope for any further reductions in the departure noise limits. Our conclusions on the way forward in the light of that study will be announced in due course.

Central Railways

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce a decision about the report by the Strategic Rail Authority on Central Railways' freight proposal; and if he will make a statement. [86604]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Chorley (Mr Hoyle) on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 455W.

Channel Tunnel Link

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress has been made on the High Speed Channel Tunnel Link between the tunnel entrance and Fawkham Junction; what the expected date is of completion of this section; and when services will begin operating. [86112]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 1 of the CTRL (Channel Tunnel to Fawkham Junction, North Kent) is now over 92 per cent. complete and on target for completion and the start of services by the end of 2003.

Cliffe Airport

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will hold a Cliffe Airport proposal exhibition in Thurrock. [85628]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* I refer my hon. Friend to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Spelthorne (Mr. Wilshire) today (85225).

Crossrail

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the impact of cost inflation within the rail industry on Crossrail; and if he will make a statement. [86594]

Mr. Jamieson: Cross London Rail Links Ltd. (CLRL) has been established jointly by the Strategic Rail Authority and Transport for London to develop proposals for Crossrail. CLRL are currently examining a number of potential routes as well as developing the business case for the project and appraising the economic and other impacts of the options. Cost analysis will form part of this work.

Disabled Access

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many recent representations he has received from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public regarding disabled persons' difficulties in accessing (i) train station platforms and (ii) London Underground platforms. [86517]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Since April this year the representations I have received about the difficulties experienced by disabled people accessing station platforms are as follows:

	From MPs	*From the public*
Train station platforms	5	4
London Underground	0	2

The Strategic Rail Authority's new code of practice is expected to deliver improvements in the design of new stations and refurbishment of existing infrastructure.

Also, railway stations—and other transport infrastructure—are covered by the part III provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act. From 1 October 2004 station operators will have to take reasonable steps to remove, alter or find reasonable ways of avoiding physical features which make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for a disabled person to access the service.

EQUASIS Database

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the role and success of the EQUASIS database in reducing the number of sub-standard ships registered by flag states; and what further action is planned. [86103]

Mr. Jamieson: The EQUASIS database provides the industry with freely accessible safety-related information on the quality of the world's merchant fleet, so answering calls for greater transparency. The database receives approximately 100,000 hits per month.

HQUASIS provides charterers of ships and others in the maritime industry with information on ship quality, so that substandard ships might be avoided. Increased usaec of the information on EQUASIS by the industry should leave operators of substandard ships increasingly marginalised.

Integration of Transport

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what financial support has been provided by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* Transport Direct for schemes relating to the integration of transport for (i) ticketing, (ii) timetabling and (iii) marketing (A) in total and (B) for each scheme supported, for each year since 1997; what the projected support is under the 10-year-plan; and what assessment has been made of the role and success of the schemes. [86084]

Mr. Jamieson: No specific financial support has been provided.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* number of, *(b)* location of and *(c)* number of passengers using each scheme relating to the integration of transport for (i) ticketing, (ii) timetabling and (iii) marketing between modes in each year since 1997. [86085]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not keep a record of individual integration schemes. These are generally the responsibility of transport operators working in co-operation with each other, the SRA and/or local authorities or PTEs.

The Department has encouraged the work of the Journey Solutions organisation to deliver a national integrated rail/bus ticket. The scheme, PlusBus, provides a simple add-on bus option to rail rickets at one or both ends of a train journey. It is currently available at 35 stations across the National Rail network, and will be available at a further 120 stations by May 2003.

Local Authority Ports

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department since 19 January 2001 of the *(a)* safety and maintenance standards and *(b)* works of the local authority ports at (i) Whitby, (ii) Gillingham, (iii) Torquay, (iv) Ramsgate New Port, (v) Sunderland, (vi) Scarborough, (vii) Bristol Royal Docks, (viii) Bridport, (ix) Portsmouth Commercial Port and (x) Weymouth Harbour; what financial support has been provided by the Department in each case; and what improvements have been achieved. [86107]

Mr. Jamieson: Supplementary Credit Approvals (SCA) are available for local authority run ports to help to fund essential safety and maintenance work. The following SCA allocations been made to those listed in the question:

SCA allocations for 2000–01 issued 28 September 2001

£

Port	*SCA*
Whitby	335,000
Gillingham	452,750
Ramsgate New Port	206,250
Sunderland	58,125

SCA allocations for 2000–01 issued 28 September 2001

£

Port	SCA
Scarborough	129,000
Bristol	166,500
Bridport	112,500
Portsmouth Commercial Port	244,625
Weymouth	182,160

Torquay surrendered a £200,000 allocation in 2000–01 as the work planned could not be carried out due to two World War Two embarkation ramps being declared buildings of historic interest (Grade II).

The final total allocation for 2000–01 was approximately £1.88 million.

SCA allocation for 2001–02 issued 30 September 2002

£

Port	SCA
Ramsgate New Port	75,000
Sunderland	7,500
Portsmouth Commercial Port	30,000

SCA Letters of intent for allocation for 2002–03 issued 2 April 2002 (formal allocation to be issued by 30 September 2003)

£

Port	SCA
Ramsgate New Port	262,500
Portsmouth Commercial Port	34,250
Weymouth	8,275

The Department confirms with the ports that the relevant work has been carried out.

Since January 2001 Health and Safety Executive inspectors have visited the ports at Portsmouth, Scarborough, Sunderland, Ramsgate New Port, Torquay, Weymouth and Bristol. These visits were conducted as part of HSE's planned inspection programme, or to investigate accidents or complaints, and not directly related to the SCA funding.

Offshore Oil Industry (Secretary of State's Representative)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 673W, whom he has appointed; what facilities he has at his disposal; and what budget he has. [86233]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is as follows:

(a) The Secretary of State appointed Robin Middleton as Secretary of State's Representative (SOSREP) for salvage and intervention on 4 October 1999.

(b) The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) provide him with an office and administrative support for day to day running. During incidents, specialised offshore counter pollution and salvage equipment is available at the MCA's depots at Milford Haven and Burnt Island.

There are now also four Emergency Towing Vessels stationed all year in strategic locations around the United Kingdom. These are available to be directed by SOSREP. Aerial surveillance can also be provided by the MCA.

(c) SOSREP does not have an individual budget. Funding is provided by the Directorate of Operations at the Maritime and Coastguard Agency in Southampton as necessary.

To date Robin Middleton has been involved in over 261 incidents issuing 29 directions, setting up 17 salvage control units and attending seven national exercises.

PlusBus Scheme

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received on the PlusBus scheme; what support his Department and Transport Direct have provided; what assessment *(a)* has been made and *(b)* is planned of the scheme, and what the expected outcome is. [86083]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department works closely with Journey Solutions (the organisation responsible for the PlusBus scheme). The Department is represented, through the Transport Direct team, on both the Journey Solutions Board and Advisory Panel. Both of these groups have taken a close interest in the PlusBus scheme, offering support where appropriate, and will continue to do so. To date no representations from other organisations or members of the public have been received on the scheme as it was only launched publicly last month.

My Department is currently undertaking research on behalf of Journey Solutions to assess the PlusBus scheme. The research will measure awareness of PlusBus; examine customer satisfaction with the product; critically review each step of the PlusBus journey; test effectiveness of promotional components; confirm target market; and measure impact on travel patterns. The results of this research should be available by mid 2003. The research will contribute to the Department for Transport understanding about multi-modal ticketing—one of the Transport Direct strategic objectives.

PPP

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his Answer of 2nd December, Official Report, column 498W, if he will place in the Library the calculations upon which his long-term grant offer is made. [85742]

Mr. Jamieson: The calculations made as part of our assessment of the amount of freight facilities grant which may be offered in a given case are set out in Annexes A and B to the document "Water Freight Facilities Grant". Copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Primary Rail Routes

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent calculations he has made of the average cost to the passenger per mile of travel on each of the primary rail routes. [85323]

Mr. Jamieson: The most recent research into the average price of fares was carried out for the Strategic Rail Authority by AEA Technology in 2001. It did not include route-specific information. The standard class average fare paid was 13.7 pence per mile.

Railway Rolling Stock

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimates his Department has made of the feasibility of using type 365 rolling stock on railway lines between London, Bishop's Stortford and Cambridge. [86241]

Mr. Jamieson: Services between London Liverpool Street and Cambridge via Bishop's Stortford are currently provided by Class 317 units. The Department is not aware of any plans to use Class 365 units on these services.

Railway Stations

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans there are for increasing capacity at *(a)* Clitheroe and *(b)* Preston railway stations. [85324]

Mr. Jamieson: There are no current plans. However, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) is currently developing a Capacity Utilisation Policy to improve capacity planning and provision across the whole of the rail network.

Road Building Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the value for money to *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the other public funds of road building schemes, including those relating to road improvements and operations, using the design, build, finance and operate contracting method. [86098]

Mr. Jamieson: A value for money assessment is carried out on all Design Build Finance and Operate proposals, whether they are promoted by my Department or by a Local Authority seeking Government assistance for their scheme. This consists of the preparation of a public sector comparator, which broadly involves an estimate of the costs of constructing and maintaining the scheme within the public sector over the same length of a Design Build Finance and Operate contract and comparing this with an estimate of letting a Design Build Finance and Operate contract. The costs of both options are then discounted back to today's prices to ensure that the comparison is on the samebasis.

The following Design Build Finance and Operate schemes were judged to be value for money at contract award.

Schemes promoted by the Highways Agency

M1-A1
A1(M)
A417 A419
M40
A19
A50
A30/A35

Local Authority schemes supported by my Department

A130

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many road building schemes using the design, build, finance and operate contracting method are *(a)* completed and *(b)* under construction; what the estimated cost to public funds is for each project over the lifetime of the DBFO contract; and if he will make a statement. [86100]

Mr. Jamieson: There are nine design build finance and operate schemes of which one is under construction (A130) and eight have been completed. The cost to the public funds over the life (30 years) of the eight completed projects are:

£ million

Project	*Estimated cost*
M1-A1	232
A1(M)	154
A417 A419	112
A69	62
M40	182
A19	136
A50	67
A30/A35	148

The above figures are net present values calculated at an 8 per cent. real discount rate.

The Government are also prepared to consider providing assistance to local authorities to provide roads through a design build finance and operate contract. To date only the A130 road has been procured in this way. That road was constructed in two stages. The first stage has been completed and the second stage is expected to open shortly. The estimated cost to public funds over the life of the project is £105 million at 1997 prices.

School Transport

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what regulations governing the safe transportation of children to and from school on public transport; and if he will make a statement. [86162]

Mr. Jamieson: I would like first of all to express my deepest sympathy to all those bereaved and injured by the tragic accident involving children travelling on a bus in my hon. Friends constituency on 3 December.

There are a number of different regulations governing the standards for buses and coaches which will effect those used for school transport.

(1) The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, as amended. This sets out the legal technical parameters for masses, dimensions, suspension, steering, turning circle requirements and seat belt requirements for the vehicles.

(2) The Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment, Use and Certification) Regulations 1981, as amended. These set out the standards for the likes of seat sizes, gangway sizes, handholds, exits, luggage spaces, step heights etc.

(3) The Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984, as amended. These set the standards for the numbers of passengers that can be carried on bus, the way they are to be marked to show this and where passengers can and cannot stand.

(4) The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989, as amended. Which as well as setting out the requirements for the vehicles external lighting also requires markings to be displayed on the vehicles that are used for carrying children.

(5) The Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) Regulations 1990, as amended. This sets out the requirements for the behaviour of Staff and passengers using buses and coaches.

My Department keeps the regulations referred to above under constant review.

Shipping Criteria

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the level of *(a)* submission and *(b)* publication of self-assessment forms from flag states on shipping criteria and performance indicators; and what action is planned in this area. [86081]

Mr. Jamieson: Forty-nine Member States (including the UK) have so far submitted their completed Self-Assessment Forms to IMO. That is a disappointing rate of return. The UK encourages those Member States that have not yet completed and published their Self-Assessment Forms to do so.

The UK and other Member States have brought to IMO a proposal for the introduction of a voluntary Model Audit Scheme, to assess the effectiveness of Member States' implementation and enforcement of relevant IMO safety and pollution prevention Convention standards.

The UK and other Member States have brought to IMO a proposal for the introduction of a voluntary Model Audit Scheme, to assess the effectiveness of Member States' implementation and enforcement of relevant IMO safety and pollution prevention Convention standards.

Single Hull Tankers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many single hull oil tankers were registered in each flag state in each year since 1990. [86080]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is not held by my Department.

Stingray Mobile Camera System

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cases of vehicle excise duty evasion have been recorded by the Stingray mobile camera system, broken down by region, since its introduction. [85952]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 11 October 2001 (the national launch of the Stingray automatic number plate reader mobile camera system) and 31 October 2002, 17,756 confirmed cases of vehicle excise duty evasion have been recorded by the Stingray systems. It is not possible to give details by region.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what revenue has been generated from enforcement action against vehicle excise duty evasion through detection by the Stingray mobile camera system since October 2001. [85953]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 11 October 2001 (the national launch of the Stingray automatic number plate reader mobile camera system) and 31 October 2002, £2.08 million has been generated from enforcement action against VED evaders caught by the Stingray systems. This includes penalties, fines, court costs and relicensing revenue.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the total running cost for the 11 units of the Stingray mobile camera system since October 2001. [85954]

Mr. Jamieson: Between 11 October 2001 (the national launch of the Stingray ANPR system) and 31 October 2002, the total cost of operating the units was some £1.43 million including publicity.

Supplementary Credit Approvals

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport which local authorities received supplementary credit approvals related to roads maintenance and repair in each financial year since 2000–01; and what the total amount received was in each case for *(a)* flood damage and *(b)* other causes. [86110]

Mr. Jamieson: All local authorities in England (outside London) received capital support in the form of supplementary credit approvals for road maintenance in 2000–01 and 2001–02. Capital support to authorities for road maintenance in 2002–03 is in the form of basic credit approvals except for major maintenance schemes with a gross cost exceeding £5 million. The following four authorities have received supplementary credit approvals in 2002–03 for major maintenance schemes:

Bedfordshire
Halton
Newcastle Upon Tyne
Oldham

The support made available to authorities each year does not separately identify the provision for road maintenance and repair relating to flood damage and to other causes. We separately provided £23 million in 2001–02 in support to the following 22 authorities in England for the repair of roads worst affected by flooding in the previous winter and spring:

Amount in thousands (£000)

Local authority names	*Flood damage 2001–02*
Brighton and Hove	341
Derby	106
Hartlepool	66
Herefordshire	988
Medway	162
Portsmouth	180
Redcar and Cleveland	195

	Amount in thousands (£000)
Local authority names	*Flood damage 2001–02*
Telford and The Wrekin	401
West Berkshire	364
Devon	879
East Sussex	1,656
Gloucestershire	894
Hampshire	5,051
Kent	5,333
North Yorkshire	1,258
Northumberland	100
Shropshire	256
Surrey	1,440
West Sussex	1,684
Wiltshire	930
Oldham	931
LB Richmond	50
Total	23,265

Traveline Website

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the contract to run the traveline website was awarded; to whom it was originally awarded; who holds this contract; what the length and cost of the contracts *(a)* were at the time of award and *(b)* are now; what the terms of reference and expected outputs of the contract were; what assessment has been made of the delivery of the contract; what changes have been made to the original contract; and what further changes are planned. [86091]

Mr. Jamieson: The traveline website is owned by the traveline partners not by the Department for Transport. We are not therefore in a position to comment on the contracts entered into by those bodies.

In 2001 the traveline parties, under the leadership of Buckinghamshire County Council submitted a bid to the then Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions for 58K Supplementary Credit Approval (SCA) to develop the original traveline portal site.

This was supplemented by a grant of 25K during 2002 to extend the traveline portal functionality. This work will be completed in the first quarter of 2003.

The traveline parties have agreed with the owners of a site offering a comprehensive index of public transport information (pti.org.uk) to merge websites and functionality, given the complementary nature of these sites. As part of the merger, the controlling company, pt/ Website Ltd., will include representatives from transport operators and local authorities.

It will be a matter for pt/ Website Ltd. and the various traveline partners nationally to consider how and when to assess the effectiveness of their web services.

Trunk Roads

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trunk road excavations there have been in each Shropshire constituency in each year since 1997, and what the cost was in each case. [85633]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 12 December 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the number and cost of trunk road excavations in each Shropshire constituency since 1997.

From your question, we assume that you are seeking information on utility companies' works (water, gas, electricity, telecommunications, etc.) which involve trunk road excavations. I am afraid historical information of this type is not held centrally in a form that would be readily available.. It would be time consuming and expensive to collect, involving detailed searching through manual records from a number of different sources. That said, since September we have had a new streetworks system in place that will allow us to collect the number of streetworks excavations per utility within a specific area.

I am sorry that I cannot send a more helpful reply. If you consider that the information that we have for the last two months for the trunk roads in Shropshire would be useful, it can be provided. The contact within the Agency is Andrew Slater, he can be contacted at our offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8504.

Waterloo-Exeter Railway Line

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision to award a franchise to South West Trains on the Waterloo to Exeter line on *(a)* track doubling west of Salisbury, *(b)* car parking at Salisbury station and *(c)* the re-opening of Wilton station. [86228]

Mr. Jamieson: Stagecoach's initial proposals for a 20-year franchise—submitted in July 2000—included double tracking of the line and car park expansion at Salisbury, but not the re-opening of Wilton station. The Strategic Rail Authority subsequently proposed to place the Exeter line in the Wessex franchise. Consequently, double tracking of the line and the expansion of car parks were excluded from Stagecoach's Best and Final Offer when submitted to the SRA in November 2000. The new approach to the South West Trains franchise, announced on 6 November 2002, includes the route but excludes infrastructure enhancements. Alternative means of pursuing infrastructure projects are being considered by the Strategic Rail Authority.

West Coast Main Line

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the operation of the franchise for the west coast main line. [85335]

Mr. Jamieson: The main operator of long distance rail services on the west coast main line is Virgin trains. The Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) manages this rail franchise, and all of the other rail franchises. The SRA is working with Virgin trains to ensure that an appropriate level of service is provided while the major up-grade of the west coast main line is in progress.

DEFENCE

Airbus 400

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence by how much, and by what percentage, the unit

costs of each Airbus 400 ordered for the RAF will change as a result of Germany's decision to reduce its Airbus 400 order. [86381]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* We welcome the official announcement from the German Government concerning its participation in the A400M programme with an off take of 60 aircraft.

The cost impact, if any, of the reduction in German off take will be determined through negotiation with the prime contractor, Airbus Military. We will clearly hope to minimise any price increase to the United Kingdom.

Aircrew

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many aircrew in the United Kingdom forces were born in Scotland; how many are pilots of *(a)* combat aircraft, *(b)* transport aircraft and *(c)* helicopters, in each arm of the service; and how many are other aircrew by (i) arm of service and (ii) function. [85999]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Apache

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 171W, on the Apache, what assessment he has made of the cost of upgrading the Apache's night vision system. [85379]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The cost of a possible enhanced night vision system for Apache has yet to be fully established.

Atomic Weapons Establishments

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed by the Atomic Weapons Establishments at *(a)* Aldermaston, *(b)* Burghfield and *(c)* Blacknest. [86064]

Dr. Moonie: As at 29 November 2002, the number of people employed at each of the Atomic Weapons Establishments (AWE) in the United Kingdom was as follows:

	Number
AWE Aldermaston	3,190
AWE Burghfield	317
AWE Blacknest	8
Total	3,515

The figures quoted are staff, both full and part-time, employed by AWE plc.

Barracks (Infantry)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans exist to increase barrack accommodation in Scotland for infantry units; and at what locations. [86009]

Dr. Moonie: Major Army Infantry units are currently based at three locations in Scotland, detailed in the following table. We have no plans to increase accommodation for infantry units in those locations. The former Army Training and Recruitment site at Glencorse, near Penicuik, will, however, be occupied by an infantry battalion in the future.

Unit	*Location*
1st Battalion The Royal Highland Fusiliers	Fort George, Inverness
1st Battalion The Royal Scots	Dreghorn Barracks, Edinburgh
1st Battalion The Highlanders	Redford Infantry Barracks, Edinburgh

Challenger 2 Tanks

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the Challenger 2 Main Battle Tank; and when desert modifications will be complete. [85664]

Mr. Hoon: Challenger 2 is a world class tank. In 1999 it exceeded very demanding reliability targets during a series of rigorous trials which tested the performance of the tank under simulated battlefield conditions. It has also given excellent service in Kosovo and Bosnia.

The Ministry of Defence expects that a range of measures identified to improve Challenger 2 performance in desert conditions will be completed in good time for any possible future operations.

Combat Assault Boot

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column 473W, what steps he has taken to discover whether individual soldiers have failed to be issued with the combat assault boot because of recent production difficulties. [86690]

Dr. Moonie: There have been no reports of soldiers being without a pair of serviceable combat assault boots. If there were a shortage, units would report the problem and action would then be taken to resolve the issue. Moreover we have made positive checks with the chain of command who have found no evidence of soldiers being without boots. We have a system whereby orders are prioritised to ensure that all urgent demands are met. All such demands for combat assault boots are being met.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) pursuant to his answer of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 473W on the combat assault boot which company manufactures the combat assault boot and where they are based; how many soldiers are issued with the combat assault boot; how many pairs are issued each year to each soldier; what representations he has received from individual units about the shortage of combat assault boots; and whether combat assault boots are issued to Royal Navy and RAF personnel; [86743]

(2) if he will make a statement on the *(a)* production and *(b)* availability of the combat assault boot. [86689]

Dr. Moonie: UK Safety, based in the United Kingdom, are the main manufacturer of the Combat Assault Boot (CAB). Iturri, based in Spain, also supply a relatively small number of boots. UK Safety relocated within the UK earlier this year and experienced some initial difficulties with production.

Every soldier is issued with two pairs of CAB during basic training and these are replaced as and when necessary through Unit Quartermasters. As explained in my answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 473W 79,000 pairs of CAB were issued to Army Units for the year 1 November 2001 to 31 October 2002. We have not received any representations from units about shortages of CAB. No serviceman should be without at least one pair of serviceable CAB.

All Royal Navy and Royal Air Force (RAF) personnel are issued with one pair of CAB, the exception being RAF Regiment and Royal Marines personnel who are issued with two pairs on the same basis as soldiers.

Contracts (Foreign Companies)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of work he requires to be carried out in the UK on contracts awarded to foreign companies. [85427]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* It is the Government's policy to provide the armed forces with the equipment which they require at the best value for money for the taxpayer. Contracts are negotiated on an individual basis and there is no policy requirement for a particular percentage of work to be undertaken in the United Kingdom. However, as stated in our new defence industrial policy published on 14 October, the benefit to the UK economy from Ministry of Defence contracts is taken into account when selecting contractors. A copy of the Government's defence industrial policy is in the Library of the House.

Defence Staff

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the *(a)* British Forces Post Office, *(b)* Central Data Management Agency, *(c)* Defence Analytical Services Agency, *(d)* Defence Aviation Repair Agency, *(e)* Defence Bills Agency, *(f)* Defence Estates, *(g)* Defence Export Services Organisation, *(h)* Defence Procurement Agency, *(i)* Defence Scientific and Technical Laboratory, *(j)* International Visits Control Office, *(k)* Meteorological Offices, *(l)* Ministry of Defence Police, *(m)* Defence Scientific Advisory Council *(n)* Disposal Service Agency, and *(o)* Hydrographic Office; how many are employed in Scotland in each case; and what the personnel costs of each agency are. [85997]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civil and *(b)* military personnel are employed at (i) the Clyde Submarine Base, Faslane and (ii) the Royal Naval Armaments Deport, Coulport. [86001]

Dr. Moonie: The number of civilian and military personnel employed at HMNB Clyde and RNAD Coulport, including Ministry of Defence civilian and military personnel and employees of Babcock Naval Services, the industrial partner, but excluding crews on ships and submarines visiting or undergoing maintenance at these bases is:

	Civilian	*Military*
HMNB Clyde	3,042	1,677
RNAD Coulport	655	55

DERA

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the *(a)* total staff budget for DERA and *(b)* the staff budget for DERA in Scotland was in the last year for which figures are available. [86007]

Dr. Moonie: DERA was disestablished on 1 July 2001, when two new organisations, QinetiQ and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), were created. QinetiQ is a plc, and all operational inquiries should be addressed to the Chief Executive. Dstl remains a part of the Ministry of Defence. For the financial year 2001–02, Dstl's total staff budget was £118.3 million. It is not possible to separate out the costs for the 52 employees based in Scotland as these individuals belong to a number of larger cost centre groups.

Dockyard Personnel

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military personnel are employed at (i) the Dockyard, Rosyth and (ii) the Royal Dockyard, Devonport. [86063]

Dr. Moonie: The number of civilian and military personnel employed at the Royal Dockyards in Rosyth and Devonport is:

	Civilian	*Military*
Rosyth	2,205	10
Devonport	5,954	1,048

The totals include employees of the privately owned Rosyth and Devonport Dockyards and also Ministry of Defence civilian employees and military staff at both Rosyth and the Devonport Naval Base, which is adjacent to Devonport Dockyard. These figures exclude crews on ships and submarines visiting or undergoing maintenance work at the bases.

Foxhunting

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will publish the terms of the licence under which fox hunting occurs on his Department's land. [86609]

Dr. Moonie: A copy of the current licence will be placed in the Library of the House.

Future Carriers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of steel required for the future carriers will be produced in the UK. [84087]

Dr. Moonie: This will be a matter for the Prime Contractor when selected.

Guards Battalions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many trained officers and soldiers serve in the Guards battalions, broken down by nationality; [86003]

(2) what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* current strength is of each of the regular Scottish infantry battalions; and if he will list each element of company strength serving in them; [85998]

(3) what the *(a)* establishment and *(b)* the current strengths is of each of the regiments in the Foot Guards; and if he will list each element of company strength serving with them, indicating where each battalion has soldiers attached to it from another battalion, which battalion they are from and in what numbers. [86004]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

International Defence Projects

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list aborted international defence projects to which the United Kingdom has subscribed development costs since 1997; what the cost was to the United Kingdom of each; and who the partner nations were. [86379]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

MOD Staff (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the Department's civilian jobs are in Scotland, broken down by location. [86000]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is set out in the following table showing the position as at 1 October 2002.

MOD civilian strengths for staff serving in Scotland by county as at 1 October2002

Scottish county	*FTE strength*
Borders	2
Central	321
Dumfries	32
Fife	964
Grampian	871
Highland	75
Lothian	581
Shetland IS.	31
Strathclyde	5,059
Tayside	504
Western IS.	4
Total	8,444

Notes:
1. Figures include full time equivalent values for part timers.
2. Figures are individually rounded and may not sum precisely to the totals shown.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff are employed in Scotland by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* executive agencies responsible to his Department; where these staff are located; and how many staff are employed in (i) England, (ii) London and the South East, (iii) Wales, (iv) Northern Ireland and (v) the United Kingdom. [86002]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is set out in the following tables showing the position as at 1 October 2002.

MOD civilian strengths by requested Government Office Region as at 1 October 2002

(FTE)

	MOD (excluding agencies)	*Executive agencies*	*Total*
Borders	1	1	2
Central	132	189	321
Dumfries	25	7	32
Fife	526	439	964
Grampian	728	144	871
Highland	41	34	75
Lothian	448	133	581
Shetland IS.	20	11	31
Strathclyde	1,054	4,005	5,059
Tayside	174	330	504
Western IS.	—	4	4
Total	3,148	5,296	8,444

Notes:
1. Figures include full time equivalent values for part timers.
2. Figures are individually rounded and may not sum precisely to the totals shown.

MOD civilian strengths by requested Government Office Region as at 1 October 2002

(FTE)

Specified locations	*Strengths*
London and the South East	25,008
England	66,665
Wales	4,224
Northern Ireland	3,221
United Kingdom	82,554

Notes:
1. Figures include full time equivalent values for part timers.
2. Figures are individually rounded and may not sum precisely to the totals shown.
3. Figures in the breakdown exclude 2,348 MOD civilian staff for whom allocation to a specific region is not possible.

Nimrod MRA4

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the Nimrod MRA4 to enter service; and what delays have been encountered with this project. [85454]

Dr. Moonie: The current contract requirement for the first aircraft to be delivered into service is August 2004 and the In-Service Date requirement of seven aircraft is March 2005. The current contract dates result from the contract re-negotiation that took place in

1999, following technical and programme difficulties encountered by BAE Systems in meeting the original contract placed in 1996.

More recently, BAE Systems have acknowledged a delay in the programme for the first flight of Nimrod MRA4. This delay has been caused by a combination of factors arising from the challenging concurrent engineering and parallel working on this highly complex aircraft. The consequences of first flight slippage are being urgently examined, jointly, by the Company and the Department. The results of this work so far indicate that first flight is unlikely before the second half of 2003 and we continue to examine the consequences this may have on ISD. Until this work is completed, it would be premature to speculate on the impact of this slippage on the timescale for the entry into service of Nimrod MRA4.

RAF Lynham

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his latest estimate is of the recent possession valuation of the RAF Lyneham site after contamination re-evaluation. [85183]

Dr. Moonie: No decision has yet been taken on the future role of RAF Lyneham. Were the site to be surplus to Ministry of Defence requirements, and to be sold for agricultural use, the estate has been estimated to be worth £11.25 million. This includes an estimation of remediation cost of £0.75 million.

Smallpox

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what training and exercises have been carried out to prepare for the deployment of the armed forces in the event of an outbreak of smallpox; and if he will make a statement. [85890]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The armed forces are not responsible for dealing with an outbreak of smallpox. The Department of Health would take the lead and could, if appropriate, call upon the limited skills of the armed forces. These skills are subject to constant refinement through training and exercises.

Details of the response to a smallpox outbreak are available on the DoH website at www. doh. gov.uk/ epcu/cbr/biol/smallpoxplan.htm.

Weapons Training

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military *(a)* units and *(b)* personnel are trained to deal with nuclear, chemical or biological incidents within the UK. [84529]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The United Kingdom has a capability, involving the emergency services and a number of Government Departments and agencies, to make safe terrorist chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) devices. The Ministry of Defence and the armed forces would contribute to the response with personnel and equipment from a number of units based in the UK and available to respond at very short notice. I am withholding precise details of the number of units and personnel in accordance with Exemption 1a of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Beyond this, all armed forces personnel are given basic training to protect themselves in a nuclear, biological or chemical (NBC) environment. The Joint NBC Regiment receives specialist training. It is configured for military operations (primarily overseas) but could provide assistance to the civil power in the UK if appropriate and if not already deployed.

The Civil Contingencies Reaction Forces announced earlier this year will also be equipped and trained to protect themselves in a CBRN environment if called upon to assist the civil power during an incident in the UK.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Clean Water

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the assistance given by her Department to increase the provision of clean water to *(a)* Zambia, *(b)* Lesotho, *(c)* Mozambique, *(d)* Zimbabwe, *(e)* Swaziland and *(d)* Botswana. [85644]

Clare Short: In Zambia, DFID is providing basic infrastructure and other services, including water supply systems and sanitation improvements, in urban areas of Lusaka and Livingstone. So far, 420,000 urban and peri-urban poor have improved their livelihoods as a result of the project.

In Lesotho, our current support is focused on their Poverty Reduction Strategy, which includes the water sector within a comprehensive approach to planning government and donor spending.

In Mozambique, DFID is providing £3.8 million through UNICEF to a Rural Water Supply and Sanitation project in Zambezia Province in Northern Mozambique. The expected outcome is to develop and implement a Provincial Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Master Plan. This will include affordable water and sanitation options for poor communities. It will prioritise under-served geographical areas and will operate in partnership with the Provincial Government.

In Zimbabwe, DFID's programme is focused on the humanitarian crisis but we spent £8 million in the late 1990s on helping to develop national water policy, and assisting the implementation of the Integrated Rural Water and Sanitation Programme in Bikita and Lupane Districts.

In Swaziland, DFID has provided £1.98 million, with matched funding by the Government of Swaziland, for a three year rural water supply programme building the capacity of rural communities to manage their water supply systems. Consideration is also being given to some funding for school water supplies as part of the current emergency relief programme.

In Botswana we are only indirectly involved in rural water supply, through a £2 million contribution to the Government's recently approved Sustainable Rural Livelihoods Programme, intended to support a broad range of initiatives having an impact on rural poverty.

DFID is also supporting the water sector in southern Africa through regional initiatives, including £0.9 million of support to the regional office of the Global Water Partnership, and have made provision for £ 2.0 million to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) aimed at both capacity building and support for specific pro-poor projects in the water sector.

Development Education

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Department for Education and Skills regarding the inclusion of development education in the National Curriculum. [85744]

Clare Short: There has been frequent contact over the last four years with the Department for Education and Skills regarding the inclusion of development and the global dimension in the subjects taught under the national Curriculum. These discussions led, among other things, to the production of a joint DFID and DfES booklet "Developing a global dimension in the school curriculum"; the ongoing production of guidance to teachers on how to bring the global dimension into specific subjects; and the inclusion of developing countries in the Teachers International Development Programme.

Ethiopia

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial contribution has been made by *(a)* the UK Government and *(b)* the EU to (i) the WFP's appeal for Ethiopia and (ii) the Government of Ethiopia to address the food shortages. [85631]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Meriden on 25 November. *Official Report*, column 29—30W.

Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in the research and development of new vaccines for developing countries under GAVI; and if she will list research programmes funded under GAVI. [85745]

Clare Short: GAVI was designed to support research and development (R&D) of new vaccines relevant to developing countries. The first phase of its work was to identify candidate vaccines and stimulate research and innovation, which complemented existing research.

Two potential vaccines, both of which are at an advanced stage of development, were selected for support: against rotavirus (the most common cause of severe dehydrating diarrhoea among children) and pneumococcal disease (a cause of pneumonia and meningitis).

GAVI has also developed the concept of Accelerated Development and Introduction Plans (ADIPs), which will manage the support to each vaccine and aim to help demonstrate its efficacy, safety and cost effectiveness, encourage uptake and support its introduction. Competitive bids to run the ADIPs for rotavirus and pneumococcal vaccine were requested and proposals were submitted in October 2002. The GAVI board is now in the process of deciding how to respond to these bids. Once the ADIP contracts are awarded then the support to R&D will start.

Global Fund

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department has contributed to the Global Fund to fight Aids, TB and Malaria in 2002; and how much she plans to contribute in 2003. [86242]

Clare Short: My Department pledged £138 million to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) over five years. Contributions for calendar year 2002 will be £50 million. £25 million was paid in April 2002 and a further £25 million will be paid in December 2002. As the fund gets established, we will closely monitor its effectiveness and the value it adds to the international effort against the three diseases, and review our contributions accordingly. A further £25 million will be contributed in calendar year 2003, depending on performance.

Global Health Fund (Grants)

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the grants allocated by the Global Health Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria have been for *(a)* HIV prevention and *(b)* the provision of anti-retroviral drugs. [85746]

Clare Short: Under the first round of applications to the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM) US$ 616 million was approved and committed for the first two years. Nearly 70 per cent. of these resources are for HIV/AIDS programmes.

Of the 28 countries with approved HIV/AIDS proposals from the first round, 20—over 70 per cent.—include some money for highly active anti retro viral therapy (HAART). The first round proposal form did not request specific data from applicants on how much money would be expended on antiretrovirals. However, the Fund estimates that approximately 20 per cent. of money from the first round was allocated to the provision of drugs (some of which will be for antiretrovirals), and 20 per cent. on commodities (some of which will be for HIVprevention).

Rape (Democratic Republic of Congo)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to *(a)* reduce incidents of rape and *(b)* provide support for rape victims in the Democratic Republic of Congo. [85880]

Clare Short: We are extremely concerned about the levels rape and violence to which women in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) are subjected.

Through our Embassies in Kinshasa and Kigali, and through direct contact with local authorities when visiting the East, the UK Government raised the urgent need to address these issues with representatives from all sides including the RCD and Rwandan authorities. We are establishing a DFID office in Kinshasa from December 2002 and will be better placed to raise issues with relevant authorities in government held areas. We also support a number of civil society organisations, including International Alert and local rights organisations, that are working in eastern DRC to monitor and raise rights abuses with authorities, as well as providing some limited support to women victims.

Rwanda

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much financial support the United Kingdom Government has given to *(a)* the International Criminal Tribunal Court and *(b)* the establishment of Gachacha community courts in Rwanda in *(i)* 2001 and (ii) 2002. [85743]

Clare Short: The United Kingdom provides support to the UN International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) through assessed annual contributions made by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office from the Conflict Prevention Pool. The UK share of the budget was £3.475 million in 2001 and £3.782 million in 2002. The United Kingdom has not so far provided any direct support to the establishment of Gacaca community courts in Rwanda. DFID has however provided substantial direct budgetary support to the Government of Rwanda amounting to £18 million in 2001–02 and 22 million in 2002–03. The Government of Rwanda can allocate these funds to finance priority activities such as Gacaca in accordance with their national poverty reduction and reconciliation objectives. DFID representatives in Kigali participate in donor coordination mechanisms related to Gacaca. We are reviewing options for possible support to the Gacaca process in 2003

Sexual Abuse (Zimbabwe)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made in *(a)* investigating allegations and *(b)* reducing incidents of sexual abuse in the Tongogara refugee camp in Zimbabwe. [85881]

Clare Short: The country representative of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, together with the Zimbabwean authorities, have completed their investigation. Both parties have implemented a number of measures to address the problems found. Two non-governmental organisation staff have been dismissed, and the number of personnel working in the camp has been increased. There is now a greater 24-hour presence, including Police officers and women personnel. UNHCR's office has also been strengthened to ensure on-going monitoring of the work of NGO partners implementing support programmes for the refugees.

WALES

Coalfields Regeneration Trust

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what sum is paid to Wales under the Coalfields Regeneration Trust; and what the budget is for England and Wales. [84190]

Mr. Touhig: The total budget of the Coalfields Regeneration Trust to fund regeneration projects in coalfield (and former coalfield) communities across England, Scotland and Wales is £50 million over three years from its launch in late 1999. Wales' allocation is £3.462 million.

Pay Differential

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will make a statement on the pay differential between Wales and the rest of the UK in the last 12 months. [82200]

Peter Hain: Based on the latest figures available (from the New Earnings Survey, April 2001—April 2002), the average personal salary in Wales is £20,784.40 (£399.70 p.w). The Office for National Statistics publishes figures for GB rather than the UK. The corresponding figure for GB as a whole is £24,164.40 (464.70 p/w). Expressed as a differential, the average Welsh salary is 13.99 per cent. lower than the average salary for GB as a whole.

Salaries

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the average personal salary is in *(a)* Wales and *(b)* the rest of the United Kingdom. [82375]

Peter Hain: Based on the latest figures available (from the New Earnings Survey, April 2001—April 2002), the average personal salary in Wales is £20,784.40 (£399.70 pw). The Office for National Statistics publishes figures for GB as opposed to the UK. The equivalent figure for GB as a whole is £24,164.40 (£464.70p/w).

HOME DEPARTMENT

Accommodation Centres

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement about his powers *(a)* to make proposals for and *(b)* to select sites for an accommodation centre, with special reference to the provisions of part 2 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002. [85452]

Beverley Hughes: Section 16 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 gives the Secretary of State power to arrange for the provision of premises for the accommodation of persons in accordance with part 2 of that Act. Nothing in part 2 of the Act limits the discretion of the Secretary of State in respect of the proposed sites for accommodation centres or in respect of which sites he may decide to submit planning notifications.

Animal Experiments

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what animal experiments licensed by the Home Office have involved the feeding of genetically modified crop plants to farm animals and poultry since 1997; when the experiments took place and how many animals were involved; which genetically modified crops were used in the experiments; how long the experiments lasted; what their respective completion dates were; what their reference numbers were; and which experiments received public funding. [85070]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: A small number of studies looking at the nutritional value and safety of some genetically modified food-stuffs have been licensed by the Home Office under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986. However, it is not departmental policy to give details which could identify where and by whom work licensed under the 1986 Act is undertaken. Other information requested is not readily available from departmental records and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Anti-social Behaviour

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action is being taken to tackle anti-social behaviour. [82977]

Mr. Denham: We have already introduced measures to tackle anti-social behaviour including changes to increase the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) in the Police Reform Act 2002. We have increased police capacity by creating and funding community support officers and strengthening the powers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices. We will build on this through the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill.

The Queen's speech outlined a new drive to tackle Anti-Social Behaviour—we will be producing a White Paper in the New Year and a bill to reinforce this drive.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what forecasts have been made of the likely impact of new *(a)* licensing and *(b)* anti-social behaviour provisions in (i) the North West, and (ii) Burnley; and if he will make a statement. [83416]

Mr. Denham: The Licensing Bill, introduced to the House of Lords on 14 November, was accompanied by a Regulatory Impact Assessment, and has been deposited in the Library. The expected impacts include reductions in binge drinking prior to fixed closing times and related drunkenness in the streets. A more gradual dispersal of consumers should also lead to a decrease in reports of nuisance and noise. We believe that these provisions will benefit people throughout the country.

The Anti-Social Behaviour Bill will build on existing provisions and fill gaps, where appropriate, to tackle anti-social behaviour—wherever it occurs.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the prevalence of anti-social behaviour; and if he will make a statement. [83677]

Mr. Denham: The prevalence of anti-social behaviour is assessed using information from the British Crime Survey, which provides a measure of the public's perception of the level of disorder and anti-social behaviour in their area. The survey asks about problems caused by noisy neighbours or loud parties, teenagers hanging around on the streets, rubbish or litter lying around, vandalism and graffiti, racial attacks, drug dealing and people being drunk or rowdy.

Asylum Seeker Housing

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his reply of 3 December 2002, (ref 84175) on asylum seekers, how many asylum seekers have been housed by Clearsprings Management Ltd., broken down by local authority area; what fees have been paid per asylum seeker for their housing broken down by local authority; and what other contracted services Clearsprings Management Ltd. provides for his Department. [86208]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) has only one contract with Clearsprings Management Ltd. to provide accommodation for destitute asylum seekers. I am unable to give details about payments to Clearsprings under the terms of this contract since this information is commercial in confidence.

Statistics are currently not available on the number of asylum seekers placed by NASS in accommodation owned by individual accommodation providers. To provide these figures would involve a disproportionate cost.

Benefits Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the implications for *(a)* patterns and *(b)* levels of crime of the phased withdrawal of payable order books for payment of social security benefits, with particular reference to sources of finance for the purchase of illegal drugs. [84401]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*: The Home Office has not made any assessment of the implications for patterns and levels of crime associated with this proposal. I understand that the Department for Work and Pensions monitors claims activity to inform counter-fraud activity and will look for any changes in patterns of behaviour during the rollout to direct payment.

Burrell Case

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 98W, regarding the Burrell Case, when he was informed that the trial would collapse. [84621]

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary and Attorney General keep in close contact on a range of matters. This issue came up in the course of that regular contact.

Chelmsford Prison

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the approved number of places is at Chelmsford Prison; and how many prisoners are housed there; [86508]

(2) what proposals he has to provide additional prison places in Essex. [86509]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* There are no immediate plans to build a new prison in Essex, or to increase the number of prison places in existing prisons in the area. The Prison Service is continually reviewing its estate, and it may be that such plans are considered at a future date.

On 29 November 2002, the operational capacity of Chelmsford Prison was 576. On the same day, the total population at the prison was 567.

Correspondence

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Edinburgh, West of 5 November 2002, regarding airport security; and for what reason his reply has been delayed. [85875]

Mr. Denham: The hon. Member's letter was received in the Home Office on 19 November 2002. The correspondence was transferred to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport (Alistair Darling) on 4 December 2002, who will be replying shortly.

Criminal Injuries Compensation

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what percentage of criminal injuries compensation budget for 2002–03 was allocated in the first six months of the financial year. [86163]

Hilary Benn: 51 per cent.

Criminal Justice

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to publish *(a)* Criminal Statistics England and Wales 2001 and *(b)* Prison Statistics England and Wales 2002. [84310]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* It is proposed to publish Criminal Statistics, England and Wales 2001 on 12 December

Prison Statistics for England and Wales 2002 is planned for publication in 2003.

Criminal Records Bureau

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in which Indian cities the outsource of personnel of the Criminal Records Bureau is located. [84922]

Hilary Benn: There are no Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) personnel located in India. However, some data processing work relating to CRB disclosure applications has been outsourced by Capita to Hayes Plc and is undertaken at a site in Chennai, formerly known as Madras.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he last discussed with the Chief Executive of the Criminal Records Bureau the performance of the Bureau; and if he will make a statement. [86059]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* My noble Friend, Lord Falconer of Thoroton, holds weekly meetings with the Chief Executive of the Criminal Records Bureau to discuss the operational performance of the Bureau. In addition to these meetings, the Chief Executive also provides Ministers with both weekly and monthly reports detailing the current operational situation.

Custody Plus

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the cost of *(a)* introducing and *(b)* running the custody plus scheme. [84308]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The majority of the costs for implementing custody plus (both the costs of introducing the new sentence and of running it thereafter) fall on the Probation Service who need to build up capacity to manage an increased case load of approximately 50,000 per annum as a result of this new sentence. Current estimates are that an additional £19 million, £70 million, £136 million, £175 million, £186 million and £194 million for the financial years 2003–04, 2004–05, 2005–06, 2006–07, 2007–08 and 2008–09 respectively will be needed for the Probation Service to implement all the sentencing provisions in the Bill. Costs are expected to be in the order of £194 million annually thereafter.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on the prevalence of domestic violence within different categories of family configuration and marital status; [83856]

(2) what research into the prevalence of domestic violence has been funded by central government in the last five years; and which of these studies break down their results by *(a)* family configuration and *(b)* marital status. [83857]

Mr. Denham: The British Crime Survey (BCS) provides overall trend information on the number of incidents of domestic violence. The BCS figures are derived from a sample and so are subject to sampling error. Moreover, the BCS is carried out by face-to-face interviews and some respondents may be unwilling to reveal experience of domestic violence to interviewers. Copies of the BCS are available in the Library.

However, the 1996 BCS included a self-completion component on domestic violence to encourage disclosure. Results from this were published in Home Office Research Study No.191—copies are available in the Library. This more confidential approach to measurement revealed that the proportion of women who were victims of domestic assault in the preceding year was over three times higher than in the main BCS. This study also has information on the marital status of victims (page 29), and whether there are children in the household (page 32).

In addition, BCS interviews conducted in the 2001–02 financial year provide the following information (from face-to-face interviews).

Living arrangements	*Percentage of respondents*[1]
Married	0.2
Cohabiting	0.7
Single	1.3
Separated	4.4
Divorced	1.0
Widowed	0.2
Head of household under 60	
Single adult and child(ren)	3.8
Adults and child(ren)	0.7
No children	0.6
Head of household over 60	0.1
All adults	0.6

[1] Who were victims of domestic violence once or more

The 2001 BCS also contained an interpersonal violence self-completion module designed to estimate the extent of domestic violence, sexual victimisation and stalking. The module included questions on the marital status of victims and the family configuration. Results are expected to be published in Summer 2003,

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what statistics regarding domestic violence are tracked at UK level. [85311]

Mr. Denham: Domestic violence is not separately identified in recorded crime statistics collected by the Home Office. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) has collected information from police forces on the number of reported incidents of partner-on-partner violence since 1993. The British Crime Survey (BCS) can provide information on the number of incidents of domestic violence against women and men. The Home Office also collects information on all homicides, which can identify the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if there is a standard model for the role of domestic violence officer in the UK. [85315]

Mr. Denham: There is currently no standard role for domestic violence (DV) officer in the UK. Home Office Circular 60/1990 emphasised the need for the establishment of dedicated units or specialist officers to deal with DV incidents. "Policing domestic violence — a modular training programme", a national training product developed by Centrex and issued in November 2003, will provide a structured but flexible approach to the delivery of domestic violence training within the police service including to domestic violence officers.

Drugscope

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much central government funding was provided to Drugscope in each of the last five years. [85097]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Drugscope and its predecessor organisations the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse and the Institute for the Study of Drug Dependency received the following funds from the Home Office, Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

	£
1998–99	774,000
1999–2000	1,287,322
2000–01	1,215,188
2001–02	1,092,990
2002–03	706,511

2002–03 figures relate to spend to date and known commitments and may not reflect accurately the final outturn figure.

These figures are based upon information available from departmental accounting systems and do not include all payments for consultancy work.

In addition, Drugscope was also successful in securing £76,294 over the two years 2002–03 and 2003–04 from the Recovered Assets Fund.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what responsibilities he has for emergency planning and the co-ordination of the work of emergency planning authorities; and how his exercise of such responsibilities in London differs from that elsewhere in *(a)* England and *(b)* the UK. [84605]

Mr. Denham: As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister (Mr. Blair) made clear to the House on 20 November, my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary (Mr. Blunkett) has responsibility for ensuring effective arrangements are in place to co-ordinate the Government's response to major emergencies.

The Home Secretary chairs three Cabinet Committees which co-ordinate this work: DOP (IT) (T) which oversees the work to strengthen the UK's defences against terrorism, DOP (IT) (R) which works to build the UK's resilience and ability to manage the consequences of major emergencies; and the Civil Contingencies Committee which meets to oversee lead department's management of major emergencies and manage their wider effects. The devolved Administrations are represented on the relevant committees.

The Cabinet Office provide the Home Secretary with direct support headed at official level by Sir David Omand, who is the Permanent Secretary in charge of security and intelligence co-ordination. All Departments have a responsibility to plan, prepare, train and exercise for handling major incidents and emergencies that might occur within their field of responsibility. It is their Ministers' responsibility to ensure that they are ready to take the leading role on behalf of central Government in managing the initial response to a major emergency, mitigating its immediate effects, and organising the development of a recovery plan.

My right hon. Friend, the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Prescott) is replying to you on his responsibilities in this area, and on the specific arrangements for London. My right hon. Noble Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Lord McDonald) has responsibility for the work of the Civil Contingencies Secretariat, including the payment of the Civil Defence Grant.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local agreements have been established between fire authorities and health authorities at local level in relation to the handling of an NBC attack. [85424]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* A national Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between Her Majesty's Fire Service Inspectorate and the Department of Health for the mass decontamination of casualties following a chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear incident was drawn up in December 2001. The MoU is intended to provide a national framework for locally agreed plans and procedures for mass decontamination.

Agreements have already been established to cover the fire authorities in 19 of the 28 strategic health authorities in England. In all other areas, agreements are being finalised for adoption.

The Devolved Administrations have adopted the approach of agreeing a single Memorandum of Understanding to cover all fire and health authorities.

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on how many occasions Ministers have met under his chairmanship in the past six months to discuss civil protection. [85426]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* In line with Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, information on the proceedings of Cabinet and Cabinet Committees is not disclosed. However, my right hon. Friend, the Home Secretary, has regular contact with his colleagues in relation to his responsibilities for counter terrorism and civil contingency.

Entertainment Venues

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in developing arrangements under which entertainment venues would contribute to the policing and public order costs arising from their activities. [85072]

Mr. Denham: We have set up a working group, comprising representatives of the Home Office, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, the association of Chief Police Officers and the football authorities, to consider a range of strategic football issues, including police charging policy in connection with matches, and the investment of football clubs in the wider community.

The Government is also concerned at the costs incurred in policing entertainment venues, particularly pubs and clubs which operate late into the night and major events such as sporting and outdoor entertainment. We welcome schemes where entertainment outlets contribute to the additional policing costs associated with alcohol related disturbance.

Exceptional Leave to Remain

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on his policy regarding exceptional leave to remain. [85524]

Beverley Hughes: Our policy is to give protection to those people who need it. However exceptional leave has acted as a pull factor for people to come to the United Kingdom in the belief that they will be given exceptional leave if their asylum claim is refused.

We have decided to tighten up the basis on which leave will be granted to those who have been refused asylum. The current exceptional leave provisions will be replaced by a new form of "Humanitarian Protection" which will offer protection to those who have protection needs but are not covered by the 1951 Convention.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of police officers who will be removed from normal duties to escort Green Goddesses during the duration of the firefighters' strike; and what estimate he has made of the cost to police authorities of this additional responsibility in terms of overtime, cancelled rest days and non-availability for routine activity. [81666]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* I understand from the Association of Chief Police Officers that between 5,000–6,000 police officers, mostly working rest days, were used per day to escort Green Goddesses and staff control rooms during the firefighters dispute.

I have been advised by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) that it is very difficult to predict exactly what the final cost to police authorities of supporting emergency fire cover will be, as this will depend on the nature of the strike activity.

Immigration

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for permanent leave to remain have been made since January; how many were made in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2000; what the average waiting time is to determine applications for permanent leave to remain; what the waiting time was in December (i) 2001 and (ii) 2000; what estimate he has made of how many extra staff would be needed to reduce the waiting time to three months; and if he will make it his policy that supporting documentation is copied upon receipt of the application and returned to the applicant while waiting for determination. [85751]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available information on the number of people granted settlement (permanent leave to remain) is as follows. Information on the number of applications made for settlement is not available.

(a) 106,820 granted settlement in 2001; and

(b) 125,090 granted settlement in 2000.

There are no published data on decision times to determine applications for settlement. Our aim is to screen all postal applications within three weeks. Most applications (i.e. those which are straightforward) are decided on an initial screening. Due to a busy period for immigration applications between September and November, the initial screening of new applications is at present taking up to eight weeks on average. We are

working to reduce this to three weeks or less, but are unlikely to achieve that for the next two to three months because of the exceptionally high intake. Because of the high number of applications, some which need further inquiries or more detailed consideration can take over 12 months to decide. Information on general processing times for applications is provided to applicants on the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) website at www.ind.homeoffice.gov.uk

We are looking at what extra resources will be required to provide a better service.

Where applications are handed into the Public Enquiry Office and cannot be completed on the day, the sponsor's passport is copied and handed back to the caller. We will extend this practice in January to those new postal applications where the application cannot be decided on initial consideration.

Immigration (Removals)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons were removed by his Department in November. [85526]

Beverley Hughes: I regret that information on the number of people removed under Immigration Act powers in November 2002 is not yet available. Figures for total removals will be published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletin "Control of Immigration: Statistics United Kingdom 2002", which is due for publication in August 2003.

Monthly statistics showing the number of asylum removals are available from the Home Office quarterly asylum statistics bulletin. Figures for November will be available in "Asylum Statistics: 4th Quarter 2002, United Kingdom", which is scheduled for publication in February 2003.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the backlog of cases is in each division at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate. [85525]

Beverley Hughes: At the end of September 2002, there were 37,200 asylum cases awaiting an initial decision, including work in progress.

On the same date, there were an estimated 47,000 appeals lodged with the Immigration and Nationality Directorate (IND) that had not yet been sent to the Immigration Appellate Authority. This figure includes non-asylum appeals.Information on the number of cases outstanding in other divisions of IND is not available.

Information on the number of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision is published quarterly on the Home Office website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Internet Child Pornography

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what additional resources are available to the police to deal with the recent names given to them by US detectives investigating internet child pornography. [85410]

Hilary Benn: The new National Policing Plan requires forces to include child protection in their local policing plans, strengthen their partnership arrangements and carefully select and train staff working in this area.

This reinforces the Joint Chief Inspectors' Report on Arrangements to Safeguard Children recommendation that police forces and authorities should review the role, remit, location and status of child protection units to ensure that child protection is dealt with to a consistently high standard.

As part of the investment programme for police services in England and Wales, this year (2002–03) the police received an overall funding increase of 6.1 per cent. (on top of record spending and a record increase of 10.1 per cent. in 2001–02) taking the total provision to £9,010 million. In addition policing will receive an increase of £1.5 billion for policing as a wholeby 2005–06 over the 2002–03 figure.The Home Office has also decided to provide an additional £½ million in this financial year only to assist the Association of Chief Police Officers national structure to support operations to combat child abuse on the internet.

Operational decisions on allocation of police resources to combating child exploitation rest with police authorities and chief officers. There is no central record of the additional resources which chief officers across forces may have allocated to deal with investigations resulting from this operation.

Metropolitan Police

Mr. Horam: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Metropolitan Police officers there were in each of the last 10 years. [82478]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The information is set out in the table.

Metropolitan police

Year[1]	*Police officers*[2]
1992	28,154
1993	27,867
1994	27,699
1995	27,480
1996	27,343
1997	26,677
1998	26,094
1999	26,073
2000	25,485
2001	[3]24,878
2002	26,223

[1] As at 31 March

[2] Figures are for full-time equivalent strength

[3] Police strength in the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) for March 2001 was reduced as a result of boundary changes on 1 April 2000 between the MPS and the Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey forces. Consequently it is not possible to make like with like strength comparison over the 10 years

Police

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he intends to make performance data relating to police basic command units publicly available; and if he will make a statement. [84311]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Information is already published about the performance of police basic command units (BCUs) in reducing and detecting crime in respect of six types of crime which are of particular public concern. The most recent published figures, covering the year 2001–02, can be found in Home Office Statistical Bulletin 07/02 which was published in July.

The National Policing Plan described the on-going work to develop a more rounded picture of police performance. Performance radar diagrams will be introduced to provide a quick and visual representation of police performance across a number of policing responsibilities. Following discussion with forces and police authorities these will be published as appropriate. In due course these will cover both forces and BCUs.

Police (Staffordshire)

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civilian police workers there were in Staffordshire in each of the last 10 years. [84176]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The information is set out in the table.

Staffordshire police

Year (as at 31 March)	*Police strength*[1]	*Civilian support staff strength*[1]
1993	2,179	737
1994	2,208	746
1995	2,231	749
1996	2,209	753
1997	2,211	763
1998	2,292	866
1999	2,238	1,004
2000	2,170	858
2001	2,129	935
2002	2,133	1,030

[1] Figures are full-time equivalents for civilian support staff. For police officers full-time equivalent strength figures were introduced from March 1995, following the introduction of part-time working for officers.

Police Service Targets

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the targets he has set which apply to the police service. [83675]

Mr. Denham: The National Policing Plan, which was presented to Parliament on 29 November 2002 in accordance with Section 1 of the Police Reform Act 2002, sets out, for the first time in one document, the strategic national priorities for the police service over the next three years and the indicators against which the performance of the service will be judged.

The police service is asked, through police authorities and police forces, to contribute to the Home Department achieving its Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets. These have been detailed in Section 10 and Annex A of the National Policing Plan. A summary of actions that Chief Officers and police authorities should take into account is at Annex B of the same document. The number of Best Value Performance Indicators, which was 32 in 2001–02, has dropped to 19 in 2002–03 and will remain 19 for 2003–04.

All forces and authorities are subject to audit and inspection, and each is required to demonstrate a continuous drive for efficiency by meeting an annual target of savings/efficiency gains equivalent to 2 per cent.; of their annual budget.

Police Training

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of police recruits who commenced training completed their probation service in each police authority area in each year since 1995. [82492]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* Tables showing the numbers of officers appointed on probation (which is the closest equivalent to recruits entering training have been placed in the Library). Data on officers confirmed on appointment (i.e. having completed their probation) has been collected only since 2001. That data is given for 2001–02 but it does not, of course, relate directly to the numbers appointed in that year.

Post-Release Supervision

Mr. Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will take measures to make the extended post-release supervision mandatory for ten years for sexual and violent offenders. [82674]

Hilary Benn: The Government are committed to the protection of the public. This is reflected in provisions within the Criminal Justice Bill to introduce new sentences for sexual and violent offenders who have been assessed as dangerous. These sentences will replace existing provisions for dealing with sexual and violent offenders, including the extended supervision provision in section 85 of the Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000.

Under the new sentences an offender who commits a specified sexual or violent offence carrying a maximum sentence of between two and 10 years must be sentenced to the new extended sentence. Release during the second half of this sentence will be upon recommendation of the Parole Board and the Court will be required to add periods of extended supervision of up to nine years to the sentence.

Prison Health Service (Wales)

Mr. Win Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress has been made in transferring funding responsibility for prison health services to the NHS in Wales. [85834]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* I am in touch with the Minister for Health and Social Services in the Welsh Assembly. Welsh Assembly and Home Office officials are considering the arrangements that would be needed to effect the transfer of responsibility for prison health services to the national health service (NHS) in Wales.

Prison Releases (Drug Addicts)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of people leaving prison were drug addicts in *(a)* 1997, *(b)* 1998, *(c)* 1999, *(d)* 2000 and *(e)* 2001. [85711]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Prison Service does not measure the number of prisoners leaving prison with drug-related problems.

Prisons

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the rise in the prison population on *(a)* the assault rate on *(i)* prisoners and (ii) staff, *(b)* offending behaviour courses, *(c)* staff-prisoner ratios, *(d)* family visits and *(e)* purposeful activity. [82424]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Prison Service is working to minimise the disruption caused to prisoners and their regime by the population increase.

The rate of positive adjudications of assault has reduced in recent months. This is due in part to prisoners spending more time in their cells but the current assault rate is also depressed pending the introduction of new adjudication arrangements brought in after the removal of added day punishments. Although the population increase has affected staff-prisoner ratios, the operational capacity of each establishment is set to minimise the risks to security, safety and control.

With population close to operational capacity, a greater number of prisoners must be moved to maximise the available accommodation. This increases the number of prisoners being held away from their home area and for some, the greater distance can disrupt family visits. Prisoners held temporarily in police cells are not granted family visits, although the aim is that the time an individual prisoner spends in police cells is kept to a minimum and that prisoners who are particularly vulnerable are accommodated in prisons, wherever possible.

The Prison Service aims to avoid transferring prisoners that are on or awaiting offending behaviour programmes, however some disruption is inevitable while programmes are relocated away from local establishments which suffer most from increased turnover. The average level of purposeful activity across the estate has fallen slightly.

Romford

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the policing and public order costs generated by entertainment venues in Romford town centre. [85073]

Mr. Denham: The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis informs me that his estimate of the cost of policing disorder in Romford town centre between 7pm and 6am, when entertainment venues attract much of their clientele, is, so far this year, in the region of £240,000.

"Secure Borders, Safe Haven" White Paper

Mr. Simon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to proceed with the proposals contained in paragraphs 7.6, 7.10 and 7.11 of the White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven". [85404]

Beverley Hughes: We expect to reach a decision shortly on these proposals. A Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules will then be laid before Parliament.

Sexual Offenders Register

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people are on the Sexual Offenders Register; and how many were on the register in 1997. [85384]

Hilary Benn: The Sex Offenders Act 1997 requires offenders cautioned for, convicted of, or found not guilty by reason of insanity of an offence specified in Schedule One to the Act since the date of its implementation to notify the police of their names, addresses, dates of birth and intentions to travel abroad for eight days or longer. The requirements of the Act also apply to offenders who were serving a sentence for a relevant offence, either in prison or in the community, at the date of its implementation (1 September 1997). There is, however, no central register of sex offenders and offenders subject to the requirements of the Sex Offenders Act are not separately identified in criminal statistics.

Information on the number of 'registered' sex offenders in a police area is submitted by police and probation services under the requirements placed on them established by section 67 of the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000.

As at 31 March 2002, police forces in England and Wales had notified the Home Office of 18,513 'registered' sex offenders.

I am informed by the Scottish Executive that as at 28 August 2002, 1,816 registered sex offenders were recorded by the Scottish Criminal Record Office as being administered by Scottish Police Forces.

The provisions of the Sex Offenders Act 1997 were commenced on 1 September 1997. A Home Office evaluation of the way the Act had been implemented was published in July 2000. This indicated that at 31 August 1998, one year after implementation, 8,608 sex offenders were subject to the Act's requirements. Figures covering the last three months of 1997 are not available.

Violent Crime (Havering)

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of violent crime were recorded in the London borough of Havering in the last year, broken down into *(a)* offences of violence against the person, *(b)* sexual offences, *(c)* robbery and *(d)* criminal damage; what proportion of those offences occurred within Romford town centre between 7 pm and 6 am; and what percentage of recorded violent crime within Havering this represents. [85074]

Mr. Denham: The numbers of violent crimes recorded in Havering for the year ending March 2002 are given in the table.

Numbers of violent crimes in Havering, year ending March 2002

	Number
Violence against the person	3,225
Sexual Offences	173
Robbery	549

Numbers of recorded crimes for areas within London boroughs are not available centrally. Numbers of recorded criminal damage offences by London boroughs for this time period are not yet available centrally.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Beacon Schools

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what mechanism is in place to have funds returned from beacon schools in the event of their closure. [85558]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* In the event of a beacon school closing, the local education authority's Standards Fund allocation is reduced accordingly. Any unspent beacon funds held by the school would be identified alongside other grants still held and returned to the local education authority and then offset against future Standards Fund payments by the Department.

Examination Results

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will publish the 2002 GCSE results for *(a)* Chesham Park Community College and *(b)* other secondary schools. [86227]

Mr. Miliband: The 2002 GCSE results will be published in the secondary school performance tables towards the end of January 2003. These tables will include the results for Chesham Park Community College.

Laboratory Technicians

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what extra grant he has made available to schools for laboratory technicians. [84755]

Mr. Miliband: In 2003–04 we are making available to local education authorities, through Standards Fund Grant, £268 million to cover the costs of recruiting extra school support staff and extra administrative help, particularly for small schools, and £37.45 million for the training and development of support staff.

This additional funding should contribute significantly to the transformation of the school workforce, of which school science laboratory technicians, as well as many others who work to support teachers in the classroom, are vital members. We estimate that, during this Parliament, schools should have the capacity to recruit at least an extra 50,000 full-time equivalent support staff, including science technicians. In addition, the new National Network of Science Learning Centres will provide training and professional development opportunities for technicians.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travelling in 2001–02; [84791]

(2) what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84940]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the financial year.

Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Per Capita Allocations

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much the Government allocates per year to educate a child aged 11 to 16 years in the Portsmouth, South constituency; and if he will make a statement. [85869]

Mr. Miliband: The Department does not hold information on funding provided at constituency level. Most funding provided by the Department is distributed via local education authorities. The table shows the Government's education Standard Spending Assessment and departmental grants allocated to Portsmouth local education authority in 2002–03. Where possible, funding intended for secondary schools has been identified; but for most grants it is not possible to break down the allocations for secondary schools (pupils aged 11–16). Grants are mainly allocated across all phases and the amounts going to each type of school will be a matter for local decision.

	£ million
Standard Spending Assessment[1]	37.737
Standards Fund Grant[2]	5.530
School Standards Grant[3]	0.745
Teachers Threshold Grant	1.038
Capital Funding[4]	5.532

[1] Figure reflects education SSA settlement figures (secondary sub-block).

[2] Figure comprises recurrent departmental contribution, excluding grants specifically allocated for early years or infant/primary purposes.

[3] Figure reflects funding for secondary schools (excluding all special schools).

[4] Funding includes Basic Need (ACG), Standards Fund Grant (Departmental contribution), New Deal for Schools, Schools Access Initiative and Voluntary Aided School Grant. It does not include funding for Class Size initiative (which is relevant only to primary schools).

University Merger (London)

Mr. Frank Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column 731W, on University Merger (London), what reply he gave to the President of University College and the Rector of Imperial College. [86746]

Margaret Hodge: A copy of my reply has been placed in the Library.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Disabled Children

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will implement the recommendation of the Steering Group of the Joint Fundamental Review of the Housing Adaptations Service on the abolition of the means test in relation to disabled children and their families. [85397]

Mr. Browne: The means test is an essential tool to allow the Northern Ireland Housing Executive to target grant towards those most in need. Any such exemption would seriously undermine the ability of the Housing Executive to target resources effectively. I will shortly be setting up a Working Group to review the means test to ensure that disabled children are not disadvantaged by it.

East Antrim Institute

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the progress towards providing a new East Antrim Institute building on the Larne Campus. [85622]

Jane Kennedy: In April 2002, the then Minister announced that £1.5 million was being made available for the provision of a new facility at the Larne campus of East Antrim Institute. The institutes is currently taking the project through procurement with construction expected to commence around May 2003.

Emergency Rehousing

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the number of NIHE tenants who have sought alternative emergency re-housing in Northern Ireland due to intimidation by paramilitary organisations since 1998. [85754]

Mr. Browne: Where Northern Ireland Housing Executive tenants seek alternative accommodation because of intimidation they are treated as being homeless. In such cases information on the source of intimidation and on the tenure of the applicant is not recorded.

However since 1 April 1998, 6,740 households presented to the Housing Executive as homeless due to intimidation/civil disturbance.

Further Education Colleges

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent by each Northern Ireland further education college on *(a)* consultancy fees and *(b)* audits in the last three years. [82680]

Jane Kennedy: Within the time available it is not possible to separate our consultancy costs. I will write to the hon. Member as soon as this information becomes available. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

In the last three years, the following amounts have been spent by each Northern Ireland Further Education College on Audits:

(b) Audits

£

College	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Armagh College of Further and Higher Education	12,135	11,378	14,119
Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education	53,519	61,671	45,216
Castlereagh College of Further and Higher Education	10,797	10,264	9,406
Causeway Institute of Further and Higher Education	4,633	9,090	13,692
East Antrim Institute of Further and Higher Education	3,847	13,806	14,364
East Down Institutes of Further and Higher Education	12,220	12,220	12,224
East Tyrone College of Further and Higher Education	13,500	12,000	14,700
Fermanagh College of Further and Higher Education	10,855	8,049	9,071
Limavady College of Further and Higher Education	8,965	9,135	9,310
Lisburn Institute of Further and Higher Education	10,000	8,500	13,000
Newry and Kilkeel Institute of Further and Higher Education	17,014	12,178	20,539

Primary Schools

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list Northern Ireland primary schools which have an enrolment of 30 pupils and under, together with the current enrolment at each such school *(a)* in the controlled sector and *(b)* in the maintained sector. [86431]

Jane Kennedy: The information for 2002–03 is not yet available. For 2001–02 the information is as follows.

	Year 1 to year 7 enrolment
Controlled Sector	
Earl of Erne PS	17
Tullywhisker PS	12
Ballyrock PS	24
Mosside PS	17
Glenarm PS	26
O'Neill Memorial PS	24
Drumbo PS	22
Groomsport PS	24

	Year 1 to year 7 enrolment
Downshire PS	23
Ardmore PS	20
Toberlane PS	22
Eglish PS	26
Churchtown PS	24
Granville PS	26
Maintained sector	
St. Matthew's PS, Garvaghey	30
Envagh PS	16
St. Davog's Scraghey PS	27
St. Columba's PS, Dromore, Omagh	21
St. Mary's PS (Laught)	16
St. Patrick's PS, Seskinore	28
St. Joseph's PS, Fintona	10
Magilligan PS	30
St. Mary's PS, Rathlin Island	5
Braid PS	29
St. Patrick's PS Aughtercloney, Ahogill	25
Brackalislea PS	20
St. Mary's PS, Aghadowey	27
Tir-na-og PS	27
St. Joseph's PS, Ahoghill	24
Guiness PS	27
St. Mary's PS, Ballygowan	29
Our Lady's PS, Keady	11
St. James's PS, Tandragee	26
All Saints PS, Banbridge	18
The Drelincourt Infants School	25

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Broadcasting Standards

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to regulate the provision of subtitles, signing and audio-description of broadcasts to ensure the maintenance of quality standards. [85813]

Dr. Howells: The Communications Bill gives Ofcom a requirement to produce, publish and from time to time review, a code relating to provision of television services for the deaf and visually impaired and the means by which such services should be promoted. The code will include guidance on the technical standards to be attained for subtitling, signing and audio description as the current code produced by the Independent Television Commission does.

Church Licences

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on introducing additional licence fees for churches that stage plays and concerts; and if she will make a statement. [85149]

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received concerning the proposed enforcement of local authority licensing on church venues and the payment of fees for musical performances in churches; and if she will make a statement. [84504]

Dr. Howells: In total, this Department has received eleven representations in connection with the proposal in the Licensing Bill to extend the licensing requirement beyond Greater London, where it currently applies. Among these representations, only one was from an organisation, which has since met with my officials to discuss their concerns.

Earlier, following the publication of the White Paper on licensing reform in April 2000, we received eight responses from religious organisations; none of these letters took issue with the proposal to create a level playing field for the licensing of churches and other places of religious worship.

The Government are aware of the concerns that some people have about the licensing of churches. We have had discussions about this issue with the Church of England and, along with other faith groups, will seek to ensure that the new licensing system does not impose an unnecessary burden on them while still providing the necessary safeguards for the public.

Community Fund Grants

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which projects in the Sedgefield constituency have benefited from community fund grants. [86606]

Dr. Howells: The projects in the Sedgefield constituency that have benefited from community fund grants are as follows.

Applicant Name

Community Fund Main Grants

Fishburn Community Action Group

Puppies Playgroup

Sedgefield Locality Carers Centre

St. Francis Luncheon Club

South West Durham Social Resource Centre

St. Alban and St. Paul Trimdon Station Parochial Church Council

Cornforth Partnership

Cornforth Partnership

Trimdon Grange Play Area Association

Trimdon Village Hall

Sedgefield District Help Furniture Scheme

Community and Voluntary Sector Organisations Sedgefield CAVOS

Trimdon Village Hall

Cornforth Partnership

Sedgefield Locality Carers Centre

Dean Bank and Ferryhill Literary Institute

Ferryhill LAD.D.E.R. Centre Ltd.

Sedgefield Locality Carers Centre

Small Grants Scheme

Coundon Comets Juvenile Jazz Band
Sadberge Village Hall Association
REMAP GB (Wear and South Tyneside)
Heighington Village Hall Association
Neasham Reading Room and Club
Great Aycliffe Village Hall Association
The Acorn Players
Middleton St. George Youth Club
Trimdon Colliery Community Association
Middleton St. George Pre School
Youll House Thornley Senior Citizens' Club
Hurworth Village Hall
Cellar Sound

Awards For All Schemes

Bradbury Parish Meeting
Hurworth and District Over 60s Club
Hurworth Community Association Senior Citizens Club
New Thornley Partnership
Age Concern Chilton
Deaf Hill Ward Regeneration Partnership
Ferryhill Station and Chilton Lane Ward Residents Association
Brafferton and Coatham Mundeville Village Hall Association
Wear Valley Senior Citizens Dance Club
Hurworth Community Association Senior Citizens Club
Chilton West Residents' Association
Hurworth and District Over 60s Club
Ferryhill Kids Club
St. Vincent De Paul Society, St. Mary's and St. Joseph's Furniture Help Scheme
Trimdon United Junior Football Club
Oakleaf Badminton Club—Junior Section
Hurworth Village Hall
Timothy Hackworth Primary School
Rockliffe Park Cricket Club
1st Peterlee Scout Group
Spennymoor Disabled Club
Chilton and Windleston Old Age Pensioners Association
Sedgefield Cricket Club (Junior Section)
The Little Rascals Trimdon Grange Parent and Toddler Group
Hurworth and District Over 60s Club
Sedgefield Community College
Ferryhill Kids Club
Trimdon Grange Community Centre Association
West Cornforth Senior Citizen's Association
The Durham Light Infantry (Horden/Peterlee Branch)
Aycliffe and District Bus Preservation Society
Diabetes UK—Bishop Auckland
Alington House Quilters
Pioneering Care Partnership
Over the Hedge "Millennium Project Group"
Ferryhill Village Women's Institute
Dolphin Junior Badminton Club
Auckland Croquet Club
Over the Hedge "Millennium Project Group"
Rainbow Fun Club
Ferryhill Amateur Operatice Society
Age Concern Thornley
Yarm and District Saddle Club
Chilton and Windlestone Disabled Club
Ferryhill Town Council
Chilton and Windlestone Disabled Club
Neasham Reading Room and Club
Ferryhill Station and Chilton Lane Ward Residents Association
Trimdon Past and Present History Society
Wheatley Hill Out of School Hours
Darlington Ladies FC
Age Concern Durham County Gold Collective Club
Wingate Infant School
Cellar Sound
Tyne and Wear Women's Basketball Club
Darlington and District Netball League
St. Francis Luncheon Club
Fishburn Art Group
Greenfield School Community and Arts College
Kelloe Cricket Club
Bishop Middleham Village hall
Sarah Scott School of Highland Dancing
Darlington Ladies FC
Aycliffe Village Primary School
Newton Aycliffe Athletics Club
Trimdon Station Residents Association
St. Francis Church Committee
Teesside Lions Wheelchair Sports Club
Action for Dystonia—Diagnosis, Epidemiology and Research
Sedgefield Development Partnership
Newton Aycliffe Cricket Club
TARKA Ltd.
Deaf Hill Primary School
Trimdon Colliery Community Association
Trimdon Grange Community Centre
New Thornley Partnership
Trimdon Millennium Celebrations Group
Newton Aycliffe Youth A.F.C.
National Playday Steering Group
Newton Aycliffe RFC Junior Rugby
Wellfield School
Thornley Young People's Project
Thornley Tapestry and Arts Group
Neasham Reading Room and Club
Castle Eden Playgroup (Parent/Toddler)
East Durham Play and Community Network
Jayenell Gymnastic Club
Sedgefield Saxons
Trimdon's Little Tykes
Ferryhill Town Youth FC
Tees Valley Cougars
Sedgefield Area Committee
The Newton Aycliffe Royal British Legion Pipes and Drums
Darlington Table Tennis Club
Heighington Budo Club
Age Concern Thornley
East Durham Play and Community Network

Eaglescliffe Thunder
The Eastbourne Cardinals
Ian Ramsey School Association
Fishburn Amateur Boxing Club
West Cornforth Out of School Fun Club
Wheatley Hill Mothers Club
8th Darlington (Cockerton Green) Scout Group
Cornforth Partnership
Sadberge Village Hall Association
Wingate Women's Institute
Wheatley Hill Community Association
Wheatley Hill Heritage Society
Newton Aycliffe Over Sixties Club
DISC Ltd.
Sedgefield Arts and Recreation Community Association
Trimdon 2000 Ltd.
Community and Voluntary Organisations Sedgefield
Ferryhill Station Primary School
Northumberland Table Tennis
Ferryhill School.

Entertainment Licences

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the cost of the licensing provisions to churches and chapels; and if she will make a statement. [84505]

Dr. Howells: The estimated fees in the Regulatory Impact Assessment published with the Licensing Bill were between £100 and £500 for a premises licence with a subsequent annual charge of between £50 and £150. Fees would be set centrally by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in secondary legislation and would not be made final until that secondary legislation has been brought into force. Any variation in fee levels would most likely relate to the size of the venue so that smaller venues pay less than large ones.

The Government are aware of the concerns that some people have about the licensing of churches. We have had discussions about this issue with the Church of England and, along with other faith groups, will seek to ensure that the new licensing system does not impose an unnecessary burden on them while still providing the necessary safeguards for the public.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what consultations she has had with representatives of faith organisations about the Government's proposals for entertainment licences for buildings whose prime purpose is religious. [84618]

Dr. Howells: This Department has received 11 representations from different representatives of religious organisations concerning the proposal to extend the licensing requirement beyond Greater London. Among these representations, only one was from an organisation, whom officials have since met to discuss their concerns.

We sent the White Paper, that was published in April 2000, to 231 organisations in order to gain their responses in respect of our proposals. We received eight responses to this consultation from religious organisations, including one from the Churches Main Committee. None of these were concerned with the proposal to create a level playing field for churches and other places of religious worship.

The Government are aware of the concerns that some people have about the licensing of churches. We have had discussions about this issue with the Church of England and, along with other faith groups, will seek to ensure that the new licensing system does not impose an unnecessary burden on them while still providing the necessary safeguards for the public.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if the licensing of religious buildings for entertainments under the provisions of the Licensing Bill extends to *(a)* churchyards and other open ground within the curtilage of the building and *(b)* other secular buildings within the curtilage of the religious building; and if she will make a statement. [84619]

Dr. Howells: A premises licence or temporary provision would be required for any place where a licensable activity is to take place, be it a church, a secular building within the curtilage of the church, or an open area within the curtilage of the church, such as a churchyard.

The application for the premises licence would have to be accompanied by an operating plan which would specify the areas that would be licensed.

The Government are aware of the concerns that some people have about the licensing of churches. We have had discussions about this issue with the Church of England and, along with other faith groups, will seek to ensure that the new licensing system does not impose an unnecessary burden on them while still providing the necessary safeguards for the public.

Ladbrook Report

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the Ladbrook Report on BBC News 24; whether the report has been sent to the BBC; and whether she plans to initiate similar reviews of the BBC digital channels. [85083]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State published Richard Lambert's independent review of BBC News 24 on 5 December and has placed copies in the Libraries of both Houses. The report was sent to the BBC on 2 September 2002. My right hon. Friend intends to hold similar reviews of all new BBC public services. The next service to be reviewed will be BBCi (formerly BBC Online).

Lottery Funding (Sport)

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to increase the amount of Lottery funding available for sport. [86136]

Dr. Howells: The Government has guaranteed that sport will continue to receive its current 16 2/3 per cent. share of the funds the Lottery raises for good causes until the end of the current licence period in 2009 at the very least. Sport has benefited significantly from the creation of the newer good cause of health, education and the environment through, for example, the £750 million PE and sport in schools initiative by the New Opportunities Fund (NOF). My Department,

the National Lottery Commission and Camelot are continuing to work to maximise income for all the good causes.

Parliamentary Questions

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many oral questions her Department has answered on sport in each parliamentary session since May 1997. [86511]

Dr. Howells: 293 oral questions on sport have been answered by my Department since May 1997. These are broken down by parliamentary year as follows:

Year	*Number*
1997–98	61
1998–99	46
1999–2000	54
2000–01	41
2001–02	91

Figures include those oral questions which received either oral or written answers.

Pigeons

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Greater London Authority regarding a proposed fine for feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square; and if she will make a statement. [84445]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no discussions with the Greater London Authority regarding a proposed fine for feeding pigeons in Trafalgar Square.

The Mayor for London wrote to my right hon. Friend on 21 November informing her of his wish to introduce a Bylaw to prohibit the feeding of pigeons on Trafalgar Square. The Greater London Authority have published formal notice of their intention to apply to the Secretary of State for confirmation of the Bylaws. My right hon. Friend is the confirming authority for Bylaws relating to Trafalgar Square.

Social Inclusiveness

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department has taken to extend social inclusiveness by increasing the involvement of identified priority groups in each of the sectors her Department has responsibility for; and if she will make a statement. [83746]

Mr. Caborn: Opening up our institutions to the wider community, to promote lifelong learning and social cohesion, is now a strategic priority for the Department. Progress on that priority will be assessed through one of the Department's four Public Service Agreement targets for the 2003–06 period:

> to increase significantly take-up of cultural and sporting opportunities by new users aged 20 and above from priority groups.

As set out in the DCMS Service Delivery Agreement, the cultural and sporting opportunities will include those provided by arts facilities funded via the Arts Council of England, the national and regional museums and galleries, community sport, the historic environment, and the internet via Culture Online. These initiatives will build on existing projects such as Creative Partnerships and Space for Sport and Arts, which are bringing new opportunities to deprived areas around the country.

Sports (Recognition)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the sports recognised by her Department. [86512]

Mr. Caborn: Recognition of sports is a matter for the sports councils which currently recognise 112 activities. Recognition is based on a number of criteria including primarily "physical effort" and "skills". A full list which is publicly available, as follows.

List of activities recognised by the national sports councils

Aikido
American Football
Angling
Archery
Arm Wrestling
Association Football
Athletics
Australian Rules Football
Badminton
Ballooning
Baseball
Basketball
Baton Twirling
Biathlon
Bicycle Polo
Billiards and Snooker
Bobsleigh
Boccia
Bowls
Boxing
Camogie
Canoeing
Caving
Chinese Martial Arts
Cricket
Croquet
Crossbow
Curling
Cycling
Disability Sport
Dragon Boat Racing
Equestrian
Fencing
Fives
Flying
Gaelic Football

Gliding
Golf
Gymnastics
Handball
Hang/Para Gliding
Highland Games
Hockey
Horse Racing
Hovering
Hurling
Ice Hockey
Ice Skating
Jet Skiing
Ju Jitsu
Judo
Kabaddi
Karate
Kendo
Korfball
Lacrosse
Lawn Tennis
Life Saving
Luge
Modern Pentathlon
Motor Cycling
Motor Sports
Mountaineering
Movement, Dance, Exercise and Fitness
Netball
Orienteering
Parachuting
Petanque
Polo
Pony Trekking
Pool
Quoits
Racketball
Rackets
Racquetball
Rambling
Real Tennis
Roller Hockey
Roller Skating
Rounders
Rowing
Rugby League
Rugby Union
Sailing
Sand/Land Yachting
Shinty
Shooting
Skateboarding
Skiing
Skipping
Snowboarding
Softball
Sombo Wrestling
Squash
Skater/Street Hockey
Sub-Aqua
Surf Life Saving
Surfing
Swimming and Diving
Table Tennis
Taekwondo
Tang Soo Do
Tenpin Bowling
Trampolining
Triathlon
Tug of War
Unihoc
Volleyball
Water Skiing
Weightlifting
Wrestling
Yoga

Underwater Archeology

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment has been undertaken of the impact of the Government contract with Marine Odyssey Inc. for commercial salvage on an historic wreck upon the prospects for future UK accession to the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Archaeological Heritage. [82988]

Dr. Howells: It is not envisaged that there will be an impact, as this agreement is a unique pragmatic solution to a situation in which the archaeological heritage is at risk. It enables the Government to ensure that the site is excavated responsibly. Although the UK is not currently bound by the UNESCO Convention on the Protection of the Underwater Cultural Heritage, the Government has stressed from the beginning that the project must as far as possible be developed in line with the rules contained in the Annex to the Convention, which are seen as representing best practice for maritime archaeology.

Wrecks

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what English Heritage's role is in relation to proposed salvage operations on the wreck believed to be that of the 17th century warship, Sussex. [82978]

Dr. Howells: English Heritage has this year become the Government's advisors on underwater heritage, and they have become involved in this project by chairing an independent Archaeological Review Group which is scrutinising the Project Plan to ensure that it complies with appropriate archaeological standards. They will also be asked for advice on post-excavation conservation, research and publication.

Mr. Allan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on the protection, management and care of historic wrecks of non-UK origin located in the UK's domestic waters. [82987]

Dr. Howells: The Protection of Wrecks Act 1973 contains provisions which provide protection of wrecks in UK waters which are deemed to be of historical, archaeological or artistic significance, regardless of their

origin. This is a devolved matter; the protection and management of wrecks in the waters of the devolved administrations is a matter for the relevant First Minister.

No distinction is made in the protection or management of wrecks in English waters based on whether or not they are of UK origin.

In England, the policy has long been for English Heritage to be granted powers to provide assistance in relation to archaeological sites which are situated below the mean low water mark. The National Heritage Act 2002 extended these powers with effect from 1 July 2002, and DCMS is in the process of drafting directions in consultation with the devolved heritage agencies and English Heritage.

Formal transfer of responsibility is expected to take place shortly, which will mean that English Heritage will be able to perform the functions for underwater archaeology that they can for land-based archaeology, for instance giving grants, contributing towards the costs of research, and providing educational facilities and services, public information and advice, and entering into certain agreements.

TREASURY

Bio-ethanol Fuel

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received from *(a)* British Sugar, *(b)* the National Farmers Union, *(c)* the Country Land and Business Association and *(d)* other groups on the level of duty on bioethanol road fuel. [86282]

John Healey: We have received a number of representations about the level of duty on bioethanol.

Business Support

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to devolve business support services to regions other than the north-west, east midlands and west midlands. [85946]

John Healey: The Government will consider the development of the RDA pilots before taking a decision on the general roll-out of RDA-led management and coordination of business support. However, outside the pilot areas, RDAs have been given additional funding and flexibilities which will enable them to work with SBS and other business support providers to improve the coherence and quality of services for small businesses. In the north-east, for example, the RDA has launched a new strategy to improve the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the business support infrastructure.

Childcare Tax Credits

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the take-up rates were for child care tax credit in each year since it was introduced. [86664]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates of such take-up rates would have to be based on household survey data. These surveys contain too few sample cases to produce reliable estimates.

Credit Unions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask TheChancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government is taking to encourage the development of credit unions and community banking; and whether the Government has set targets for the development of credit unions and community banking. [85762]

Ruth Kelly: The Government believes that the availability of financial products is essential to ensure access to wider mainstream services and is an important component in tackling social exclusion. There are a number of ways in which access to financial services can be improved and providers each have a different contribution to make. The Government has not set targets for growth in particular sectors —it is ultimately for consumers to decide which services are most appropriate for them.

The Government is involved in a number of initiatives to increase the accessibility of financial services at a local or community level.

We are in the process of delivering a programme of legislative and regulatory changes to help improve the operational flexibility of credit unions. Universal banking services, using the post office network, will build on and extend the accessibility of bank accounts to areas without bank branches or ATM machines. New Deal of Communities partnerships have developed or are planning projects to counter financial exclusion. These and similar projects typically involve co-operation between local government, local agencies, financial service providers or voluntary groups.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the trends in growth of credit unions and the community banking sector have been since *(a)* 1997 and *(b)* 1992. [85800]

Ruth Kelly: Information on the trends in growth of credit unions is set out in the table. Comprehensive data covering the different developments and initiatives in the provision of banking services at local or community levels is not centrally available.

Credit Unions in Great Britain

	Number of Credit Unions	*Number of members at end year*	*Total assets (£000)*
1992	383	88,007	32,489
1993	427	110,079	44,671
1994	475	138,582	60,742
1995	530	161,502	79,945
1996	550	190,825	100,348
1997	596	224,674	123,979
1998	630	255,596	147,940
1999	666	295,826	180,633
2000	687	325,058	214,977

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the ECOFIN Council held on 3 December; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [85860]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the ECOFIN meeting on 3 December.ECOFIN discussed a Presidency proposal on the taxation of savings. The proposal confirmed the agreement at the Feira European Council that the ultimate objective of the EU should be exchange of information on as wide a basis as possible. And it confirmed the rejection at Feira of an EU-wide withholding tax, which would have had severe implications for the London bond market.

ECOFIN discussed the Commission's negotiations with the third countries named in the Feira conclusions, and in particular the negotiations with Switzerland. The Presidency proposed that Switzerland should implement the OECD standard of exchange of information on request, and that the Commission should hold further discussions with them on this. The ultimate objective would be automatic exchange of information.

Under the Presidency proposal, Switzerland would be required to apply a withholding tax until moving to automatic exchange of information. The rate would be 20 per cent. for the three years from 2004 and 35 per cent. thereafter. Austria, Luxembourg and Belgium would be required to apply a similar rate of withholding tax until Switzerland move to the OECD standard of exchange of information on request, at which point they would have to move to automatic exchange of information. Austria, Luxembourg and Belgium would have to apply the OECD standard of exchange on request from no later than 2011. The other 12 member states would apply automatic exchange of information from 2004 as agreed at the Feira European Council.

I gave a report on our discussions with Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and the overseas territories in the Caribbean. I made clear that automatic exchange of information would apply in all the territories.

The Commission will hold further discussions with Switzerland, and the Presidency expect to hold a further meeting of ECOFIN later this month.

The Paymaster General (in her capacity as Chair of the Code of Conduct Group) presented the Code of Conduct Group's report on the rollback of harmful tax measures. The Presidency indicated that the Group's report, along with the third component of the tax package, the directive on interest and royalties, would be considered at the additional ECOFIN meeting later this month.

The Presidency invited Ministers to reach political agreement on the draft directive on energy taxation. As a number of other member states continued to have reservations with the text, the Presidency concluded that agreement was not possible at this stage and there would be a further discussion at the additional ECOFIN meeting later this month. The draft directive on VAT administrative co-operation will also be considered at the additional ECOFIN and I stressed that the UK was prepared to be constructive in reaching agreement on this. Ministers discussed a number of financial services issues. ECOFIN adopted conclusions on implementing streamlined legislative procedures (the so-called "Lamfalussy model") across the financial services sector. There was a discussion on whether the new procedures should be implemented immediately or delayed pending further discussions with the European Parliament. The Presidency called a vote to decide this. There was a simple majority in favour of immediate implementation, which the UK supported.

The Commission presented its proposal for a revised directive on investment services. I expressed UK disappointment at the Commission's late amendment to the text on pre-trade transparency. This change would be anti-competitive and would deliver a poor deal for the retail investor. I also stressed that late changes such as this, which flew in the face of consultation results, were likely to undermine market confidence in the consultation process and the Lamfalussy arrangements.

Ministers noted Commission reports on corporate governance and progress on the Financial Services Action Plan and efficiency and integration indicators.

ECOFIN noted the President of the European Court of Auditors presentation of the Court's annual report for 2001 and adopted conclusions on the streamlining of economic policy co-ordination processes and on the use of structural reform indicators.

Under any other business, Commissioner Solbes gave an oral presentation on the Commission Communication on strengthening economic policy co-ordination, which Ministers noted.

Economic Tests

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the pre-Budget report November 2002 (Cm 5664) Box 2.3, what technical work needed to enable assessment of the five economic tests has been completed. [86285]

Ruth Kelly: As we set out in the 'Paper for the Treasury Select Committee on the Treasury's Approach to the Preliminary and Technical Work', issued on 6 September, "A number of supporting studies will be published encompassing the preliminary and technical work . . . When the assessment is complete, the detailed supporting studies will be published alongside, all to be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate." More detail on the supporting studies is given in the 6 September paper.

Enterprise Areas

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which of the 2000 enterprise areas announced in the Pre-Budget Report fall within *(a)* Roxburgh and Berwickshire and *(b)* the Scottish Borders. [85698]

John Healey: The enterprise areas in Scotland are defined as the 15 per cent. most deprived areas as identified by the Scottish Index of Deprivation 1998. There are no areas within Roxburgh and Berwickshire or the Scottish Borders that fall into this category.

However, other measures taken by the Government in the Pre-Budget Report will benefit businesses in these areas, including the announcement of the extension of the Small Firms Loan Guarantee Scheme to firms in the

retail, catering and several other sectors from April 2003. The Scottish Executive will introduce on 1 April 2003 a tapering mandatory small business rate relief, worth in total around £45 million to qualifying businesses. The Scottish Executive will also be distributing the Small Business Service's start-up guide, which will bring together information on all Government requirements and support for SMEs in a single start-up pack by spring 2003.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of local government regarding the relaxation of requirements for detailed planning permission in enterprise areas announced in the Pre-Budget Report. [85964]

John Healey: The Pre-Budget report announced that the Government will consider how to encourage local authorities to introduce Local Development Orders to relax planning control in enterprise areas. The Government's proposals on LDOs were the subject of wide public consultation following the issue of the Government's Green Paper, "Planning: Delivering a Fundamental Change" (December 2001).

Firefighters

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the increase in the net value of firefighters' pensions which would result from a 1 per cent. increase in the current annual wage bill; and if he will make a statement. [86279]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

Responsibility for the Firefighters Pension Scheme rests with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Brentwood and Ongar on 9 December 2002.

Infant Mortality

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the infant mortality rate in the families of members of the armed forces has been in each year since 1990. [86216]

John Healey: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Dr. Murrison, dated 10 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on what the infant mortality rate was in the families of members of the armed forces in each year since 1990. (86216)

The table below provides infant mortality rates where either the mother or father was recorded as being in the armed forces at registration. At the registration of births and deaths of children, information on the occupation is only collected for the father and the mother, not for other members of the family. Father's occupation is only collected for births that occur inside marriage and those outside marriage that are jointly registered by both parents. Information on mother's occupation is seldom provided.

Infant mortality: numbers and rates where either the father or mother was recorded at death registration as being in the armed forces, England and Wales, 1990–2001

	Number of deaths	*Rate*[1]
1990	79	6.4
1991	70	5.9
1992	73	5.8
1993	46	4.1
1994	43	4.1
1995	41	3.9
1996	50	5.3
1997	53	6.2
1998	45	5.3
1999	34	4.2
2000	26	3.3
2001[2]	32	4.3

[1] Per 1,000 live births. Figures for live births are a 10 per cent. sample coded for mother's and father's occupation. Information on the father's occupation at birth is not collected for births outside marriage if the father does not attend the registration of the baby's birth. These births and any subsequent infant deaths are excluded from the figures, unless where information was provided that the mother was in the armed forces (8 deaths in 1990–2001).

[2] Provisional.

Source:
Office for National Statistics

Insurance

Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met representatives from the insurance industry to discuss the impact of the level of insurance premiums on the building and construction industries. [86045]

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of *(a)* the insurance industry and *(b)* business regarding the future of employers' liability insurance. [85960]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is in regular contact with industry on a wide range of insurance matters. In the Pre-Budget Report, my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor, announced that the Department for Work and Pensions would undertake a formal review of the operation of employers' liability compulsory insurance.

Insurance Premium Tax

Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much was received from insurance premium tax *(a)* in the first year it was levied and *(b)* last year. [86041]

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what has been the yield from taxing insurance premiums since 1997 in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms. [85700]

Ruth Kelly: Figures for receipts of insurance premium tax in cash terms are available in Table 2.1D of the Office for National Statistics publication, "Financial Statistics".

Andy King: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when he last reviewed insurance premium tax; [86042]

(2) what plans he has to *(a)* reduce and *(b)* cap insurance premium tax. [86044]

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment his Department has made of the effects of a reduction in insurance premium tax; [85967]

(2) whether the review of employers' liability insurance announced in the pre-budget report will consider the possibility of reducing insurance premium tax. [85966]

Ruth Kelly: As with all taxes, Insurance Premium Tax is kept under review and any changes are announced in the annual Budget.

Mental Health (Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Office for National Statistics will publish its report on children's mental health services. [86467]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 10 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent Parliamentary Question concerning the Office for National Statsistics (ONS) report on children's mental health services. (86467)

In March 2000 ONS produced a report which presented the findings of a survey of the mental health of children and adolescents, aged 5–15, in Great Britain (Meltzer et al, 2000). The survey was carried out between January and May 1999. It was commissioned by the Department of Health, the Scottish Health Executive and the National Assembly for Wales.

The first part of the report focused on the prevalence rates of mental disorders among young people. The second part showed the way in which children and adolescents with particular disorders vary from those without any disorder on a range of factors including their background, personal and familial characteristics, physical health, use of services and social functioning.

In this context, children's mental health services included health, social, educational and voluntary care services which provided treatment and advice given to young people with mental health problems. In the ONS report, the data presented on the use of services come from parents' reports of who they went to seek help from if they thought their child had a significant mental health problem.

Six months previously, in September 1999, the Audit Commission produced a report of their two-year national audit of the specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) provided by health authorities and trusts. (Audit Commission, 1999).

References.

Meltzer H, Gatward R, Goodman R & Ford T (2000) Mental health of children and adolescents in Great Britain, London: The Stationery Office

Audit Commission (1999) National Report—Children in mind: child and adolescent mental health services

Modern Apprenticeship Taskforce

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* remit, *(b)* terms of reference and *(c)* guidance are for the new Modern Apprenticeship Taskforce. [85958]

John Healey: Working alongside DfES and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC), the new National Modern Apprenticeship Taskforce has been created to recommend effective and innovative ways of ensuring that modern apprenticeship programmes respond to the changing needs of employers and young people. It will generate greater employer engagement in Modern Apprenticeships and provide strategic oversight of the MA system. It will advise the Government and the LSC on forward strategy and support progress towards meeting the Government's target that, by 2004, 28 per cent. of 22 year olds will have participated in a Modern Apprenticeship.

Oil Prices

Dr. Cable: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the impact on his projected GDP growth in 2003 and 2004 of an average oil price of *(a)* $30 in 2003 and 2004, *(b)* $40 in 2003 and $30 in 2004; and *(c)* $60 in 2003 and $40 in 2004. [85648]

John Healey: By raising production costs and so constraining supply, higher oil prices tend to depress GDP growth, simultaneously pushing up inflation and unemployment. The UK differs from most other major industrialised economies in that it is a small net exporter of oil. Potential GDP losses therefore may be partly offset by increased UK incomes deriving from North Sea production due to the improvement in the terms of trade.

In practice, the overall economic effects from rising oil prices are difficult to estimate as they depend largely on second round impacts on wages and other prices, as well as movements in business and consumer confidence.

Pensions Review

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the review of pension contribution statistics by the National Statistician has been completed; what conclusions have been reached; and if he will place the full report in the Library. [85659]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from K. Dunnell to Mr. Jim Cousins, dated 10 December 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question on the review of pension contribution statistics. I am replying in his absence.

The review of pension contribution statistics by the National Statistician has been completed. The conclusions are set out in the review report, "Review of ONS Pensions Contributions Statistics", which was published on 10 October 2002 and may be found at the following web address: www.statistics.gov.uk/about/Consultation by theme/downloads/Pension Contribution Report.pdf, along with a statement from the National Statistician at: www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/pens1002.pdf.

An action plan taking forward the recommendations of the Review of ONS Pensions Statistics was published on 29 November and may be found at the following web address: www.statistics.gov.uk/about/Methodology by theme/downloads/ pension review action plan.pdf along with a statement from the National Statistician at: www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ pen1002.pdf.

Copies of the report have also been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Planning Permission

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what safeguards he proposes to put in place to prevent inappropriate or low quality developments as a result of the relaxation of requirements for detailed planning permission in enterprise areas announced in the Pre-Budget Report. [85963]

Ruth Kelly: The Pre-Budget Report announced that the Government will consider how to encourage local authorities to introduce Local Development Orders (LDOs) to relax planning control in enterprise areas.

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill will provide that LDOs can only be introduced for the purpose of implementing policies in an adopted development plan document. They will be subject to the same public consultation as that development plan document. The Secretary of State may direct that a draft LDO be submitted to him for his approval, and may, in extreme circumstances, revoke an adopted LDO.

Poverty

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what definition the government uses of *(a)* relative and *(b)* absolute poverty as applicable to government policy; and what plans the government has to review the utility and appropriateness of definitions of poverty in respect of government policy. [85760]

Dawn Primarolo: For the purposes of the Public Service Agreement target to reduce the number of children living in low income households by a quarter by 2004–05 compared to 1998–99, the Government measure the number of children in households with an equivalised income below 60 per cent. of the contemporary median, as reported in "Households Below Average Income". This is a measure of relative income distribution; statistics on absolute measures based on income thresholds fixed in real terms are also published, as is information on pensioners and working-age adults.

Low income is central to poverty. But poverty is a complex multi-dimensional issue, related to many other aspects of people's lives—including health, housing, the quality of the environment, and opportunities to learn. A broader set of indicators related to poverty and social exclusion, going beyond income, is published in the annual report "Opportunity for All".

Looking further ahead, the Government are committed to finding a measure of child poverty that will both underpin effective policy-making and enable the public to gauge progress towards the long-term goal of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it within a generation. In April 2002 the Department for Work and Pensions launched a consultation exercise on measuring child poverty in the long-term. Preliminary conclusions are due to be published by spring 2003.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his policy is on the use of a version of the budget standards model to define poverty; and what assessment he has made of the effect on poverty of the poorest households of change since 1977, using a budget standards model. [85761]

Dawn Primarolo: A wide range of research has been produced into what constitutes an "adequate" level of income for a family with children, following different budget standards models. However, there is no simple answer to the question of which level of incomes is adequate for all family types. Different research methods tend to make different assumptions and generate a range of estimates. It would be difficult to justify any one set of assumptions against another equally plausible set.

Statistics based on relative and absolute low income going back to 1979 are published in "Households Below Average Income".

Stamp Duty

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask The Chancellor of the Exchequer what the total revenue from stamp duty was in each year since 1997. [85948]

Ruth Kelly: Stamp Duty revenues for each financial year since 1997–98 are given as follows:

£ million

Year	*Stamp duty revenue*
1997–98	3455.2
1998–99	4623.4
1999–2000	6897.8
2000–01	8164.6
2001–02	7103.5

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the stamp duty thresholds were in each year since 1997. [85949]

Ruth Kelly: Stamp duty thresholds and rates for this period for the transfers of land, buildings and property, other than stocks and shares, are given in the table (the rate is nil for considerations up to £60,000):

Percentage

Commencing date	*Considerations exceeding £60,000, but not exceeding £250,000*	*Considerations exceeding £250,000, but not exceeding £500,000*	*Considerations exceeding £500,000*
16 March 1993	1	1	1
8 July 1997	1	1.5	2
24 March 1998	1	2	3
16 March 1999	1	2.5	3.5
28 March 2000	1	3	4

Training and Management Courses

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what discussions officials from his Department have had with small businesses regarding

expanding training and management courses; and if he will publish the research he has commissioned regarding a proposed expansion: [85961]

(2) what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of the banking industry concerning the University for Industry, and if he will make a statement. [85957]

John Healey: The Government welcome a proposal from high street banks to provide leadership support for prospective and existing businesses by creating a virtual university for small businesses with ready access to information, advice, support and mentoring through the internet and more specialist training courses. The Government are currently in discussion with a number of banks to develop the detail, and will consult with small businesses as the proposal develops.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Todd: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will publish the evidence he employed to choose which areas he has placed within those entitled to area cost adjustment. [86626]

Mr. Leslie: A full methodology guide to the area cost adjustment has been published on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website (www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0304/acatech.pdf). A copy has also been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Asylum Seekers (Rough Sleeping)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what arrangements he has made for contact assessment outreach workers in the rough sleepers unit to record the number of destitute asylum seekers sleeping rough. [85815]

Mrs. Roche: Contact and assessment teams funded by local authorities and the Homelessness Directorate already record details of anyone they encounter who is sleeping rough, and this will include any destitute asylum seekers.

British-Irish Council

Llew Smith: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on matters discussed and decisions taken at the meeting of the British-Irish Council on 22 November; if he will place in the Library and on his Department's website copies of papers discussed at the Council; and if he will list the Council attendees. [86472]

Mr. Leslie: I refer my hon. Friend to the written statement made by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister on 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W.

Emergency Planning

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responsibilities he has for emergency planning and the co-ordination of the work of emergency planning authorities; and how his exercise of such responsibilities in London differs from that in *(a)* England and *(b)* the UK. [84604]

Mr. Leslie: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itcham stated today, responsibility for the arrangements for co-ordinating the Government's response to major emergencies lies with him.

My right. hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister is represented on the three Cabinet Committees which my right hon. Friend the Member for Southampton Itcham mentions and which my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield Brightside chairs.

As my right hon. Friend also stated, all Departments have a responsibility to plan, prepare, train and exercise for handling major incidents and emergencies that might occur within their field of responsibility. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is thus responsible for the following areas:

> fire policy and the central Government management and inspection of the fire service, which has a key role to play in emergency planning.
>
> the regional co-ordination unit and the Government offices of the regions. Government offices provide an important link between central Government and local government on a wide range of issues including emergency planning. Government offices also play a role in communication and co-ordination during any emergency.

In addition, my right hon. Friend, the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich, has specific responsibility for London resilience. As the capital city, the financial capital and the seat of Government, London is in a unique position, with unique requirements for emergency planning. A new strategic emergency planning regime for the capital, developed in response to the events of 11 September 2001, is headed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich with the Mayor of London as his deputy. This regime co-ordinates the emergency planning work of the London boroughs, transport operators, utilities, London NHS, the emergency services, other civil authorities in London and the business community.

Local Government Reform

Mr. Wood: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of his proposals for reform of local government on enhancing *(a)* accountability, *(b)* openness and *(c)* probity; and what additional powers and resources will be made available for investigating and addressing complaints and malpractice. [85669]

Mr. Leslie: Building on the reforms in the Local Government Act 2000, which have brought about new council constitutions and established a new ethical framework for local government, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is now implementing the next stage. As set out in our response to the Transport, Local Government and Regional Affairs Committee's report on the draft Local Government Bill, this Bill marks a key stage in the Government's commitment to giving all local authorities new freedoms and flexibilities.

Already under way is a long-term evaluation study of new council constitutions and the new ethical framework, which will establish the extent to which the reforms achieve the sought-for improvements in local authority efficiency, accountability and transparency.

As to additional measures for investigating and addressing complaints and malpractice, the Government intend in the new year to introduce regulations under the Local Government Act 2000 to provide for the handling by local standards committees of cases of alleged misconduct.

Mobile Phone Network

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will review his Best Practice guidelines on mobile phone network development to take account of the results of the Deloitte and Touche review of the mobile phone operators' compliance with the 10 commitments; and if he will make a statement; [86571]

(2) how he plans to monitor implementation of the Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development; and whether this will be separate from the monitoring of the phone operators' 10 commitments by Deloitte and Touche. [86572]

Mr. McNulty: The "Code of Best Practice on Mobile Phone Network Development" was published on 11 November this year. The code contains guidance for operators and local authorities on the siting of mobile phone masts and base stations.

The review by Deloitte and Touche, commissioned by the Federation of Electronics Industries (FEI), is a comprehensive assessment on the operators' 10 commitments. The review has not yet been completed; we expect it early next year. Once it has been received, we will then assess the need to review the guidance.

Pathfinder Projects

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was originally budgeted for each national pathfinder programme in *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02; what funds budgeted for were not spent in each year; and whether they were carried forward. [81937]

Mrs. Roche: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 118w.

Regional Government (Exmoor)

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the effect of regional government on Exmoor, with special reference to funding for the national park. [86235]

Mr. Leslie: The White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" (Cm 5511) makes it clear that elected assemblies will only be established in those English regions outside London which choose to have one. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently taking soundings about the level of interest in each region in having a referendum about establishing an elected assembly.

The White Paper does not propose any changes in the current arrangements for funding National Park Authorities.

Elected regional assemblies will have a responsibility to ensure that countryside, landscape, recreation and rural issues are addressed in their regional strategies (for example regional spatial strategies and regional cultural strategies). They will also be expected to 'rural proof' their activities.

The White Paper invited views on the way in which regional stakeholders should be involved in the work of elected assemblies, and the Government will announce specific proposals in due course. National Park Authorities have been involved in this consultation.

Rent Restructuring

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will set out the formula that *(a)* RSLs and *(b)* local authorities will need to implement as a minimum to reach the target rents set under his rent restructuring policy for (i) 2003–04, (ii) 2004–05 and (iii) 2005–06. [85679]

Mr. McNulty: Rent restructuring in the social sector aims to produce a fairer and more coherent pattern of rents, while keeping rents affordable and well below market levels. We want social rents to reflect the size, condition and location of properties, as well as the level of local earnings relative to the national average to take account of affordability.

These factors have been included in the following national rents formula, where weekly rent is equal to:

70 per cent. × average rent for the sector (LA or RSL) × (county manual earnings/national average manual earnings) × bedroom weight

Plus

30 per cent. × average rent for the sector × (property value/national average property value for the sector)

The national rents formula is capped at a maximum level, varying according to the number of bedrooms. This will ensure rents do not rise to unreasonably high levels in high value areas.

Registered social landlords and local authorities are being encouraged to start moving their rents towards the rents formula over a 10 year period from April 2002, in 10 roughly equal steps, while keeping annual rent changes within limits of RPI + $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. ± £2 per week.

Showmen

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what support he will provide to local authorities for the provision of winter quarters for showmen. [84481]

Mr. McNulty: There is no special provision for local authorities to provide accommodation for travelling showmen. If my hon. Friend the member for Chorley has particular concerns, perhaps he will write to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Student Houses

Mr. Reed: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the number of student houses in multi-occupancy in Charnwood borough council. [85028]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate costs. However as part of their part of their housing investment programme returns, Charnwood reported having a total of 102 houses in multiple occupation on 1 April 2002.

Water Measurements (Wards)

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list those wards, grouped by counties and unitary wards or metropolitan authorities, in England and Wales whose boundaries contain estuaries, rivers and inland shore waters; what the percentage is of the area of each such ward that is comprised of water measured, where applicable, from the high water mark; and what effect such measurement has on the way in which population *(a)* density and *(b)* sparsity is measured for official statistical purposes. [85950]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Stephen O'Brien, dated 10 December 2002:

As National Statistician I am replying to your recent question on wards whose boundaries contain estuaries, rivers and inland shore waters. (85950)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) can provide the information requested on the percentage of the area of electoral wards/divisions and local authorities in England and Wales which comprise inland water. Information on the effect these measurements have on the population density is not available.

ONS has recently received area measurements produced by the Ordnance Survey for Great Britain using their 1:10,000 scale 2001 BoundaryLine product (boundaries as at May 2001). Early next year, these measurements will be made available on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk). However if the request is urgent, ONS is willing to provide an extract on CD-ROM which will list three measurements and the percentage of inland water for all electoral wards/divisions and local authorities in England and Wales. The three measurements will be:

area to Mean High Water: defined as the total area of an administrative unit measured in hectares and includes all tracts of inland water; where the administrative area is bounded by tidal water it is measured to Mean High Water mark.

area of inland water: defined as the surface area of inland water areas exceeding 1sq km within the area to Mean High Water, measured in hectares, within the administrative unit. Inland water includes features such as lakes and reservoirs; rivers, canals and streams are not included in this area measurement.

land area: area to Mean High Water excluding area of inland water.

Population density figures and land area measurements will be published as part of the 2001 Census Key Statistics during April 2003. The land area measurement has been used in accordance with the Eurostat directive.

If a CD-Rom giving the above information is required, you should contact Alan Taylor at our Titchfield office on 01329 813536.

There are no plans to provide population density figures based on other area measurements.

Westminster/Kensington and Chelsea (Support)

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much external financial support was given to *(a)* Westminster and *(b)* Kensington and Chelsea in each year since 1992, giving the percentage change in each case expressed in (i) cash terms and (ii) real terms. [85828]

Mr. Raynsford: The figures for the level of total external support and the percentage change in cash terms and real terms for Westminster in each year since 1992 are set out in the table.

Westminster

	Total external support (£000)	*Percentage change*	
		Cash terms	*Real terms*
1991–92	188,142	—	—
1992–93	222,967	18.5	14.8
1993–94	186,794	−16.2	−18.2
1994–95	188,144	0.7	−0.6
1995–96	193,729	3.0	0.1
1996–97	190,100	−1.9	−4.9
1997–98	194,241	2.2	−0.9
1998–99	187,720	−3.4	−5.9
1999–2000	192,738	2.7	0.2
2000–01	194,839	1.1	−1.1
2001–02	198,752	2.0	−0.1
2002–03	205,117	3.2	0.7

The figures for the level of total external support and the percentage change in cash terms and real terms for Kensington and Chelsea in each year since 1992 are set out in the table.

Kensington and Chelsea

	Total external support (£000)	*Percentage change*	
		Cash terms	*Real terms*
1991–92	106,064	—	—
1992–93	131,641	24.1	20.2
1993–94	109,283	−17.0	−19.0
1994–95	110,594	1.2	−0.1
1995–96	109,602	−0.9	−3.6
1996–97	109,063	−0.5	−3.6
1997–98	108,858	−0.2	−3.2
1998–99	107,887	−0.9	−3.5
1999–2000	110,941	2.8	0.4
2000–01	112,777	1.7	−0.5
2001–02	117,917	4.6	2.4
2002–03	122,280	3.7	1.2

Total external support consists of revenue support grant, redistributed national non-domestic rates, central support protection grant (in 1999–2000 and 2000–01), SSA reduction grant (between 1994–95 and 2000–01) and Inner London education grant (until 1994–95).

The real terms percentage change figures are calculated using the HM Treasury GDP Deflator where 2001–02 equals 100.

Ms Buck: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was granted from each source of support within his Department to *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* the Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea, outside the revenue support grant, in each year since 1997. [85831]

Mr. Leslie: The available information on funding for local authorities provided by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for which figures were requested is given in the tables.

The figures included in the tables exclude funding provided by the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions and the former Department of Transport, Local Government and the Regions for areas of work that are now the responsibility of the Department for Transport and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Westminster city council

£000

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Revenue Funding							
Central Support Protection Grant	—	—	—	4,206	4,866	—	—
SSA Reduction Grant	893	—	15,580	8,500	1,625	—	—
Housing Revenue Account subsidy[1]	23,850	22,489	21,656	21,102	20,214	25,626	30,763
Supporting People Grant	—	—	—	—	—	100	313
Beacon Council Grant	—	—	—	—	21	—	—
Total Revenue Funding (excluding Revenue Support Grant and redistributed business rates)	24,743	22,489	37,236	33,808	26,726	25,726	31,076
Capital Funding							
Basic Credit Approvals Issued	12,196	2,761	4,910	5,681	22,188	12,612	15,148
Capital Receipts Initiative—housing SCA[2]	—	2,039	6,618	7,176	—	—	—
Cash Incentive Scheme SCA[2]	975	1,029	644	40	—	—	—
Social Housing Grant	5,177	4,522	7,100	4,371	10,254	5,136	[3]
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	—	—	—	—	—	749	1,123
Street Wardens Grant	—	—	—	—	—	27	115
Street Crime Wardens Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	108
Estate Action Grant[4]	—	9,001	5,860	2,301	2,687	3,817	1,785
Rough Sleeping Grant	—	—	—	513	757	1,628	1,860
Priority Needs Order	—	—	—	—	—	—	66
Bed and Breakfast Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,443
Homelessness Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	70
Local e-government Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	525
Total Capital Funding	18,348	19,352	25,132	20,083	35,886	23,968	23,241

[1] HRA Subsidy figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are estimates, as payments have yet to be completed.
[2] SCA = Supplementary Credit Approvals
[3] Social Housing Grant data for 2002/03 is currently unavailable.
[4] 2002–03 Estate Action figure is the amount of funding agreed. To date Westminster have claimed £862,350.

Royal borough of Kensington and Chelsea

£000

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
Revenue funding							
Central Support Protection Grant	—	—	—	1,121	—	—	—
SSA Reduction Grant	10,838	8,412	5,487	3,158	—	—	—
Housing Revenue Account subsidy[1]	40,063	38,247	35,313	33,453	30,987	46,011	19,410
Supporting People Grant	—	—	—	—	—	95	268
Beacon Council Grant	—	—	—	—	21	—	—
Total Revenue Funding (excluding Revenue Support Grant and redistributed business rates)	50,901	46,659	40,800	37,732	31,009	46,106	19,678
Capital Funding							
Basic Credit Approvals Issued	8,895	5,686	4,183	5,411	17,081	12,652	12,740
Capital Receipts Initiative—housing SCA[2]	—	1,095	3,959	4,319	—	—	—
Cash Incentive Scheme SCA[2]	600	600	217	—	—	—	—
Social Housing Grant	6,649	5,026	4,076	6,766	7,754	9,477	[3]
Neighbourhood Renewal Fund	—	—	—	—	—	540	811
Estate Action Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Gypsy Sites Refurbishment Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	517
Rough Sleeping Grant	—	—	—	371	208	208	—
Priority Needs Order	—	—	—	—	—	—	37
Bed and Breakfast Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	1,377
Homelessness Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	168
Local e-government Grant	—	—	—	—	—	—	200
ISB Grant	—	—	—	—	39	126	—
Total Capital Funding	16,144	12,407	12,435	16,867	25,082	23,003	15,849

[1] HRA Subsidy figures for 2001–02 and 2002–03 are estimates, as payments have vet to be completed.
[2] SCA = Supplementary Credit Approvals.
[3] Social Housing Grant data for 2002–03 is currently unavailable.

Youth Provision (Battersea)

Martin Linton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what housing assistance is available to young people resident in Battersea who have left care homes or foster parents *(a)* over the age of 16 and *(b)* over the age of 18. [85523]

Mr. McNulty: Care leavers in Battersea can obtain housing assistance from the London borough council for Wandsworth. Help is available through the housing providers that work with Wandsworth, such as Shaftesbury Homes and Aruthusa, NACRO and the Wandsworth Independent Living Scheme. The council also offer specialist services for the black minority ethnic community, offenders and young parents. Care leavers wishing to access these services can do so by contacting their social worker or Wandsworth's homeless persons unit. Alternatively the Connexions service personal advisers help those leaving care who may become homeless in Wandsworth through working with voluntary organisations such as Grenfell, Threshold and Patchwork Housing. Advice on services which are available to young people between 16 and 18 years of age is best obtained by an individual setting out their detailed circumstances to the agencies listed.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Carlson *v.* Townsend

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what action she has taken as a result of the judgment in the Court of Appeal in the case of Carlson *v.* Townsend. [86520]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The implications of the judgment in Carlson *v.* Townsend was one of the issues considered by the Personal Injury Protocol Working Party as part of its comprehensive review of the protocol. The findings of the working party will be considered as part of the on-going process of monitoring the working of the protocol.

Equal Access Workshops

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when workshops to examine difficulties of equal access to legal services took place; what the *(a)* cost and *(b)* purpose of each workshop was; what minority ethnic organisations she consulted on the programme of these events; how many persons and what organisations have been represented at events; and what plans she has for further events in the next 12 months. [86017]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Five Community Legal Service (CLS) Diversity Workshops have taken place. The target groups and the costs of the relevant workshops were as follows:

Workshop	£
Children and Young People	4,738.90
People with Disabilities	3,668
Minority Ethnic Groups	2,763.87
Older People	616.58
Women's issues	750

The purpose of the workshops was to see how access to legal help and advice could be improved for each of the five target groups. In particular the aim of the workshops was to assess the following issues as they specifically applied to the target group:

the need for advice within the target group;

the areas where advice was most likely to be sought, and why;

the barriers to advice;

the importance of knowing legal rights, and the impact and social consequences of not knowing those rights; and

ideas for developing CLS partnership work for the target group in question.

No minority ethnic organisations were consulted on the programme of the workshops.

A list of the organisations and the total number of people who attended the events is shown in the following list.

A decision has not yet been made about the number or nature of further events.

List of attendees for CLS Diversity Workshops

Children and Young People—15 January 2002

(21 external delegates)

Child Poverty Action Group

Shelter

Federation of Independent Advice Centres

Local Government Association

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

Youth Access

The Law Society

Connexions

NACAB

Children's Rights Alliance

The Home Office

National Children's Homes

Race Equality Unit, DTI

Children's Legal Centre

Commission for Racial Equality

National Youth Agency

DFES

Legal Aid Practitioners Group

Family Law Association

Law Centres Federation

Harlow Young People's Information Centre

People with Disabilities—13 May 2002

(24 external delegates)

Disability Rights Commission

Federation of Independent Advice Centres (2 delegates)

Help the Aged
Disability Unit
NACAB (2 delegates)
Bury and District Disabled Advisory Council
Disability Information Services
Law Centres Federation
Garden Court North Chambers—Bar Council
Advice Services Alliance
Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)
Royal National Institute for the Deaf (RNID)
British Dyslexia Association
Shelter
Employment Services
Disability Rights Commission
British Council of Disabled People
Dial UK
LCD Disability Network
MIND
Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People
Federation of Independent Advice Centres

Minority Ethnic Groups—17 September 2002
(27 external delegates)

Action for Integration and Tolerance
Norwich and Norfolk Racial Equality Council
Lambeth Law Centre (3 delegates)
South London Tamil Welfare Group
Diversity Unit, LCD
Iranian Association
BT Ethnic Minority Network
Somali Welfare and Development
Commission for Racial Equality
Federation of Independent Advice (2 delegates)
Home Office
Latin American Association
Chinese Information and Advice Centre
Halkevi Turkish Community (2 delegates)
Connexions Service
Cambridgeshire Travellers Initiative
Asylum Aid
Confederation of Indian Organisations
University College, London
Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants
Federation of Irish Societies
Consumers' Association
Ghana Welfare Association

Older People—29 November 2002
(23 external delegates)

Maturity Works
Cruse Bereavement Care
Department of Work and Pensions
Neovenator
Latin American Association
Wise Owls
Beth Johnson Foundation
Better Government for Older People
Thamesmead Law Centre
Help the Aged
NACAB
ASRA Housing Association
SADACCA Elderly Day Care Centre
Action on Elder Abuse
Scottish Older People Advisory Group
Friends of the Elderly
Department of Health
Counsel and Care for the Elderly
Association of Retired People over 50
Jobcentre Plus
Islington PCT
Association of Greater London Older Women
DTI

Women's issues—28 October 2002
(13 external delegates)

Rights of Women
Fawcett Society
Calderdale Well Woman Association
Women's Link
Awareness in Practice
Equal Opportunities Commission (3 delegates)
ADVANCE
South Essex Rape and Incest Centre
Domestic Violence Working Group
National Domestic Violence Helpline
Northern Ireland Women's Support Network

Local Boundaries (Wales)

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department whether the review of local government boundaries in Wales will report in December. [85620]

Yvette Cooper: This is a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Medical Reports

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if the Lord Chancellor will issue directions to regulate the use of agreed medical reports. [86521]

Ms Rosie Winterton: My Department does not intend to regulate the use of agreed medical experts. The Civil Procedure Rules (CPR), allows parties in civil proceedings to instruct a single joint expert. To regulate this further would incur unnecessary costs and defeat the objectives of the CPR—to make civil disputes easier, quicker and cheaper to resolve.

Personal Injury

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what monitoring has taken place on the Personal Injury Pre-action Protocol. [86519]

Ms Rosie Winterton: To assess pre-action behaviour and the effect of the protocols, the Civil Justice Council and the Law Society jointly commissioned research by the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies and the University of Westminster. The report, "More Civil Justice?", which was published on 25 April 2002, focused on three specific areas of dispute: personal injury, clinical negligence and housing disrepair. The study found that in all three areas there was evidence of a culture change and better communication between opposing sides, which has increased the number of claims settling without going to court.

The report included a number of recommendations that are being considered by the Personal Injury Working Party in the comprehensive review of the protocol that it is currently conducting.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Automated Credit Transfer

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when his Department's plans to conduct a customer information campaign on the change to automated credit transfer payment will start; what form it will take; what its budget is; and if he will make a statement. [86054]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions will be converting people to Direct Payment over a two-year period, with the first payments going into accounts from April 2003. A customer information campaign will support the conversion.

We have already started to notify customers about the change to Direct Payment. The first invitation letters asking for account details started to go out to some Child Benefit customers at the end of October. We have also made information publicly available on the internet, through news releases to the media, and in articles aimed at advisers.

Next year the information campaign will give even more customers the information they need to help them make the best choice for their circumstances. The main element of the campaign is direct mail and we will write to all customers who are currently paid their benefits and state pensions by paper based methods. This is to let them know how Direct Payment affects them, and what options are available to them. We will support the mailing with an advertising and information campaign using a range of publicity media.

The detail of the campaign is still being developed, but a budget of up to £25 million is available for the campaign, spread over a three-year period (2002–03 to 2004–05).

Bereavement Benefits

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his policy towards claims for backpayments of bereavement benefits following the judgment given by the European Court of Human Rights on this subject on 11 June. [84318]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Bereavement benefits were introduced from April 2001 and, for the first time, extend the help available to both men and women. For information on the judgment referred to, which concerns benefits which pre-date bereavement benefits, I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to the hon. Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 320W.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to extend the deadline for claiming bereavement payments; whether the change will be retrospective; and if he will make a statement. [86612]

Malcolm Wicks: We want bereaved people to claim and receive the help that they and their families are entitled to when they need it—immediately after the bereavement. Most people do; more than four fifths claim within four or five weeks of their loss. However, we acknowledge that not all bereaved people find it possible to claim as promptly as the current rules for the lump-sum Bereavement Payment require. We are therefore extending the time limit for claiming Bereavement Payment and aligning it with the period over which a person can receive Bereavement Allowance—namely 12 months. We see this as a sensible alteration that will simplify the scheme for everyone while remaining compatible with underlying benefit entitlement rules.

We laid amending regulations on 24 October 2002, which will give effect to this change for claims in respect of deaths that occur on or after 1 April 2003.

Children's Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what benefits are available to children with mental health problems. [83187]

Maria Eagle: The term "mental health problems" covers a wide variety of symptoms. Where those symptoms impair a child's normal functioning to the extent that they amount to a severe mental disability, the child may be entitled to Disability Living Allowance[1]. The additional benefits which, subject to the normal entitlement conditions, are available to families with disabled children who qualify for Disability Living Allowance are shown in the table. The Family Fund Trust, which is funded by government, also provides grants to families of severely disabled children in order to ease the stress of their day-to-day life.

Benefits available to families with children with a mental disability who qualify for Disability Living Allowance

Disabled child's Disability Living Allowance component and rate

Care component (all rates) and mobility component (all rates).

Highest rate care component.

Highest or middle rate care component.

Higher rate mobility component.

Additional benefits that may be available to families of severely disabled children

Disabled child premium in income related benefits[2], or disabled child tax credit in Disabled Person's Tax Credit or Working Families Tax Credit.

Enhanced disability premium and the disabled child premium in income related benefits, or enhanced disability tax credit.

Invalid Care Allowance[3].

Access to the Motability, "Blue Badge" and Vehicle Excise Duty Exemption schemes.

Notes:

[1] Children under 16 years of age with a mental disability can qualify for the care component and the lower rate mobility component of Disability Living Allowance if they are so severely disabled that their need for attention, supervision or watching over by another person is substantially in excess of that normally required by children of their age. Those who qualify for the highest rate of the care component may also qualify for the higher rate of the mobility component if they exhibit extreme and unpredictable disruptive behaviour as the result of arrested or incomplete development of the brain.

[2] Income Support, Jobseekers Allowance (income related), Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit.

[3] Entitlement to Invalid Care Allowance can also give entitlement to the Carer Premium in income related benefits.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Birt

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister when Lord Birt began working as an adviser to the Prime Minister on transport issues; when this role is due to end; and what the expected *(a)* date and *(b)* nature of the outcome of his work are. [86086]

The Prime Minister: Lord Birt was appointed in October 2001 as my unpaid strategy adviser for a period of up to three years. The nature of Lord Birt's work is to provide private internal advice to me and other Cabinet Ministers on a range of issues. This advice is not disclosed under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to government Information.

Catherine Meyer

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he sent the letter to the Chancellor of Germany concerning the case of Catherine Meyer; and when the reply was received. [86723]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him in the House on Monday 28 October, *Official Report*, column 554 and the answer I gave him on Monday 25 November, *Official Report*, column 20W.

HEALTH

A and E

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the *(a)* role and *(b)* grade is of Mr. Richard Woodfield within the Medicines Control Agency; and what assessment he has made of the performance of Mr. Woodfield in relation to the specialist natural health retail sector. [85084]

Ms Blears: Mr. Richard Woodfield is a senior civil servant employed by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA). He is the group manager with responsibility for regulatory policy on herbal medicines and management of the MCA's European support unit. I am not prepared to provide any further personal information about Mr. Woodfield.

Acute Hospitals

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients died while waiting on ambulance trolleys at acute hospitals in the past 12 months. [86040]

Mr. Lammy: This information is not collected centrally. However, we have not been made aware of any deaths attributable to waiting times in ambulances at accident and emergency departments.

Adverse Events

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on current research into adverse events in hospitals. [85774]

Mr. Lammy: As set out in the report, "An Organisation with a Memory", international research demonstrates that significant numbers of adverse events occur in healthcare systems across the world.

In the United Kingdom, the Department has commissioned a programme of research into patient safety, which seeks to build upon and complement international work in this area. The programme is led by Professor Richard Lilford at the University of Birmingham. Work already completed includes systematic reviews of existing international research and examining the nature of errors in primary care. A number of studies are currently under way looking at obstetric injury, errors in accident and emergency units and the operating theatre, and errors resulting in litigation. Professor Lilford is working closely with the National Patient Safety Agency. Further information is available from the University of Birmingham patient safety research programme website at www.publichealth.bham.ac.uk/psrp.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the proportion of NHS patients affected by adverse events in British hospitals in the last 12 months. [85775]

Mr. Lammy: At the present time, we do not know what proportion of national health service patients are affected by adverse events in British hospitals. However, as reported in "An Organisation with a Memory", a report of an expert group on learning from adverse events chaired by the Chief Medical Officer, it is estimated that errors may occur in 10 per cent. of hospital admissions. This is in line with research carried out in other countries including New Zealand, Canada and Denmark.

The Government established the National Patient Safety Agency in July 2001 to improve the safety of NHS patient care by promoting an open and fair culture and by introducing a national reporting and learning system for adverse events. It is planned for the reporting and learning system to be rolled out across the NHS from summer 2003. The system will, in time, enable us to understand the true nature and extent of adverse events in the NHS and prevent them being repeated.

Ambulance Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the turnover rate for ambulance staff is, broken down by trust area. [85769]

Mr. Hutton: Information on ambulance staff turnover is not collected centrally.

Ambulance Staff (Vacancies)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for *(a)* paramedics and *(b)* ambulance staff, broken down by NHS trust area. [85784]

Mr. Hutton: Separate information for paramedic vacancies is not collected centrally. Information for all ambulance staff is shown in the table.

Between March 2001 and March 2002 the three month vacancy rate for ambulance staff fell from 1.4 per cent., to 0.5 per cent.

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002—ambulance staff vacancies in NHS trusts, by DHSC and NHS trust—three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

	Ambulance staff (excluding HA staff)			
	Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	*Three month vacancy number*	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)*	*Staff in post (headcount)*
England (excluding HA staff)	0.5	90	16,320	16,920
Midlands and Eastern	0.9	40	4,850	5,060
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Ambulance and Paramedic Service NHS Trust	2.4	10	470	480
East Anglian Ambulance NHS Trust	0.0	0	810	890
East Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	900	910
Essex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	640	720
Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	11.8	30	220	220
Lincolnshire Ambulance and Health Transport Services NHS Trust	0.0	0	410	410
Shropshire's Community and Mental Health Services NHS Trust	0.0	0	190	190
Staffordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	260	270
Warwickshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	290	290
West Midlands Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	670	670
London	0.0	0	2,310	2,330
Guy's and St. Thomas' NHS Trust	0.0	0	20	20
London Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	2,280	2,300
North West London Hospitals NHS Trust	0.0	0	10	10
Parkside Health NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Northern	0.3	20	4,560	4,810
Christie Hospital NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Cumbria Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	230	260
Greater Manchester Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	730	740
Lancashire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.2	0	580	620
Mersey Regional Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	560	560
North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust	2.5	20	580	590
North Manchester Healthcare NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North Tyneside PCT	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Manchester PCT	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance and Paramedic Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	420	450
Tees, East and North Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	580	590
West Yorkshire Metropolitan Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	870	1,010
Southern	0.5	30	4,600	4,720
Avon Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	320	340
Cornwall Healthcare NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Dorset Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	230	230
Gloucestershire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	2.9	10	210	210

Department of Health Vacancies Survey, March 2002—ambulance staff vacancies in NHS trusts, by DHSC and NHS trust—three month vacancy rates, numbers and staff in post

	Ambulance staff (excluding HA staff)			
	Three month vacancy rate (percentage)	*Three month vacancy number*	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)*	*Staff in post (headcount)*
Hampshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	2.8	10	390	400
Isle of Wight Healthcare NHS Trust	0.0	0	60	60
Kent Ambulance NHS Trust	0.8	10	610	650
Oxfordshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	130	140
Royal Berkshire Ambulance NHS Trust	[2]	[2]	280	290
South Devon Health Care NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Surrey and Hampshire Borders NHS Trust	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Surrey Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	340	350
Sussex Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	670	680
Two Shires Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	340	340
West Country Ambulance Service NSH Trust	0.4	0	820	820
Wiltshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust	0.0	0	200	210

[1] Figures where sum of staff in post and vacancies is less than 10.
[2] Did not receive a return
Key notes:
1. Three month vacancy information is at 31 March 2002.
2. Three month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more (whole time equivalents).
3. Three month vacancy rates are three month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data are from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001.
6. Staff in post data exclude staff employed by health authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from trusts, PCTs and special health authorities.
7. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest 10.
8. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
Other notes:
9. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
10. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
11. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.
12. Only those NHS trusts employing ambulance staff are listed.
Sources:
Vacancy numbers and rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002
Non-medical staff in post: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census September 2001

Broadband Connectivity

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide pharmacies with broadband connectivity; and if he will make a statement. [83902]

Mr. Lammy: There are no specific plans to provide broadband connectivity to pharmacies. Hospital pharmacies will have access to the broadband networking arrangements for hospitals being put in place as part of the national health service modernisation programme. Community pharmacists are of course part of the NHS "family", but apart from those participating in the electronic transfer of prescriptions pilots do not make use of the national NHS network.

The broadband networking plans set out in the Government's "21st century IT" strategy document focus on the needs of NHS trusts and general practitioner practices. As stated in the strategy document, it is anticipated that the trials will continue to grow and involve a sizeable number of GPs and pharmacists with a natural migration into rollout. This project will create greater connectivity to NHSnet for pharmacists allowing the access to the benefits that this service provides. We will review the need for broadband access to pharmacies as the strategy develops.

Child Dental Health

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of children with tooth cavities in *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the north-west of England; in each of the previous five years. [85330]

Mr. Lammy: The British association for the study of community dentistry (BASCD) carries out surveys to monitor the dental caries experience of five, 21 and 14-year-old children. The survey of five-year-olds is carried out every second year and the surveys of 12 and 14-year-olds are carried out every four years.

The number of children with tooth cavities for five, 12 and 14-year-old children by health authority in Lancashire is shown in table 1 for the years 1995–96 to 2000–01 and for the north-west region in table 2. The percentages of children with dental caries are taken from the BASCD survey results and the number of children with caries are estimated by applying these percentages to estimates of the total population of these children.

Table 1: Number and percentage of children with tooth cavities in Lancashire 1995–96 to 2000–01—Lancashire health authorities

	Five-years-old		12-years-old		14-years-old	
Health authority area	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1995–96						
East Lancashire	3,900	55	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Morecambe Bay	1,800	49	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North-west Lancashire	2,500	48	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Lancashire	1,800	45	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	10,000	50	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
1996–97						
East Lancashire	[1]	[1]	2,700	38	[1]	[1]
Morecambe Bay	[1]	[1]	900	23	[1]	[1]
North-west Lancashire	[1]	[1]	1,300	25	[1]	[1]
South Lancashire	[1]	[1]	1,500	37	[1]	[1]
Total	[1]	[1]	6,400	32	[1]	[1]
1997–98						
East Lancashire	4,000	52	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Morecambe Bay	1,900	48	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North-west Lancashire	2,800	47	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Lancashire	1,700	43	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	10,400	48	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
1998–99						
East Lancashire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	3,200	45
Morecambe Bay	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	1,000	26
North-west Lancashire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	2,200	41
South Lancashire	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	1,900	47
Total	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	8,300	41
1999–2000						
East Lancashire	3,600	50	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Morecambe Bay	1,600	42	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
North-west Lancashire	2,700	49	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
South Lancashire	1,700	44	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
Total	9,500	47	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
2000–01						
East Lancashire	[1]	[1]	2,600	35	[1]	[1]
Morecambe Bay	[1]	[1]	800	20	[1]	[1]
North-west Lancashire	[1]	[1]	2,100	35	[1]	[1]
South Lancashire	[1]	[1]	1,700	37	[1]	[1]
Total	[1]	[1]	7,200	33	[1]	[1]

[1] Data not collected by BASCD for this age group for this year.

Table 2: Number and percentage of children with tooth cavities in the north-west region 1995–96 to 2000–01—north-west region

	Five-years-old		12-years-old		14-years-old	
	Number	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
1995–96	42,300	50	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
1996–97	[1]	[1]	27,400	32	[1]	[1]
1997–98	41,800	46	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
1998–99	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]	31,400	37
1999–2000	39,100	46	[1]	[1]	[1]	[1]
2000–01	[1]	[1]	28,500	31	[1]	[1]

[1] Data not collected by BASCD for this age group for this year

Computers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance the NHS gives to trusts about the replacement time for computer equipment. [85791]

Ms Blears: No general guidance is given. The replacement of computer equipment will be decided by individual national health service organisations depending on local circumstances.

Congenital Malformation Database

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what research has been conducted into the United Kingdom congenital malformation database since it was established. [84256]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. L. Smith, dated 10 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your parliamentary question on what research has been conducted into the United Kingdom congenital anomaly database since it was established. (84256)

The National Congenital Anomaly System (NCAS) was set up in 1964 and only monitors congenital anomalies in England and Wales. Reporting to the system is voluntary and only live births and stillbirths are included. A number of articles and papers have been written using data from NCAS and on the quality of the data held on NCAS. Listed below are the articles using national data of which ONS are aware.

Research using the National Congenital Anomaly System:

Botting BJ. Limb reduction defects and coastal areas. Letter. Lancet, 1994; 343: 1033–1034.

Botting B, Rosato M, Wood R. Teenage mothers and the health of their children. Popul Trends. 1998 Autumn;(93): 19–28

Busby A, Dolk H, Collin R, Barry Jones R, Winter R. Compiling a national register of babies born with anophthalmia/ micropthalmia in England 1988–94. Arch Dis Child. Fetal Neonatal Ed 1998;79:F168–173

Doyle PE, Beral V, Botting B, Wale CJ. Congenital malformations in twins in England and Wales. J Epidemiol Community Health. 1991;45(1):43–8.

Gilbert R. Clusters of anophthalmia in Britain. Difficult to implicate Benomyl on current evidence. BMJ 1993;307:340–341.

Mastroiacovo P, Castilla E, Arpino C, Botting B, Cocchi G, Goujard J, Marinacci C, Merlob P, Metneki J, Mutchinick O, Ritvanenen A, Rosano A. Congenital malformations in twins: an international study. Am J Med Genet 1999;83:117–124

Morris JK, Wald NJ. Quantifying the decline in the birth prevalence of neural tube defects in England and Wales. Journal of Medical Screening, 1999 6; 4:182–185

Murphy M, Seagroatt V, Hey K et al. Neural tube defects 1974–94 down but not out. Arch Dis Child 1996; 75: F133-F134

Office for National Statistics. Congenital anomaly statistics Series MBS . London: The Stationery Office

Office for National Statistics. Health Statistics Quarterly no 4. Annual update: congenital anomaly statistics 1998 London: The Stationery Office, 1999

Office for National Statistics. Health Statistics Quarterly no 8. Annual update: congenital anomaly statistics 1999 London: The Stationery Office, 2000

Office for National Statistics. Health Statistics Quarterly no 12. Annual update: congenital anomaly statistics 2000 London: The Stationery Office, 2001

Office for National Statistics. Health Statistics Quarterly no 16. Annual update: congenital anomaly statistics 2001 London: The Stationery Office, 2002

Rogers SC, Weatherall JAC, OPCS, Anencephalus, spina bifida and congenital hydrocephalus. England and Wales 1964–1972. Studies on medical and population subjects. No 32 London: HMSO 1976:

Rosano A, Smithells D, Cacciani L, Botting B, Castilla E, Cornel M, Erickson D, Goujard J,

Irgens L, Merlob P, Robert E, Siffel C, Stoll C, Sumiyoshi Y. Time trends in neural tube defects prevalence in relation to preventive strategies: an international study. J Epidemiol Community Health. 1999 Oct;53(10):630–5

Smeeton NC, Rona RJ, Sharland G, Botting BJ, Barnett A, Dundas R. Estimating the prevalence of malformation of the heart in the first year of life using capture-recapture methods. Am J Epidemiol, 1999; 150 (7):778–785

Swerdlow AJ, Melzer D. The value of England and Wales congenital malformation notification scheme data for epidemiology: male genital tract malformations. J Epidemiol Community Health. 1988; 42(1):8–13.

Tan KH, Kilby MD, Whittle MJ, Beattie BR, Booth IW, Botting BJ. Congenital anterior abdominal wall defects in England and Wales 1987–93: retrospective analysis of OPCS data. BMJ. 1996 Oct 12;313(7062):903–6.

Research into the quality of data on the National Congenital Anomaly System:

Alberman E, Botting B. Recommendations for improving national data on congenital anomalies are being implemented. BMJ. 1997 Apr 26;314(7089):1278

Botting B. The impact of more complete data from Wales on the National Congenital Anomaly system. Health Statistics Quarterly 2000; 5: 7–9.

Botting B. Improving the completeness of Down syndrome notification. Health Statistics Quarterly, 2000a ; 6: 14–17

Busby A, Dolk H, Collin R, Barry Jones R, Winter R. Compiling a national register of babies born with anophthalmia/ micropthalmia in England 1988–94. Arch Dis Child. Fetal Neonatal Ed 1998;79:F168–173

Coleridge HL. The National Congenital Anomaly System-why it needs midwives' support. RCM Midwives J. 2002;5(5): 188–9

Cuckle H, Nanchahal K, Wald N. Birth prevalence of Down's syndrome in England and Wales. Prenatal Diagnosis 1991; 11: 29–34.

Dutton SJ, Owens JR, Harris F. Ascertainment of congenital malformations: a comparative study of two systems. J Epidemiol Community Health 1991; 45: 294–298.

Hey K, O'Donnell M, Murphy M, Jones N, Botting B, use of local neural tube defect registers to interpret national trends. Archives of disease in childhood. 1994; 71: F198-F202

Hill GB, Spicer CC Weatherall JAC The computer surveillance of congenital malformations. Br Med Bull 1968; 24 (3) :215–218

Huang T, Wall HC, Wald NJ, Morris JK, Mutton D, Alberman E. Reliability of statistics on Down's syndrome notifications. Journal of Medical Screening 1997; 4:95–97.

Knox EG, Armstrong EH, Lancashire R. The quality of notification of congenital malformations. J Epidemiol Community Health 1984; 38: 296–305.

Knox EG, Lancashire R. Epidemiology of congenital malformations. London: HMSO,1991.

Morris JK, Wald NJ. Quantifying the decline in the birth prevalence of neural tube defects in England and Wales. Journal of Medical Screening, 1999 6; 4:182–185

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OPCS The OPCS Monitoring Scheme for Congenital Malformations—Occasional Paper 43- A review by a Working Group of the Registrar General's Medical Advisory Committee. London: OPCS 1995

Payne JN. Limitations of the OPCS congenital malformation notification systems illustrated by examination of congenital malformations of the cardiovascular systems in districts within the Trent region. Public Health 1992; 106: 437–448.

Rahi JS, Botting B. Ascertainment of children with congenital cataract through the National Congenital Anomaly System in England and Wales. Br J Ophthalmol. 2001 Sep;85(9): 1049–51.

Smeeton NC, Rona RJ, Sharland G, Botting BJ, Barnett A, Dundas R. Estimating the prevalence of malformation of the heart in the first year of life using capture-recapture methods. Am J Epidemiol, 1999; 150 (7): 778–785

Swerdlow AJ, Melzer D. The value of England and Wales congenital malformation notification scheme data for epidemiology: male genital tract malformations. J Epidemiol Community Health. 1988; 42(1): 8–13.

Weatherall JAC. An assessment of the efficiency of notification of congenital malformations. The Medical Officer, 1969; 121:65–68

Weatherall JAC. Congenital malformations, surveillance and reporting. Population Trends 11, 1978, 27–29

Consultants' Contract (Press Releases)

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library copies of press releases made by his Department regarding slide 9 of the "A New Consultant Contract—The Framework for Agreement" presentation given by Mr.Andrew Foster, Director of Human Resources for the national health service. [86250]

Mr. Hutton: The Department has not issued any press release regarding any aspect of the presentation given by Mr. Andrew Foster, national health service director of human resources.

Correspondence

Mr. Beith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letters from the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, dated 11 June and 24 July 2002 , concerning new prescription policing arrangements. [81725]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 26 November 2002.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for his Department to improve the response rate to letters to hon. Members on behalf of their constituents. [83280]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* A customer service project has been set up under the Department's change programme. The aim of this project is to significantly improve the Department's performance in handling telephone, written and e-mail inquiries from members of the public and their representatives, and to maximise the potential of the Department's website and other forms of communication media.

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many replies remain outstanding to letters from hon. Members which were sent by them before 3 December 2001. [84064]

Mr. Lammy: None.

Mr. Desmond Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to reply to the letter of Ronnie Cairnduff of Hampshire Care dated 31 July. [84724]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is unable to locate a copy of Mr. Cairnduff's correspondence and the Customer Service Unit apologises for this and is seeking a copy of this correspondence.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the reasons for the 17 month delay in responding to a letter from the hon. Member for Totnes dated 27 June 2001 concerning Mrs. Alyson Bellenes of Marldon, Devon and St. John's Wort. [85245]

Mr. Lammy: Firstly, I apologise for the unacceptable delay in replying to the hon. Member's correspondence. Unfortunately, the Department did not receive the original correspondence but did receive the copy the hon. Member forwarded on 21 November. The delay was caused by administration difficulties within the Department.

To prevent this kind of delay from reoccurring the Department has introduced a new correspondence tracking system designed to track correspondence throughout the Department via the electronic mailing system. A customer service project has been set up under the Department's change programme with the following objectives:

to improve significantly the Department's performance in handling telephone, written and e-mail inquiries from members of the public and their representatives.

to maximise the potential of the Department's website and the other forms of communication media as a source of information to the public.

The project will give further impetus to improving performance in the timeliness and quality of responses to correspondence.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the honourable Member for Walsall North will receive a reply to his letter of 22 October regarding a constituent, Departmental Ref PO1018138. [85889]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 5 December.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will answer the letter of 5 September to him from the hon. Member for Beaconsfield concerning Mr. and Mrs. C. Brewster. [86649]

Jacqui Smith: A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 9 December.

Delayed Admissions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the total cost to NHS ambulance trusts of delayed admissions to accident and emergency departments in the last 12 months. [85767]

Mr. Lammy: None.

Delayed Ambulance Transfers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received on delayed transfers from ambulances to accident and emergency departments. [85766]

Mr. Lammy: We have received no formal representations but are aware of local concerns about delayed transfers from ambulances into accident and emergency departments. Normally any such problems are resolved locally through dialogue between the hospital, ambulance service and any other interested parties.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if the £100 million for social services that is being taken from NHS budgets will be ring-fenced for tackling delayed discharge. [85232]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* A decision on how the funding will be allocated has not yet been made. Details will be announced as soon as possible.

Dental Treatment

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to make periodontal treatment available on the NHS in all dental practices; [84595]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure that the full range of dentistry treatment is available on the NHS. [84596]

Mr. Lammy: Under their national health service terms of service general dental practitioners have a duty to provide for their registered patients all treatment that is necessary to secure and maintain oral health. The statement of dental remuneration, which includes fees for surgical and non-surgical periodontal treatments, lists most of the treatments that are available on the NHS.

Dentistry

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the provision of dentistry treatment on the NHS; and how many dentists in each PCT are *(a)* practising, *(b)* offering the full range of treatment on the NHS and *(c)* able to take on new patients on the NHS. [84597]

Mr. Lammy: The number of general dental service (GDS) dentists in each primary care trust (PCT) in England at 30 June 2002 is contained in the table that has been placed in the Library. Dentists practising in more than one PCT are counted in each PCT in which they practice.

Information about dentists in other national health service services, for example community dental service, personal dental service, hospital dental service is not yet available by PCT.

GDS dentists are required to provide a full range of NHS treatment to maintain the oral health of the patients that are registered with them for capitation (children) or continuing care (adults).

Details of the GDP that are currently accepting new patient registrations is monitored by PCTs locally and is not centrally available. Patients wishing to register with a dentist can obtain details of GDS dentists registering new patients in their area by telephoning NHS Direct or their local PCT.

Depo Provera

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received from general practitioners about the adequacy of supplies of depo provera injectable contraceptive; and what action he has taken as a result. [86605]

Ms Blears: We have received representations from a number of health professionals, including general practitioners, about the current shortage of the injectable contraceptive depo-provera which has been caused by production problems. Departmental officials have been in regular contact with the manufacturer of this product to assist rapid action to alleviate the shortage and are aware that limited stocks are now available. Normal supplies of this product are expected to be available from 16 December.

Diabetes

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the National Service Framework for Diabetes. [86073]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks.

Digital Television

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the value of the use of digital television in the modernisation of the NHS. [83021]

Mr. Lammy: The Department, working with commercial partners from the media and broadcasting industries, has recently run four pilot projects exploring health applications of digital interactive television. The different projects were chosen to explore a variety of different types of digital television service and different digital TV platforms. Information was broadcast on health conditions, healthy living and local health services using text-based material, video-on-demand and a mixture of scheduled programmes and text-based information. A range of transactional services such as booking appointments with general practitioners was also explored.

Following the completion of these pilot projects, a programme of work will begin to develop a version of NHS Direct for digital TV and to make it available nationwide. Working with commercial partners, the Department and the NHS will develop a service that will enable people to have easy and fast access at home to trusted information and advice on health, health care and the NHS. Such a service will complement the already very successful NHS Direct telephone helpline and the NHS Direct online website. The Department will also continue to explore the more transactional uses of digital TV.

The process of selecting commercial partners will begin early in the new year with the Department issuing an invitation to tender to develop and run an NHS Direct information service on digital TV. The Department's intention is, in time, to provide this service across all digital TV platforms.

Emergency Admissions Policy

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on admissions from ambulances to accident and emergency departments. [85765]

Mr. Lammy: Patients who arrive at accident and emergency departments (A&E) by ambulance should be transferred in to A&E as soon as is practical and in patients' best interests.

Emergency Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on linkage between emergency ambulance services and the fire services. [85785]

Mr. Lammy: Pre-hospital patient care remains an integral part of the health care system. The Government support the sharing of facilities and other joint working between ambulance and fire services if it is practical and mutually beneficial.

Epilepsy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what submissions his Department has received from organisations representing epilepsy *(a)* patients, *(b)* carers and *(c)* service providers as part of its review of commissioning arrangements for specialised services. [86237]

Mr. Hutton: The majority of epilepsy services are provided in a primary or secondary care setting and are not specialised services; consequently they are not within the remit of this review. There have been no specific submissions to the review from organisations solely representing epilepsy patients, carers or service providers. There have been submissions from the Association of Community Health Councils for England and Wales, the College of Health and London Health Link.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how and to what extent the views and opinions of epilepsy patients and their carers are being taken into account as part of the review of commissioning specialised services. [86526]

Mr. Hutton: The review is considering the commissioning arrangements for specialised services in general, it is not looking at any one particular specialised service. The majority of epilepsy services are provided in a primary or secondary setting and, as such, are not tertiary services; consequently they are not within the remit of this review.

Firefighters

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent discussions he has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on the length of training required to train firefighters to fulfil paramedic responsibilities. [85780]

Mr. Lammy: There have been no discussions on this subject between the Department and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what contribution his Department made to the Bain report, with special reference to firefighters taking on paramedic duties; [85781]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister about the possibility of using firefighters as paramedics. [85782]

Mr. Lammy: Sir George Bain's review is independent and I understand that he is still in the process of developing and refining his final proposals. Pre-hospital patient care is an integral part of the health care system, but firefighters can assist ambulance services by providing basic life support and defibrillation if that provides a faster response to life-threatening emergencies. This does not require the same level of training as that undergone by ambulance service paramedics.

Five-a-day Initiative

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health where the pilot schemes for the five-a-day initiative took place. [86373]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The pilot schemes for the five-a-day local community initiatives were in Airedale and Craven, County Durham, Hastings, Sandwell and Somerset.

Foundation Hospitals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether Sunderland and Homerton NHS trusts will be granted foundation status. [85564]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Applications to become national health service foundation trusts will be invited from acute and specialist NHS trusts that were awarded three stars in the performance ratings announced in July 2002. City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Trust and Homerton University Hospitals NHS Trusts are eligible to apply.

We will shortly issue a publication that will set out our detailed proposals on establishing NHS foundation trusts. Alongside this, or shortly after publication, we will invite applications to become NHS foundation trusts.

General Practitioners (Age)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors were seeking locum work *(a)* in May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest available date in (i) North Yorkshire, (ii) York and (iii) England. [85805]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not currently available. Information on locum doctors working in the hospital, community health service and public health service (HCHS) sectors on 30 September 2002 is currently being analysed and validated and should allow us to show how many locum doctors were working on that date. This information should be available in the new year. However it will not show how many locum doctors in that sector were available for or seeking locum work.

Supplementary lists, compiled by primary care trusts, should allow us to estimate the number of general practitioners seeking work in specified areas. The data is currently being validated and should be available in the new year.

Herbal Remedies

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to introduce simplified registration schemes for herbal remedies under the provisions of the amendments made by the European Parliament to the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [85085]

Ms Blears: If the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products is agreed we would plan to introduce a regulatory scheme for traditional herbal

remedies, as would be required under the current proposals. If the scope of the Directive is extended to give member states flexibility to introduce or retain simplified registration arrangements for other categories of traditional medicines we would in principle be open to the use of such flexibility. We would intend to have more detailed discussions with interested parties on this latter issue when the prospects for the amendment proposed by the European Parliament become clearer.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the Government are doing to regulate herbal remedies that they estimate could endanger people's health if taken in large enough quantities. [85387]

Ms Blears: Potentially any herbal remedy could put health at risk if taken in sufficient quantity. The proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products is under negotiation in Europe. The current proposals would ensure that traditional herbal remedies registered under the scheme were accompanied by systematic information about dosage and other information relating to the safe use of the product. This contrasts with the current position for unlicensed remedies under Section 12(2) of the Medicines Act 1968 where there are no such specific requirements for information to be given.

HFEA Consultation

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason respondents to the questionnaire on the HFEA's consultation document, "Sex Selection: Choice and responsibility in human reproduction" are asked to identify themselves as "pro life". [84613]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority gave organisations responding to its consultation on sex selection the opportunity to identify themselves as "pro life" because it is particularly interested in whether such groups would condone sex selection techniques, such as sperm sorting, that do not involve the destruction of embryos.

Hospitals (Hotel Charges)

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on hotel charges for hospital services; [83344]

(2) if he will make a statement on charging patients for hospital food; and which hospitals charge patients for meals on the ward. [83347]

Mr. Lammy: The Government have no plans to introduce "hotel" charges including charges for food in national health service hospitals.

Human Genetics Commission

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the procedures are for *(a)* appointing (i) members and (ii) chairpersons of working groups for the HGC and *(b)* addressing potential conflicts of interest among HGC working group members and chairpersons. [85288]

Ms Blears: The Human Genetics Commission (HGC) establishes working groups and sub-groups in the manner that it sees fit to conduct its work. The precise discussions leading to the creation of groups are a matter of public record and can be found in the minutes of HGC and its business committee.

HGC publishes a Register of Members' interests and the chair of HGC expects members to declare relevant interests.

Improving Design Standards

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on how he intends to implement the recommendations in the joint OGC/CABE report, Improving standards of design in the procurement of public building. [85190]

Mr. Lammy: We support the Office of Government Commerce/Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment report, and our design programme includes action plans to deliver its recommendations including:

Raising the profile of design through HRH Prince Charles as the NHS Design Champion, Lord Hunt as ministerial design champion and design champions in NHS trusts,

Partnering with key design bodies such as the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), The Prince's Foundation, the Kings Fund and others,

Supporting the NHS by developing guidance, publications and training.

Laundry Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the role of effective laundry practice in preventing health care associated infections. [85295]

Mr. Lammy: The prevention and control of infection is part of the overall risk management within the health care environment. All national health service organisations must ensure that they have effective systems in place to prevent and control health care associated infections and HSG(95)18 provides advice and guidance on the use of laundry practices to reduce the possible risk of infections. There is no central analysis of the role of effective laundry practice in preventing health care associated infections.

Levonelle

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he intends to take to prevent unauthorised sales of the contraceptive pill Levonelle. [84037]

Ms Blears: The Pharmaceutical Societies of Great Britain and Northern Ireland have set professional standards and developed comprehensive guidance for pharmacists on the retail supply of emergency hormonal contraception (EHC). Under these guidelines pharmacists are required to deal with the request personally and to use their professional judgment to decide whether the supply is necessary and in the requestor's best interests.

Malaria

Mrs. [illegible]alton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of malaria were diagnosed in the UK in 2001; and what the cost was to the NHS of treating them. [85153]

Ms Blears: 2,050 cases of malaria were reported in the United Kingdom in 2001. The individual cost of treating malaria is not available.

Medical Research Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list Government funded medical research projects, their objectives and projected completion dates. [86037]

Ms Blears: The main Government agency for medical research is the Medical Research Council (MRC), which receives its grant in aid from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, via the Office of Science and Technology. Details of 1,611 current projects funded by the MRC can be found www.mrc.ac.uk/index/current-research.

Details of 782 on-going projects funded by the Department and the national health service can be found on the National Research Register at www.doh.qov.uk/research/nrr.

Medicines Control Agency

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are employed by the Medicines Control Agency at each major salary grade; what the total wage bill of the agency is; what its total income is from *(a)* charges and *(b)* other sources; and what plans he has to submit the agency to (i) greater control, (ii) closer scrutiny and (iii) enhanced accountability. [84211]

Ms Blears: At 31 October 2002 MCA had a total of 522.5 full time equivalent (FTEs) employees. These are analysed by grade as:

	FTEs
Integrated payband 1	127.6
Integrated payband 2	115.2
Integrated payband 3	110.6
Integrated payband 4	111.6
Senior civil service	57.5
Total	522.5

The salary costs of MCA are expected to be £22,248,000 for the year 2002–03. For the financial year 2001–02 MCA income from charges was £36,730,000. For the financial year 2002–03 the initial budget was set at £40,000,000. MCA's incomes comes entirely from charges so there are no other sources.

On 13 June 2002, we announced that the Medicines Control Agency would be merged with the Medical Devices Agency from 1 April 2003 with improved governance arrangements, including a new post of chairman and non-executive members on the board. The new agency will be called the Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency. Professor Alasdair Breckenridge, CBE, has been appointed as its chairman-designate, following an open competition.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients with mental health problems detained due to a risk of suicide had a face to face assessment by a mental health professional within seven days of discharge from a hospital in the last year for which figures are available. [85636]

Jacqui Smith: The information is not available in the requested format. However, preliminary data relating to the target set for patients with severe mental illness and/or deliberate self harm shows an encouragingly high rate of follow up by face to face contact with a mental health professional. Further work is being done to ensure that our strategy to prevent suicide is fully implemented.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of mental health services following the introduction of the Mental Health Act 1999. [86142]

Jacqui Smith: Partnership arrangements under the Health Act 1999 have been available to National Health Service bodies and local government since April 2000. Since then, the Department has been notified of 44 partnerships involving mental health services. In addition, three of the first five care trusts were formed from mental health service providers.

The use of the Health Act 1999 is also being monitored through the annual local implementation plan process and in 2002 information has been collected on joint planning and the use of the flexibilities. Just under 90 per cent. of all local implementation teams reported that they were involved in joint planning and half were making other use of the flexibilities.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what performance targets his Department sets for monitoring mental health services to deaf people. [86146]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has just concluded a wide consultation of mental health services for deaf people. Together with an expert group, it is considering the large number of responses received and will publish conclusions in the New Year. The arrangements for monitoring performance will be considered as part of this.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the length of time spent by GPs on mental health training; [86155]

(2) what proportion of *(a)* GPs and *(b)* practice nurses have received formal mental health training. [86157]

Mr. Hutton: Information about the proportion of general practitioners (GPs) who have received formal mental health training is not collected centrally. However, all doctors are expected to have an understanding of the psychological factors that affect patients and have the knowledge and skills of assessment of the mental state of patients.

The content of the general practice training curriculum is the responsibility of the joint committee on postgraduate training for general practice (JCPTGP), which is the competent authority for general practice training in the United Kingdom. The JCPTGP is an independent professional body, and it is required by section 9(3) of the Vocational Training Regulations

1997 to determine and publish the curriculum to be followed by a GP registrar (ie, a trainee GP). While not all GP registrars are required to spend a period of training in psychiatry, those who do may spend not less than six months or more than 12 months training in the specialty.

The Regulations mentioned above specify seven competencies which must be tested, and which the curriculum must therefore teach:

factual medical knowledge sufficient to enable the doctor to perform the duties of a GP;

the ability to apply factual medical knowledge to the management of problems presented by patients in general practice;

effective communication, both orally and in writing; the ability to consult satisfactorily with general practice patients;

the ability to review and critically analyze the practitioner's own working practices and to manage any necessary changes appropriately;

clinical skills; and

the ability to synthesize all of the above competencies and apply them appropriately in a general practice setting.

Therefore, GPs are expected to learn in training, the skills needed to deal with all their patients. As mental health issues are relatively common, GP registrars would be often exposed, while training, to the assessment, management and monitoring of patients with mental health problems.

The General Medical Council's education committee has the general function of promoting high standards of medical education and co-ordinating all stages of medical education to ensure that students and newly qualified doctors are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for professional practice. As pre-registration house officers, all doctors, including those who will eventually become GPs, are expected to have training in the psychological and social factors that affect patients. As senior house officers, all doctors are expected to develop medical knowledge and skills of assessment of the mental state of patients.

With regard to practice nurses, information about the proportion who have received formal mental health training is not collected centrally. Workforce development confederations are in the best position to understand local educational needs. Therefore, they work with National Health Service trusts, which are responsible for making decisions in which they balance development of existing staff and investment in training.

NHS Appointments (Political Affiliations)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in each year since 1996 who have been appointed to a position within the NHS have declared a political interest, broken down by political parties; and what proportion of the total number of appointees this represents for each political party. [83293]

Mr. Lammy: Information is not available in the precise form requested. The tables give the appointments made by Ministers to national health service bodies since the Government first took office in 1997, and the appointments subsequently made by the NHS Appointments Commission since it was established in 2001.

Table 1: Secretary of State for Health appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts and health authorities from 2 May 1997 to 2 July 2001.

Political party	*Appointees*	*Proportion of total appointments (percentage)*
Conservative	305	5.1
Independent	54	0.9
Labour	1,499	25.1
Liberal Democrat	230	3.9
Other	34	0.6
Total declaring political interest	2,122	35.6
Not politically active	3,842	64.4
Total appointments for period	5,964	100.0

Table 2: Appointments Commission appointments to NHS trusts, primary care trusts, health authorities, strategic health authorities and care trusts from 2 July 2001 to 1 November 2002

Political party	*Appointees*	*Proportion of total appointments (percentage)*
Conservative	143	5.2
Independent	28	1.0
Labour	599	21.9
Liberal Democrat	111	4.1
Other	16	0.6
Total declaring political interest	897	32.8
Not politically active	1,835	67.2
Total appointments for period	2,732	100.0

NHS Direct

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the running costs of NHS Direct were in 2001–02. [86060]

Mr. Lammy: In 2001–02, the running costs for NHS Direct were £98.6 million.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* doctors, *(b)* administrators and *(c)* nurses are employed by NHS Direct. [86067]

Mr. Lammy: NHS Direct employ approximately 2,500 (whole time equivalent) members of staff nationally. Of these around 1,050 are nurses, 470 call handlers, and 210 health information advisers. The remaining staff consists of managers, trainers, nurse supervisors and administration staff. Each of the 22 sites for clinical governance purposes employs a medical director (doctor).

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients spoke to a doctor within an hour of contacting NHS Direct, in the most recent period for which figures are available. [86068]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not collected centrally.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of callers to NHS Direct spoke to a qualified health professional in the most recent period for which figures are available. [86069]

Mr. Lammy: Calls made to NHS Direct involving clinical symptoms result in the caller speaking to a qualified health professional. The remaining calls are health information inquiries that are dealt with by health information advisers.

NHS Litigation Authority

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many caseworkers are employed by the national health service litigation authority; and how many were employed in each year since 1998. [84894]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* As at 31 October 2002, there were a total of 93 caseworker posts within the national health service litigation authority. For the previous years, the numbers of caseworkers employed by the authority were as follows:

	Number of caseworkers
March 2002	76
March 2001	56
March 2000	39
March 1999	16
March 1998	8

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the proposed review of the workings of NHS Professionals. [85300]

Mr. Hutton: An internal assessment team has been established to take stock of the progress to date on implementation of NHS Professionals. The assessment will include a review of the different approaches in the provision of temporary staffing and recommend the most viable options for continuing to deliver this service in-house.

The assessment team will report their findings by mid December.

NHS Salaries

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many non-medical employees of the national health service were paid a salary of more than £80,000 in each year since 1997–98. [86249]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Information in the precise form requested is not available because some sources do not distinguish between medical and non-medical staff. What information we have is in the table.

The figures are for health authorities (HAs), national health service trusts, primary care trusts (PCTs) and special health authorities (SHAs).

	HAs all staff and directors	*NHS trusts administration, others and directors*	*PCTs administration, others and directors*	*SHAs all staff and directors*
1997–98	153	324	Not applicable	36
1998–99	215	399	Not applicable	45
1999–2000	290	483	Not applicable	66
2000–01	n/a	593	3	82
2001–02	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Notes:

Staff in HAs are not analysed into medical and non-medical in the accounts or summarisation forms. The figures include all staff employed in HAs although a number of these will be classified as medical.

All figures include directors with remuneration over £80,000. However medical directors cannot be excluded from the numbers from the information available in the accounts or schedules, i.e., the numbers are inflated in terms of the question actually asked.

Figures in health authorities in 2000–01 and in all bodies for 2001–02 are not available as they are not disclosed in the accounts or summarisation schedules.

Sources:

Health authority audited accounts 1997–98 and 1998–99

Health authority audited summarisation forms 1999–2000

NHS trust audited summarisation schedules 1997–98 to 2000–01

Primary care trust audited summarisation schedules 2000–01

Special health authority audited accounts 1997–98 to 2000–01

NICE

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy that compulsory NHS funding will not be required for older NICE-approved technologies where they are superseded by newer, more cost-effective and medically advanced NICE-approved treatments. [85045]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The statutory funding obligation applies to the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) technology guidance which is extant at this time. When NICE reviews it's earlier guidance it takes account of new technologies which may have emerged since the original appraisal.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Government is taking to ensure that the National Institute for Clinical Excellence's recommendations to the NHS in England and Wales regarding the drugs donepezil (Aricept), rivastigmine (Exelon) and galantamine (Reminyl) are implemented at a local level. [85466]

Mr. Lammy: Primary care trusts (PCTs) in England are under a statutory obligation to provide funding for treatments recommended by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence. We expect PCTs to meet these statutory obligations and will arrange to investigate allegations that patients are being denied treatment deemed appropriate by relevant clinicians.

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the National Institute of Clinical Excellence's decision-making process, with particular reference to the effect of the speed of its decision-making process on the United Kingdom pharmaceutical industry. [85469]

Mr. Lammy: No. This is a matter for the National Institute for Clinical Excellence itself. The Institute reviewed its appraisal process in consultation with stakeholders in February 2001 and will carry out a further review in 2003. The Health Select Committee has also completed an inquiry into the work and processes of the institute.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 512W, on NICE, if he will list the NICE appraisals that have received appeals. [86803]

Mr. Lammy: The 19 technology appraisals that received appeals were:

1. Computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for depression and anxiety
2. Cox -II inhibitors for skeletomuscular disease
3. Docetaxel and paclitaxel for ovarian cancer
4. Hip prostheses for primary total hip replacement
5. Human growth hormone in adults
6. Inhaler devices for treatment of asthma in older children
7. Inhaler devices for under fives
8. Interferon beta and glatiramer for multiple sclerosis (first appeal)
9. Interferon beta and glatiramer for multiple sclerosis (second appeal)
10. Irinotecan oxaliplatin and raltitrexed drugs for colorectal cancer (first appeal)
11. Irinotecan oxaliplatin and raltitrexed drugs for colorectal cancer (second appeal)
12. Laparoscopic surgery for hernia
13. New advances in hearing aid technology for hearing disability
14. Proton pump inhibitors for dyspepsia
15. Riluzole for motor neurone disease
16. Rituximab for follicular lymphoma
17. Taxanes for breast cancer
18. The use of the newer (atypical) antipsychotic drugs in treatment of schizophrenia19.Vinorelbine for breast cancer

Non-Barrier Textiles

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the extent of the use of cotton and other non-barrier textiles in operating theatres in the NHS. [85296]

Mr. Lammy: Market data for 2001 indicates that approximately 50 per cent. of the textiles used in operating theatres in the national health service are made of cotton and other non-barrier textiles. The remaining 50 per cent. are made of high tech synthetic barrier fabrics and single use disposable products.

Occupational Therapy

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the waiting times are for occupational therapy services for children in *(a)* Birmingham health authority, *(b)* Birmingham and Black Country strategic health authority area and *(c)* England. [84967]

Mr. Lammy: Waiting times for occupational therapy services for children are not collected centrally and therefore the information is not available.

Patient Discharge

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer to the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) of 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 413W, on patient discharge, what financial incentives the Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc.) Bill places on the national health service to ensure that they tackle delayed transfers of care. [86256]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The national health service has clear incentives to reduce the time that people wait for discharge; not least because this frees up capacity to treat more patients who are waiting for treatment. The access and capacity targets and the monitoring of performance ensure that this is given a high priority. The provisions in the Community Care (Delayed Discharges) Bill will ensure that there are financial incentives for social services to play their part in providing community services where delays are their responsibility. In addition, from April 2004, the NHS will be introducing a new system of financial flows that will ensure that acute trusts do not benefit financially where patients are re-admitted to hospital within a set period.

Primary Care Trusts

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many PCTs have signed head leases on GP surgeries; and if he will make a statement. [85719]

Mr. Hutton *[holding reply 9 December 2002]:* Primary care trusts have delegated authority to enter into head leases and to sublet to general practitioners and other tenants. However, the Department does not collect this information centrally and it is therefore not known how many premises PCTs have signed head leases for which are occupied by GPs or others.

Psychiatric Emergency Re-admissions

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the reasons underlying the failure to meet the public sector agreement of the rate of psychiatric emergency readmissions by April 2002. [85634]

Jacqui Smith: The psychiatric emergency readmission rate has been reduced from the baseline of 14.3 per cent. in 1997–98 to 12.7 per cent. at the last quarter of 2001–02. Further falls are expected with the implementation of community-based service models such as assertive outreach and crisis resolution.

Smoking

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of primary care trusts have a trained healthcare professional to support those wishing to give up smoking. [85695]

Ms Blears: This information not collected centrally. All primary care trusts are required to make available smoking cessation services to support smokers who wish to quit. The services must be delivered by a trained adviser, usually a healthcare professional.

Treatment Agencies

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2002 to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), *Official Report*, column 597, if he will break down by treatment types the people in contact with treatment agencies. [86052]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The table shows the numbers of drug misusers in treatment by type of service 2000–01.

Agency type	*Number of people*
In-patient	2,424
Community: Specialist services	103,094
Community: General Practitioners	8,180
Structured day programmes	706
Residential rehabilitation	1,902
Others	2,216
England total	118,522

Source:

Department of Health Statistical Bulletin Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01.

Tuberculosis

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spends on educating the public about prevention and awareness of tuberculosis. [83330]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* £324,471.59 was spent on this year's Tuberculosis Awareness campaign.

Waiting Times

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what action his Department has taken to reduce waiting times for admission to accident and emergency departments from ambulances. [85764]

Mr. Lammy: The Government are committed to bringing down waiting times for all accident and emergency (A&E) patients, no matter how they arrive at the A&E department. By the end of 2004, virtually all patients should be admitted, transferred or discharged within four hours of arrival at A&E.

If for any reason a patient who arrives by ambulance is not transferred in to A&E within 15 minutes, the patient is nevertheless then treated as having arrived at A&E for the purposes of measuring performance against the four hour target.

Where local delays occur they can be addressed through emergency care networks—which bring together all local participants in the emergency care system to iron out problems and spread good practice—and the emergency care collaborative, a new national programme aimed at reducing waiting times for all A&E patients.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 11 December 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what monitoring arrangements are in place for air pollution across the United Kingdom; and how this information is publicised. [85845]

Alun Michael: On behalf of the United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations DEFRA monitors air pollution in the United Kingdom through a national network of air quality monitoring sites, the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory and numerical modelling techniques.

There are three national automatic air quality monitoring networks: *(a)* the automatic urban network consisting of 96 sites, *(b)* the automatic rural network consisting of 22 sites and *(c)* the hydrocarbon network consisting of four sites. There are also seven national non-automatic networks that measure a wide range of pollutants. DEFRA operates two of these networks in co-operation with local authorities.

Current and historic monitoring information, including hourly updates of air quality from the automatic networks, is published on the UK Government's and the devolved Administrations' air quality website (www.airquality.co.uk). This site also provides detailed information about DEFRA's and the devolved Administrations' air pollution monitoring arrangements. Air quality information is also provided through a freephone service (0800 556677) and on Teletext, page 155.

In addition to the national monitoring networks described above, there are also a large number of monitoring sites operated by local authorities. Local authorities generally publicise this information in the air quality review and assessment reports, which they prepare under part IV of the Environment Act 1995.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to which local authorities since 1997 her Department and its predecessors have issued directions requiring air quality monitoring to be undertaken. [85841]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State has not issued any directions under part IV of the Environment Act 1995 to local authorities requiring air quality monitoring to be undertaken.

The Department offers advice on air quality monitoring to local authorities via centrally funded helpdesks and our statutory local air quality management guidance.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the individual measures against which air quality is assessed in the United Kingdom what the level of each was in *(a)* each city of greater than 100,000 population and *(b)* each local authority area in each of the last 30 years in which these have been recorded. [85846]

Alun Michael: Air quality in the United Kingdom is assessed against targets for safeguarding people's health and protecting the environment from air pollution. These targets were published in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, first published in 1997 and revised in January 2000. The strategy includes health-based standards for benzene, 1,3-butadiene, carbon monoxide lead particles, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and low-level ozone. It also includes policy objectives for each pollutant to be achieved between 2003 and 2008. On 5 August 2002 the United Kingdom Government announced tighter objectives in England for particles, benzene and carbon monoxide and introduced a new objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

The United Kingdom Government and the devolved Administrations monitor levels of the pollutants in the United Kingdom through a national network of air quality monitoring sites, the National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory and numerical modelling techniques. Details the air quality targets and all air quality monitoring data—including cities and local authorities—are published on the United Kingdom Government's and devolved Administrations air quality website www.airquality.co.uk

Beaches

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the *(a)* bathing and *(b)* non-bathing beaches in the United Kingdom which are (i) measured and (ii) not measured for (A) beach and (B) water quality standards, indicating in each case for which measurements are taken whether they pass these standards; what plans there are to strengthen the monitoring and standards of these beaches; and if she will make a statement. [85848]

Mr. Morley: The Department's publication "Bathing Water Directive (76/160/EEC) Detailed Summary of 2001 Survey Results—United Kingdom" is available in the Library and lists all identified bathing waters and the results of micro-biological and physico-chemical sample testing. The report for the 2002 bathing season will be published early in the new year. General beach quality characteristics are taken into account in the Seaside Awards and Blue Flag schemes administered by ENCAMS (Environmental Campaigns). Lists of beaches are published on their internet site (www.seasideawards.org.uk and www.blueflag.org.uk). The EC Commission has recently published a new draft bathing water directive, which proposes tighter microbiological water quality standards. The proposal will be subject to detailed negotiation among member states and in the European Parliament. Specific questions relating to bathing waters in Scotland and Wales should be directed to the devolved Administrations.

Bird Registration

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how many small businesses will be affected by proposals contained in her Department's review of bird registration; and how many such businesses depend upon trade in species listed in Schedule 4 of the Act. [85895]

Mr. Morley: Many users of the current registration system fit the definition of a "small business". Business users range from people who trade in significant numbers of Schedule 4 birds annually to those breeding just one or two birds. In the consultation process, we have endeavoured to contact as many such users as possible in order to ensure that their views are properly reflected in the review process.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason no changes were made to the bird registration scheme following the consultation on Review of Bird Registration and CITES Licensing Fees undertaken in July 1999. [85896]

Mr. Morley: No changes were made to the bird registration scheme because the 1999 consultation related solely to the question of what fees should be payable for registering a bird and obtaining any relevant CITES permits.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the costs of implementing her Department's bird registration scheme were in *(a)* 1991, *(b)* 2000 and *(c)* 2001; and what she estimates they will be this year. [85897]

Mr. Morley: The costs for the scheme in the financial year April 1991 to March 1992 were £309,769. Costs in the financial year April 2000 to March 2001 were £355,822 and April 2001 to March 2002 were £441,557. The forecast for April 2002 to March 2003 is £456,712.

The apparent large increase in costs between 2000–01 and 2001–02 is mainly due to an improved approach to cost attribution but also reflects a significant increase in enforcement effort.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* birdkeepers, *(b)* zoological gardens/bird parks, *(c)* birdkeeping magazines, *(d)* falconry centres, *(e)* police wildlife liaison officers, *(f)* ornithologists and birdwatchers, *(g)* conservation organisations, *(h)* bird watching magazines and *(i)* raptor groups have been consulted by her Department during its review of bird registration; and what criteria her Department used to determine the list of those consulted on the review. [85898]

Mr. Morley: The Department set out to consult as many interested parties as possible in conducting the bird registration review. We have therefore consulted all people who currently keep Schedule 4 birds. This includes zoos and bird parks, falconry centres and members of raptor groups. In addition, consultation took place through a number of umbrella organisations such as the RSPB, the RSPCA, the Federation of Zoological Gardens of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the British Bird Council, the British Trust for Ornithology, the Hawkboard and the Countryside Alliance. We also issued consultation documents to conservation organisations and publishers of bird magazines and relied on them to cascade information to their members and readers. All Police Wildlife Liaison Officers in England and Wales were consulted. In all over 2,000 individuals and organisations were consulted through these mechanisms. Consultation documents were also available via the Department's website.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department took in framing the bird registration scheme to the effect on conservation of wild birds. [85899]

Mr. Morley: The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 introduced the registration and ringing of certain species of birds when kept in captivity. The objective of section 7 of the Act was to support the conservation of our native wild birds by requiring those holding them to register them with the Department, and to fit them with a ring approved by the Secretary of State. The deterrent effect of this legislation has reduced the illegal taking of birds from the wild.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what meetings she had with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee during the preparation of her Department's review of bird registration. [85900]

Mr. Morley: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee were involved in three meetings with my Department during the preparation of this review. The first meeting also involved representatives from raptor groups, the devolved assemblies and conservation bodies. Subsequent meetings involved officials from my Department and JNCC in discussions about a range of possible options for inclusion in the review.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consideration her Department gave to the views of the Joint Nature Conservation Committee during the peparation of its review of bird registration. [86120]

Mr. Morley: The Joint Nature Conservation Committee are the main adviser to the Department on all scientific questions arising on bird registration issues. They were therefore consulted fully prior to the issue of the public consultation document, and were involved in a number of the preparatory discussions.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the likely effects of removing bird species from Schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 on the ability to secure convictions for possession of these birds. [86121]

Mr. Morley: The recent consultation process sought views on four possible options for the future of the bird registration scheme. We consulted as widely as possible, and consultees included the enforcement authorities, whose views we greatly value. We shall decide what specific proposals to develop in the light of the responses to the consultation. The possible impact on the ability to

secure convictions under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will be one of the factors we take into account in doing so.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of how removing bird species from Schedule 4 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will affect the number of these birds taken illegally from the wild. [86122]

Mr. Morley: When the current consultation is concluded, the Department will refer to our scientific advisers, the Joint Nature Conservation Committee, for assistance in determining whether species should remain on Schedule 4. One of the criteria in determining whether a species should remain will be its vulnerability to illegal taking.

The evidence from the 1994 review showed that the removal of kestrels, sparrow hawks and common buzzards from Schedule 4 had no detrimental effect on wild population levels.

Cattle Movements

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many representations from *(a)* Lancashire and *(b)* the north-west of England she has received regarding the loss of cattle-passport slips by the Cattle Movement Service. [85338]

Alun Michael: The British Cattle Movement Service has received around 22,000 representations about movement notification failures since May this year from around England, Scotland and Wales. It would be wrong to assume that these involve the loss of cattle movement notification cards by the Department since I am informed that these are recorded on computer on arrival and in many cases where an issue arises a check shows that no notification has been received by the British Cattle Movement Service. It follows that breaking down figures on representations on to a county by county or region by region basis would only be available at disproportionate costs.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what actions she has taken regarding the loss of cattle-passport slips by the Cattle Movement Service; and if she will make a statement on the loss of the slips. [85339]

Alun Michael: The British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) operates to ISO 9001:2000 standards, is registered with the British Standards Institute and its operating practices have received the Kite mark. All documents received by the organisation are scanned and recorded on arrival and great care is taken to avoid any loss.

Some cattle keepers have claimed to have told the BCMS about cattle movements when their computerised records have been cross-checked and deficiencies found as part of the subsidy claims checking process. I understand that the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and the BCMS check these cases very carefully. It is wrong to assume that the BCMS has lost keepers' movement notifications when they have no trace of the document ever arriving at the BCMS site. If keepers want to guarantee that their notifications are received by BCMS they can send them by registered post or by e-mail to the BCMS website at www.bcms.gov.uk.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of differences between *(a)* the data held on the British Cattle Movement Service Online Tracing System, *(b)* the data held by the British Cattle Movement Service and *(c)* the records of cattle keepers themselves; what plans she has to rectify these differences; and if she will make a statement. [85363]

Alun Michael: I am assured that there is no difference between the information held on the cattle tracing scheme website (CTS Online) and that held on the main database held by the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS). The online database is a copy of the main database.

The differences that exist between the Government's central database and on-farm records represent those births, deaths and movements that the keeper has taken steps to record on one but not on the other. Our programme of on-the-spot farm inspections bring these differences to light and we work with keepers to sort their records out. Where serious discrepancies are found, individual animals or, in the worst case, the whole herd of cattle will have a movement restriction placed upon them until the problems are rectified.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the relationship between the Rural Payments Agency and the British Cattle Movement Service; what plans she has to help improve this relationship; and if she will make a statement. [85364]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) and the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS) are both constituent parts of the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Both are committed to providing consistently high quality services that are valued by their customers. With the legislative requirement to cross-check common agricultural policy bovine subsidy claims against the cattle tracing system, it is essential that they work together to achieve these objectives.

A formal Service Level Agreement exists between the agency and the service and this is constantly reviewed. I understand that they have had a good working relationship in the past and they have liased extremely closely over recent months to ensure that the queries discovered during the cross-check exercise were resolved without referral to the industry where possible. Rural Payments Agency staff working at, and in conjunction with, the British Cattle Movement Service, examined over 150,000 cross-check queries during recent months.

Digital Mapping

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what help will be given to farmers to accommodate to the change over to digital mapping with special reference to the accuracy of mapping. [86556]

Alun Michael: To help farmers accommodate the change to digital mapping, each is being sent a copy of the relevant maps showing details of the fields after initial digitisation. The field information being noted by RPA's contractors is taken from the Area Aid Application submitted by the farmer concerned and is digitised using the latest digitised maps provided by the Ordnance Survey. To assist this process, RPA has also obtained up-to-date high quality aerial photographs of England.

In addition each farmer is sent an explanatory leaflet describing the process and explaining what is required. The maps and attached field data highlights queries which farmers are asked to help to resolve.

Once the queries have been resolved, maps will be edited and a final copy will be sent to farmers to retain.

The digitised maps are of a high standard of accuracy and the details are set out on the OS Website, www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk .

Fisheries Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the outcome was of the Fisheries Council held in Brussels on 27 to 29 November; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if she will make a statement. [85857]

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary and I represented the United Kingdom at the meeting of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels on 27 to 28 November 2002. Ministers responsible for fisheries and farming issues in Scotland and Wales also attended and, together with the Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, joined me at a short bilateral meeting with Commissioner Fischler on Friday morning at which we discussed the Mid-Term Review of the CAP.

On fisheries, the main items discussed by the Council were reform of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP), and cod and hake recovery. The Presidency noted the positions of the member states on CFP reform and will now reflect on how to promote agreement at the December Council.

On cod and hake recovery, the Commissioner outlined his revised strategy for securing cod recovery in the light of the recent scientific assessments. He envisages an 80 per cent. reduction in fishing effort for whitefish fishing, 40 per cent. for flatfish, 10 per cent. for industrial fishing and 5 per cent. for nephrops. The UK emphasised its commitment to securing stock recovery. On the other hand we emphasised our commitment to finding a package of measures which would enable sustainable fishing activity to continue while still achieving recovery. We stressed in particular the importance of the burdens resulting from recovery action falling equitably on all fleets whose activities impact on cod stocks. There will be further technical discussion at official level before the December Council.

The Commissioner also made a first presentation of his proposed action plans on the social, economic and regional implications of EU fleet restructuring and on how to reduce discards of unwanted fish. These will return to the Council for further consideration after study by officials.

The Council reached political agreement, by qualified majority, on rules for the authorisation and labelling of genetically modified (GM) food and feed. This was a difficult discussion. I eventually voted against the final compromise because it contained provisions regarding the adventitious presence and labelling of GM organisms that are neither practicable nor enforceable. I also had concerns about the legal base on which the proposal rested.

There was a brief discussion of the measures forming part of a package addressing hygiene rules and their enforcement in respect of food of animal origin. Further work is planned at official level before the December Council.

The Commission gave its regular report on BSE in the EU and reported contacts with the French Government over its plans in respect of Specified Risk Material (SRM) controls on sheep spinal cord. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary restated our concerns about the proposed French measures and strongly underlined our view that member states should not take unilateral action that goes beyond existing EU legal provisions and scientific advice.

The Council continued its consideration of the Mid-Term Review of the CAP with a discussion concentrating on modulation, decoupling and cross-compliance. I welcomed the broad thrust of the Commission's proposals while noting that the EU needed to start work quickly on the detailed legislative texts which the Commission had promised for January. I recalled our opposition to certain features of the Commission's modulation model, including its unfair redistribution of modulated funds. I gave strong support to the principle of decoupling aid from production which would encourage farmers to focus more on markets and at the same time strengthen the EU's hand in the WTO negotiations.

Under other business, there was discussion of animal welfare in third countries and the situation in Spain following the sinking of the oil tanker 'Prestige'. The Council also approved a state aid to Greek cotton producers.

Litter

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what costings have been done to assess whether a similar campaign to the Keep Britain Tidy campaign would be *(a)* timely and *(b)* prudent. [86020]

Alun Michael: ENCAMS will play an important role in supporting the Government's agenda of improving the local environment and people's quality of life by running high-profile campaigns each year based around Local Environmental Quality and Litter issues.

Campaigns planned for 2003 include a focus on fly-tipping, car litter, fly-posting and youth litter and these initiatives are in effect a continuation of the Keep Britain Tidy Campaign year on year.

I met the director of ENCAMS, Alan Woods (Environmental Campaigns which is the current name of the Tidy Britain Group) today to discuss the organisation's work which is focused on making a real difference at a local level, which is where we need to influence public attitudes and behaviour.

In parallel to the Government's policy to make a significant impact on the antisocial behaviour, litter, graffiti and noise which spoils the quality of lives in so many places, ENCAMS has developed tools which help their local authority partners to target real local problems. These include a set of posters to challenge people who allow their dogs to foul local parks. Evaluation has shown that a significant improvement has been achieved in areas where these have been used as part of a local campaign. We are encouraging ENCAMS to spread information about successful local campaigns so that lessons learned can help to improve the quality of life for people in other areas too. This fits with efforts by Ministers in DEFRA, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Home Office to give a high profile to tackling quality of life issues nationally while promoting action at the local level in conjunction with the Local Government Associate and other partners.

Joanne Whitaker, ENCAMS5 Director for the North West Region, would be more than happy to meet the hon.Member to talk about the future of local litter campaigns and programmes. More details of ENCAMS campaigns as well as promotional material can be obtained via their website: http://www.encams.org.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what representations she has received about the environmental impact of increased littering and tipping of household waste in *(a)* urban and *(b)* rural areas. [86023]

Alun Michael: The Department receives representations on litter and fly tipping from different sectors of society. During the period 1 January 2001 to 1 January 2002, we received 430 representations on litter. During the period January 2001 to the present, we received 180 representations on fly tipping. We do not differentiate between urban and rural representations in correspondence.

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much the Keep Britain Tidy campaign cost after 1972; and what assessments were made of its impact on reducing litter. [86019]

Alun Michael: Since 1972 the programmes and initiatives run as part of the Keep Britain Tidy campaign have cost £37,341,498.

There are regular reviews of the performance of all programmes and campaigns run by the Tidy Britain Group (TBG), now part of an umbrella organisation called Environmental Campaigns (ENCAMS). Under terms set out in the Grant Memorandum they submit a yearly Grant Review document, which examines in detail the effectiveness of every campaign and programme run over the previous year. Also a Financial Management and Policy Review of ENCAMS is carried out, usually at five year intervals, as part of the Government's requirement that all non-departmental public bodies and those like them should be subjected to regular and detailed scrutiny. The last review of ENCAMS took place in 2001.

Waste

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the maximum potential for anaerobic digestion systems to remove waste from the waste stream; and what assessment she has made of the environmental impact of such systems. [85838]

Mr. Meacher: When reviewing the waste strategy the Strategy Unit commissioned a study of new and emerging technologies, which includes anaerobic digestion. This contains details on the environmental impacts of the processes under study. Anaerobic digestion can potentially treat a wide range of biodegradable wastes. However in practical terms its application will depend on its cost and performance compared with the other available treatment options. The report is entitled "Delivering the Landfill Directive: The role of new and emerging technologies" and is available as an annexe to the full report "Waste not, Want not" on the Strategy Unit website: www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/index.htm .

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan (Drugs)

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment the Government have made of the effect of bombing in Afghanistan on the *(a)* production of and *(b)* trade in drugs. [84697]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The disruption of drug production and trafficking was not among the aims of the military campaign waged in Afghanistan. Any damage to the drugs trade as a result of bombing would be incidental to the principal aims of the campaign and would not be covered in any battle assessments. It is not possible to calculate from other sources the damage caused to the drugs trade in Afghanistan as a result of bombing.

Compulsory Purchase (Spain)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations the Government have made to the Government of Spain in relation to compulsory purchase of property belonging to British citizens in the regions of Valencia. [85173]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* No representations have been made to the Spanish central Government; however, our ambassador in Madrid brought these problems to the attention of the head of the Valencian regional government in a letter dated 22 October which refers to a number of individual cases. The ambassador has met and discussed the matter with British nationals, including at a public meeting. British nationals are being advised to engage the services of local lawyers, who are best placed to assist them.

Entry Clearance Independent Monitor

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last met the Independent Monitor. [86730]

Mr. Rammell: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not met Mr. Rabinder Singh, in his official capacity of Independent Monitor for non-Appealable Entry Clearance Refusals. Mr. Singh has met my three predecessors as Ministers responsible for entry clearance matters; in October 2000 the then Minister for Europe, my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz), in December 2001 the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Exeter (Mr. Bradshaw) and in October 2002 with my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien).

EU Enlargement (Agricultural Production Quotas)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on the Danish Presidency's latest offer on agricultural production quotas to the candidate countries due to join the EU in 2004; and if he will make a statement. [86547]

Mr. MacShane: The Danish Presidency has proposed small quota increases for candidates on a number of agricultural commodities. The Government will consider these provided they are justified on the basis of historical data and objective methodology and fall within the agreed financial ceilings.

Gibraltar

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he next intends to visit Gibraltar. [86728]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has no current plans to do so.

Pakistan (Minority Groups)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Pakistan concerning the plight of minority groups, with specific reference to Christians in Pakistan; and if he will make a statement. [86582]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for South Derbyshire (Mr. Mark Todd) on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 527W.

Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what public appointments he has made in November 2002. [86729]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: None.

Visa Centres (Indian Sub-Continent)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to open additional visa centres in the Indian sub-continent. [86726]

Mr. Rammell: We plan to open visa application offices in Jalandhar and Ahmedabad early in 2003. We also hope to open a number of similar offices across the country so that UK visa services are more accessible to our Indian customers. We do not currently have any plans to open similar offices in other South Asian countries.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Fire Service

Geraint Davies: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the objectives of the Government's plans for modernisation of working practices in the Fire Service, with special reference to the impact of his plans on public safety. [86432]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government believe that the Fire Service is in need of change and reform. It is a service which can make much better use of its existing resources; a Service which has to consider new ways of working and which needs to forge better partnerships; and a service which needs to attract a more diverse workforce, that better reflects the community it services. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister believes that by addressing these areas the Fire Service can further contribute to public safety.

Havering

John Cryer: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact of the proposed changes to local government finance on *(a)* the London Borough of Havering and *(b)* schools within the London Borough of Havering. [85416]

Mr. Raynsford: The provisional local government finance settlement for 2003–04 was announced in the House of Commons on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 1065 and incorporates the changes made to the formula grant distribution system following the full scale review.

As part of the settlement, the London borough of Havering will receive £154.4 million formula grant for the 2003–04 financial year, which represents an increase of £5.2 million, or 3.5 per cent. over 2002–03. Havering's formula spending share for schools funding stands at £110.039 million for next year.

Irish Forum for Peace and Reconciliation

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representation he had at the Irish Forum for Peace and Reconciliation; and what assessment he has made of this initiative. [86013]

Mr. MacShane: I have been asked to reply.

The most recent meeting of the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation was held on 27 November 2002. An official of the British Embassy in Dublin attended.

HMG welcome dialogue across a number of different fora, including the Irish Forum for Peace and Reconciliation.

Regional Government Officers

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*, column 517W, on regional Government officers what guidelines within the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information relate to the provision of information by civil servants in Government regional offices to hon. Members. [86962]

Mr. Leslie: The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information contains guidance on the release of information relating to a Department's area of responsibility. The Code applies to requests for information from any person and there are no specific provisions for hon. Members.

Sprinklers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to ensure that all new schools, public buildings and commercial premises are fitted with sprinklers. [86504]

Mr. Leslie: There are no immediate plans to introduce amendments to the Building Regulations in relation to the provision of sprinklers.

However, the Building Regulations are under constant review and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister proposes to begin work on a major revision of the fire safety aspects of the Regulations in 2004. The important issue of fire safety in schools, public buildings and commercial premises, are items that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be reviewing. As with any new guidance within an Approved Document, any decision in future with regard to fire precautions in schools, public buildings and commercial premises would need to take account of a range of views, expert advice and of course a full Regulatory Impact Assessment.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy Office Holders

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners if he will make a statement on the clergy's status as office holders. [84626]

Mr. Bell: An analysis of the clergy's status as office holders can be found at paragraph 76 of the DTI's discussion document on Employment Status in relation to Statutory Employment Rights (URN 02/1058). The Archbishops' Council is preparing a response to this document, and a copy of the response will be made available when it is issued.

Local Authorities

Miss McIntosh: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what representations the Commissioners have received concerning the proposed enforcement of local authority licensing on church venues and the payment of fees for musical performances in churches; and if he will make a statement. [84506]

Mr. Bell: Matters of this kind relating to Anglican cathedrals and churches in use, and matters relating to places of worship of other denominations and faiths, fall outside the formal responsibilities of the Church Commissioners.

However, the Bishop of London's speech in Another Place on the Second Reading of the Licensing Bill drew attention to concerns expressed on behalf of churches, cathedrals and other people from the wider community about the provisions in the Bill regarding the use of places of worship for "entertainment" such as concerts and plays. Unless these are for the purpose of religious meetings or services or incidental purposes, they would fall within the licensing requirements in the Bill, even though they are not "commercial" in character. I understand that Church of England staff are now in discussion with the Department of Culture, Media and Sport about this issue.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Assets Recovery Agency

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many *(a)* police officers and *(b)* civil servants have been seconded to work with the Assets Recovery Agency in Northern Ireland. [85885]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: I have been asked to reply.

Recruitment of staff for the Northern Ireland branch of the Assets Recovery Agency is in hand for it to begin operations, as planned, in February 2003. One civil servant has been seconded from the Northern Ireland Office to assist the project manager. These local staff are supported by the national implementation programme team in London. Further appointments, including that of the Agency's Northern Ireland Assistant Director, will be made shortly.

Fire Dispute

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, pursuant to the answer of 2 December 2002, ref 84475, on which occasions, and by whom, representatives of the Fire Service of Northern Ireland have attended meetings of the National Joint Council and Employers Side in the past 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [85715]

Jane Kennedy: One of the two members of the Fire Authority Board appointed by the Authority to represent it on the National Joint Council has attended National Joint Council meetings on the following dates: 26 February, 28 May and 30 October; and Employers Side meetings on 26 February, 28 May, 17 July, 21 August, 2 and 13 September, 28, 30 and 31 October and 5, 6, 11, 12, 21 and 28 November this year.

The acting Chair of the Fire Authority attended three Employers Side meetings on 17 July, 21 August and 2 September. He was replaced as one of the two Authority representatives on JNC in October this year by another member of the Authority, who subsequently attended one Employers Side meeting on 28 November.

The Fire Authority for Northern Ireland appoints two of its members to represent it on the National Joint Council. The representatives take their mandate from the Authority and are subject to re-appointment each year.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills by what means parents of children with mental health problems excluded from school, are able to influence the level and type of education undertaken by local education authorities. [85640]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Whenever a child is excluded from school the parent has the right to make representations to the governing body; and if the exclusion is a permanent exclusion the parent may also appeal beyond the governing body to the appeal panel. Governing bodies and independent appeal panels must consider the parent's representations and all relevant factors relating to the child's exclusion.

Where a child has been excluded, the LEA should involve the parents at an early stage in discussions about alternative school places, and keep parents in touch with progress. An individual re-integration plan must be drawn up taking into account the context and culture of the pupil, and should be discussed with the parents.

Local education authorities (LEAs) have a duty to provide suitable education for those children who cannot attend school because of their medical needs, including children with defined mental health problems. In such cases parents should be full collaborative partners in the education process.

Primary Schools, Wycombe

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many pupils entered primary schools in the Wycombe constituency in each year since 1997, broken down by ethnic group. [85531]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The information requested is not available centrally. The table provides the overall number of pupils by ethnic group.

Maintained primary schools in Wycombe parliamentary constituency: number of pupils by ethnic group—position at January in each year

	Pupils of compulsory school age and above					
	White	*Black Caribbean*	*Black African*	*Black Other*	*Indian*	*Pakistani*
1997	5,963	377	22	89	72	1,481
1998	5,920	391	20	97	84	1,524
1999	5,139	335	17	89	76	1,387
2000	5,037	321	29	74	68	1,396
2001	4,867	300	36	89	79	1,365
2002	4,766	270	36	91	76	1,384

	Pupils of compulsory school age and above					
	Bangladeshi	*Chinese*	*Other*	*Classified*[1]	*Unclassified*	*Total*[2]
1997	21	22	206	8,253	83	8,336
1998	16	18	177	8,247	61	8,308
1999	25	22	174	7,264	11	7,275
2000	29	24	263	7,241	7	7,248
2001	28	24	352	7,140	7	7,147
2002	30	23	276	6,952	83	7,035

[1] Pupils of compulsory school age were classified according to ethnic group.
[2] Collection of ethnic group data was made for pupils of compulsory school age and above only.
Source:
Annual Schools' Census

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

British Energy

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what recent independent advice she has received on the decommissioning costs of British Energy's facilities. [85646]

Mr. Wilson: The Department's financial and accounting advisers have produced advice on a range of issues affecting British Energy. The company currently makes contributions to a Nuclear Generation Decommissioning Fund owned by the Nuclear Trust whose primary purpose is to pay the legitimate costs of decommissioning British Energy's UK nuclear power stations. The Trust held its first quinquennial review in 2001, taking advice as appropriate, to compare its funds with its assessment of those costs and published its conclusions on 10 December 2001. However, the Trust does not advise the Government on British Energy's decommissioning costs.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what her estimate is of the *(a)* discounted present value and *(b)* undiscounted cost of decommissioning British Energy's nuclear facilities; and what percentage of these will be borne by the Government. [85647]

Mr. Wilson: British Energy's annual report and accounts 2001–02 estimate the cost of decommissioning the company's nuclear power stations as £0.9 billion (discounted) and £4.8 billion (undiscounted). If the proposed restructuring announced by British Energy on 28 November is successful, it represents the best chance of the company meeting these costs itself. The amount Government will pay depends on the company's performance, and it will underwrite these liabilities to the extent that the funds are insufficient to meet these costs when they occur.

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated implication is for *(a)* public expenditure and *(b)* revenue receipts over the next five years, of the renegotiated BNFL contracts with British Energy. [85645]

Mr. Wilson: The precise terms of the new contracts between BNFL and British Energy have yet to be agreed. We anticipate that any impact on total Government revenues of the new commercial deal between BNFL and British Energy will be marginal, and entirely consistent with the fiscal projections in the Pre-Budget Report.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consultations took place between officials of her Department and the European Competition Commissioner in advance of her statement on the future financing of British Energy on 28 November 2002; and if she will place copies of notated *(a)* correspondence and *(b)* minutes of meetings in the Library. [86170]

Mr. Wilson: Since the Government notified the financial support to British Energy on 10 September 2002, there have been a number of contacts between officials of my Department and officials of the European Competition Commissioner. Correspondence and minutes relating to these meetings contain commercially sensitive information, and as such, are exempt from disclosure under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Door-to-door Lenders

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures the Government is taking regarding extortionate interest rates used by door-to-door lenders. [85802]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In July last year I announced a review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 and in August this year I published a report on the progress of the review, which included emerging ideas on how to increase protection for consumers against extortionate credit. I will be consulting on more detailed proposals in the early part of 2003. The review is also looking at ways of improving the current licensing regime to ensure better regulations of lenders.

Annual Statutory Audits

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what assessment she has made of the cost to small business over the past two years of the increase in the turnover threshold above which a business must undertake on annual statutory audit; and if she will make a statement; [84261]

(2) what plans she has to increase the £4.8 million turnover threshold above which a business must undergo an annual statutory audit. [84260]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry is carrying out work to analyse the information that is available to assess the impact of the last increase that raised the audit threshold limit to £1 million.

My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated in his Pre-Budget Report that we will shortly announce a programme of research to assess the impact of the increase before making a decision on further increases, inviting key stakeholders and other interested parties to contribute their views and experiences. In the light of conclusions drawn from the assessment, the Government will consult by summer 2003 on whether the audit exemption threshold should be increased or maintained at the current level.

Debt

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what assessment he has made of the proportion of debt to income of different socio-economic groups in the United Kingdom. [75759]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Department of Trade and Industry commissioned a household survey into the cause extent and effect of over-indebtedness. The report was published on the 27 November 2002 and contains data on consumer credit repayments as a proportion of gross monthly income.

The following table suggests that for non-pensioner households the lower the income the greater the likelihood that they will be paying 25 per cent. or more of their income on repayments (excluding mortgages).

Non-pensioner households—Repayments as per cent. of monthly income (excluding mortgage)

Household income (£)	*Owes nothing (per cent.)*	*0–25 per cent.*	*25 per cent. plus*
Under 5,000	44	25	20
5,000–7,499	42	38	14
7,500–9,999	43	45	8
10,000–14,999	39	49	2
15,000–24,999	42	45	7
25,000–34,999	36	55	2
Over 35,000	44	46	6

Pensioner households show similar patterns to non-pensioner households, but the proportions repaying credit are smaller.

Pensioner households—Repayments as per cent. of monthly income (excluding mortgage)

Household income (£)	*Owes nothing (per cent.)*	*0–25 per cent.*	*25 per cent. plus*
Under 5,000	80	14	3
5,000–7,499	78	18	2
7,500–9,999	80	15	2
10,000–14,999	75	20	—
15,000–24,999	65	24	3
25,000–34,999	53	48	—
Over 35,000	84	16	—

Energy Review

Mrs Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* engineers and *(b)* scientists that have provided responses to the Energy Review. [85449]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Government are currently undertaking an energy review with a view to publishing a White Paper in the New Year. As part of that review the Government carried out a wide-ranging consultation exercise.

A substantial number of professional engineering and scientific bodies responded to this consultation including the Research Council UK; the Royal Academy of Engineering; the Council of Science and Technology; the Institute of Mechanical Engineers; the University of Sheffield (Immobilisation Science Laboratory); Nuclear Physics Group of the Institute of Physics; the University of Leeds (School of Chemistry); and the Institution of Chemical Engineers. A list of responses to the Energy Review is available on the DTI's website at www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/responses.shtml

Fireworks

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many letters she has received in the last three months from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* Members of the public regarding fireworks. [86421]

Miss Melanie Johnson *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* During the last three months the Department has received 359 letters from hon. Members and 1,089 letters from members of the public regarding fireworks.

Plutonium

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what quantities of plutonium owned by Swiss customers are held at Sellafield; in what form it is stored; and what arrangements exist for its return to Switzerland. [86137]

Mr. Wilson: The total amount of plutonium to be allocated to any one reprocessing customer is directly related to the total amount of spent fuel that customer has contracted to be reprocessed. BNFL has contracts to reprocess at THORP 422 tonnes of spent fuel belonging to Swiss electricity generators. The total allocation of plutonium allocated to Swiss customers is a commercial and contractual matter for the owners of the spent fuel and BNFL as the provider of the reprocessing service. However, approximately 1 per cent. of each tonne of spent fuel will be plutonium.

Certain Swiss reprocessing customers have already concluded contracts for the manufacture of MOX fuel, making use of their plutonium dioxide, and these contracts are in the process of being fulfilled. Accordingly, plutonium currently held at Sellafield on behalf of Swiss customers is held in three forms: spent fuel, separated plutonium dioxide and fresh MOX fuel. In addition, some Swiss owned plutonium dioxide has already been made into MOX fuel and used in Swiss reactors. All Swiss plutonium is expected to be returned to Switzerland in the form of MOX fuel.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information her Department has *(a)* received and *(b)* sought from BNFL Westinghouse in the United States on its plutonium immobilisation programme. [86168]

Mr. Wilson: None. I have been informed that BNFL/Westinghouse in the United States does not have a plutonium immobilisation programme in its portfolio of work.

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial investment has been made by BNFL into immobilization of surplus plutonium at Sellafield; and if she will make a statement on progress to date with the immobilisation programme. [86167]

Mr. Wilson: BNFL have informed me that as part of its work programme to examine the management options for stored separated plutonium, it is carrying out analysis of various technologies under assessment or study worldwide. BNFL's investment in the plutonium fuels related R&D is approximately £2 million per year.

The company is also examining alternative immobilisation techniques and technologies for those stocks which may prove difficult to convert into fuel. These non-fuel immobilisation technologies are currently in a development or exploratory stage, as they are throughout the world. The work being undertaken by BNFL is part of a wider investment in waste immobilisation technologies of some several million pounds each year; this includes an investment in the UK university base of some £2.5 million over five years.

Textile Industry

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to assist the British textile industry. [86719]

Alan Johnson: The Department is committed to building a sustainable future for the UK textile and clothing industry.

To this end, DTI will continue to work with the industry-led Textiles and Clothing Strategy Group on a range of initiatives aimed at increasing its competitiveness and productivity through the development of innovative products, more efficient production methods and by diversifying into new markets.

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has funded into the impact of wind farms on *(a)* military and *(b)* civilian radar. [86632]

Mr. Wilson: The Department of Trade and Industry has funded five projects since March 2001, with a total value of £356,898, that have addressed the impact of wind farms on radar and aviation interests. These projects have all addressed both civilian and military radar.

TREASURY

Alcohol

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average *(a)* nominal and *(b)* real price of each form of alcohol with a separate duty regime was in each year since 1996; and what the consumption per head was of each form of alcohol with a separate duty regime in each year since 1996. [86187]

John Healey: Unfortunately, price data are not available at the level of individual duty regimes. The following tables contain estimates of annual average prices for beer, spirits, cider, light wine and sparkling wine. The estimates are based on bi-monthly prices from an established market research company for on-trade and off-trade outlets and have been weighted by volume.

Estimated annual price of alcohol types

£

	Current prices					
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Beer (pint	1.49	1.55	1.61	1.65	1.7	1.71
Spirits (litre)	24.93	24.91	25.28	25.51	26.84	25.43
Cider (pint)	1.16	1.29	1.38	1.40	1.47	1.41
Light wine (litre)	5.51	5.86	6.13	6.28	6.73	6.77
Sparkling wine (litre)	8.01	8.11	7.90	7.60	7.90	7.91

Estimated annual price of alcohol types

£

	Constant 2001 prices					
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Beer (pint	1.69	1.70	1.71	1.73	1.73	1.71
Spirits (litre)	28.3	27.41	26.91	26.74	27.33	25.43
Cider (pint)	1.32	1.42	1.47	1.47	1.49	1.41
Light wine (litre)	6.25	6.45	6.52	6.58	6.85	6.77
Sparkling wine (litre)	9.09	8.92	8.40	7.97	8.05	7.91

The following table contains estimates for consumption per head for the different categories of alcohol under separate duty regimes. They have been obtained using estimated adult population aged 16 and over and clearance volumes.

	Litres per adult					
	1996	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Beer	128.3	130.3	124.8	124.3	119.6	121.4
Spirits (@ 40 per cent. abv)	4.4	4.5	4.2	4.8	4.9	5.0
Cider	12.1	11.8	11.8	12.7	12.6	12.3
Wine of fresh grape						
Still < 15 per cent. abv	16.4	16.3	16.9	17.7	18.6	19.9
Sparkling < 15 per cent. abv	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.2	1.1	1.1
> 15 per cent. abv	0.7	0.7	0.8	0.7	0.6	0.6
Made wine						
> 1.2 per cent. to 5.5 per cent. abv	3.8	2.5	2.6	3.8	5.9	7.7
Still > 5.5 per cent. to 15 per cent. abv (and > 15 per cent. abv)	1.1	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.8
Sparkling > 5.5 per cent. to 15 per cent. abv	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01

Customs and Excise

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people are employed by HM Customs and Excise at Newhaven. [85839]

John Healey: Fourteen people are employed by HM Customs and Excise at Newhaven.

Debt Relief

Ann McKechin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representations from Scotland concerning debt relief for developing countries were received by his office in 2002. [86442]

John Healey: The Treasury receives a large volume of correspondence on debt relief. In 2002 the Treasury has received to date over 29,000 letters and postcards on debt relief and related issues. Unfortunately, the number of representations received from each nation and region of the United Kingdom are not recorded separately.

Public Sector Regulations

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what actions he will take in the event of the Office of Fair Trading finding proposed public sector regulations to have deleterious effects on competition. [85947]

Miss Melanie Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) may express a view on the competition impact of proposed public sector regulations during informal consultations or as part of the competition assessment in the Regulatory Impact Assessment process (all proposals for legislation which have an impact on business undergo a Regulatory Impact Assessment). Such views will of course be given due consideration.

OFT also carry out investigatory market studies which may consider the impact of existing or proposed regulation. The Government will respond to such market studies with recommendations within 90 days of receiving the report.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Developing World (Water Shortages)

7. **Dr. Ladyman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the threat of long-term water shortages to the developing world. [84692]

Ms Keeble: It is estimated that by 2025 two thirds of the world's population will be suffering water shortages because of lack of water resources especially in Asia and Africa. At present 1 in 5 people lack access to clean water and half of humanity have no sanitation. At the Johannesburg Summit strong commitments were made to better management of water resources and improved access to water and sanitation. My Department is working with its partners to implement these.

Africa Action Plan

8. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with colleagues from G8 member governments regarding the implementation of the Africa Action Plan. [84693]

Clare Short: The commitments made to Africa at the G8 Summit in Kananaskis will require sustained commitment. The UK has published its implementation plan and we are pressing others to do the same.

Democratic Republic of Congo

9. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the recommendations set out in the UN Panel of Experts' report on the Democratic Republic of Congo. [84694]

Clare Short: We believe the broad thrust of the UN Panel of Experts on the Democratic Republic of Congo was useful but it contained some notable and deeply regrettable inaccuracies. We await further information on many of the claims made. We have asked specifically for information to substantiate the claims made against UK companies and nationals.

The current panel's mandate expired when it submitted its last report. We are likely to argue for an extension of the mandate in order that the report can be better substantiated.

Afghanistan (Health and Welfare)

10. **Mr. David Stewart:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the importance of professional armed forces in the process of rebuilding the health and welfare infrastructure in Afghanistan. [84695]

Clare Short: The decree issued by President Karzai during the Petersberg meeting last week on creating a professional Afghan National Army is an important breakthrough. This should lead to progress in extending security outside Kabul which is essential for progress in development.

Ethiopia (Famine)

11. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the famine in Ethiopia. [84696]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation is a matter of concern. But in 2002, good co-ordination and timely action by the Government of Ethiopia, donors and NGOs has prevented crisis from turning into disaster.

The UK has played a significant role and committed £17.3 million to food and non-food humanitarian assistance in calendar year 2002. DFID has also provided nearly 20 per cent. of the EC contribution. We have also actively promoted and participated in continuous dialogue on the situation between Government, donors and NGOs.

On 7 December, a joint Government-UN appeal was launched for humanitarian assistance in 2003. The appeal identifies 11.3 million people as needing more than 1.4 million metric tonnes of food assistance and places a further 3 million under close monitoring. Such massive need has resulted from the impact of widespread drought on a highly vulnerable population with little capacity to cope with shocks.

The scale of need has led to comparison with the famine of 1984. However, as reiterated by Prime Minister Meles Zenawi during the appeal launch, no-one anticipates a repeat of the suffering experienced in 1984. A state of war existed in Ethiopia at that time which impeded the humanitarian response. In addition, Government, donors and NGOs have put effective systems of early warning and response in place that were absent in 1984.

But there is no room for complacency. We remain committed to playing our part in responding rapidly to urgent humanitarian need. We also continue to support the Government of Ethiopia in tackling the underlying causes of food insecurity and protecting the vulnerable.

Less-developed Countries

12. **Mr. Jack:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research she has conducted into the factors determining levels of private investment in less-developed countries. [84698]

Clare Short: DFID commissioned a number of papers on private investment (domestic and foreign) as part of the background research programme for the December 2000 White Paper on "Eliminating World Poverty: Making Globalisation Work for the Poor". These papers are listed at the back of the White paper and are available on the Government White Paper website: www.globalisation.gov.uk Currently, we are funding two Development Research Centres: the Centre for Regulation and Competition and the Centre for New and Emerging Markets, both of which conduct research into issues related to private investment in developing countries. In addition to funding research, we keep track of relevant research findings from other institutions.

Karenni People

13. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance the Government are providing to the displaced Karenni people on the Thai-Burmese border. [84699]

Clare Short: There are an estimated 130,000 refugees from Karen and Kayah state, living in refugee camps along the Thai-Burma border. Some authorities in Thailand have estimated that a total of 1 million people from Burma live outside of camps in Thailand. The situation for all refugees and internally displaced persons remains extremely vulnerable.

In 2002–03, my Department has so far disbursed funds of £1.3 million for humanitarian assistance to support both refugees and internally displaced people within Burma/Thailand. The funding is channelled through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

GATS

14. **Mr. Jim Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the GATS agreement will affect a local community's ability to control the provision of services in their area. [84700]

Clare Short: Under the GATS, Governments retain the right and ability to determine their own domestic regulatory regimes including national policies relating to universal service, affordability of cost to the consumer, quality assurance etc.

In addition the UK Government, other WTO Members and the WTO Secretariat consider public services to be outside the scope of the GATS, regardless of the involvement of private sector finance, where the service to the consumer remains a public service.

Thus, a community's ability to control the provision of services in their area is a matter between that community and its government and cannot be compromised by the GATS.

Algeria (Refugee Camps)

15. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total expenditure is in the current year by her Department on support for Western Sahara refugees in camps in Algeria. [84701]

Clare Short: Our assistance to the Saharawi refugees is channelled through contributions to the European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO).

A new global plan for assistance to the Saharawi was agreed by the EC in May this year. This will provide 14.34 million euros (approximately £9 million) of assistance over a 15-month period. This brings the total assistance provided since 1993 to over 95 million euros, including over 79 million euros in food aid programme co-ordinated by ECHO, the World Food Programme and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. Nearly 20 per cent. of this funding comes from my Department's budget.

The UK also supports refugees through UNHCR including, but not specifically, Saharawi in camps in Algeria. My Department has recently signed a four-year Institutional Strategy Paper with UNHCR which guarantees the agency core funding for the next four years. For 2002 this contribution is £14 million. As this contribution is unearmarked it is difficult to ascertain exactly how much of the £14 million is spent in the context of this specific refugee situation.

Iraq

16. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the humanitarian implications of a conflict with Iraq. [84702]

Clare Short: My Department is engaged in regular contingency planning for a variety of potential humanitarian emergencies around the world. In the case of Iraq, we are considering a wide range of contingencies, which take into account the present humanitarian situation in the country. No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq and military action is not inevitable.

25. **Angela Watkinson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the UN regarding humanitarian contingency planning for a potential war in Iraq. [84711]

Clare Short: My Department has regular discussions with the UN on general contingency preparedness planning for a variety of eventualities and in a number of countries where it works. In the case of Iraq, the UN is preparing for all eventualities. No decision has been taken to launch military action against Iraq and military action is not inevitable.

Uzbekistan

17. **Mr. John Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she will next visit Uzbekistan to discuss aid to Uzbekistan; and if she will make a statement. [84703]

Clare Short: I have no plans to visit Uzbekistan to discuss aid to the country. I plan to visit Uzbekistan in May next year to chair the Annual Meeting of the EBRD Board of Governors.

Malawi

18. **Mr. Carmichael:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the humanitarian situation in Malawi. [84704]

Clare Short: A recent assessment concluded that 2.2 million people in Malawi are currently in need of food assistance, and this will rise to 3.25 million—a third of the population—between January and March 2003. Another assessment is now under way. It is also considering the extent to which AIDS and income poverty have contributed to the crisis. The results should be available by 30 December.

My Department is playing a leading role in partnership with the Government of Malawi and other donors, in dealing with the crisis. Since November 2001 DFID has provided £30 million emergency assistance to Malawi.

Nagorno-Karabakh

19. **Mr. Wareing:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance her Department is providing to Armenia and to help with the refugee problem in Nagorno-Karabakh; and if she will make a statement. [84705]

Clare Short: My Department has provided support to refugees who have fled from Azerbaijan and Karabakh to Armenia, and also to Azeri refugees who have fled from Armenia and Karabakh to Azerbaijan. Between 2000 and 2001, we gave £660,000 to UNHCR to support refugees in Armenia. In March 2001, we also gave an additional £500,000 to WFP to provide emergency food assistance to 297,000 subsistence farmers and other drought victims in Armenia.

We provide approximately £2 million for longer-term developmental assistance to Armenia. This is focused on public sector reform, the implementation of poverty reduction strategies and work on medium-term expenditure planning.

In 2003, DFID in conjunction with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence, plans to spend a further £2 million from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool on a three-year conflict prevention programme. These funds will be used to help the victims of the conflict and maximise the chances of reaching an acceptable settlement on the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute.

CDC Investments

20. **Gregory Barker:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to reduce the target rates of return for CDC investments. [84706]

Clare Short: The Government do not set target rates of return for CDC investments.

Occupied Territories

21. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on humanitarian aid to Palestinians in the occupied territories. [84707]

Clare Short: The only solution to the humanitarian situation in Palestine is through political action, but we should not allow the increased human suffering of the Palestinian people to continue unaddressed. The UN has recently produced a plan of action to help the international community address the most urgent needs. We are supporting a broad range of emergency programmes through UNRWA, local NGOs and the World bank. In October, I agreed an additional £5 million from my Department's contingency reserve to meet the continuing urgent needs of the Palestinian people.

World Poverty

22. **Mr. Mike Hall:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action she is taking to ensure that programmes for tackling world poverty continue after the deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals in 2015. [84708]

Clare Short: 900 million people are still likely to be living in extreme poverty in 2015 if the Millennium Development Goals are achieved. Our commitment to eliminate poverty will not end in 2015.

The 2015 targets are intended to focus international efforts and build a more effective international development system. New targets will need to be set after 2015.

Africa (Famine)

23. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development What help her Department is giving to those countries in Africa that are suffering from famine. [84709]

Clare Short: We have made the following commitments for the humanitarian crisis in southern Africa, since September 2001. In addition, we estimate that our contribution to commitments by the European Commission to date is approximately £21.42 million.

Date/country	Description	Total (£ million)
September 2001		
Zimbabwe	Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO): Feeding programme	4.0
Zimbabwe	World Food Programme (WFP): Emergency Appeal	3.5
Malawi	Agricultural Targeted Inputs Programme	3.75
Angola	UN Appeal for Angola 2001	0.5
January-May 2002		
Malawi	NGOs: Feeding programmes	4.4
Malawi	Winter Agricultural Inputs programme	1.2
Angola	Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF): Assistance to Displaced People in Kuito and Camacupa	0.45
Angola	UN Appeal for Angola 2002	1.0
Angola	International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC): Appeal for Angola 2002	0.3
June 2002		
Zimbabwe	WFP: Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	7.0
Lesotho	WFP: Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	1.56
Malawi	WFP: Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	5.0
Swaziland	WFP: Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	0.25
Zambia	WFP: Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	5.0
Zambia	NGOs: Food for work programme	1.02
Region	WFP: Logistical support in Johannesburg regional hub, Lesotho and Zimbabwe	0.51
Region	Southern Africa Development Community (SADC): Vulnerability assessments to improve targeting of humanitarian assistance	0.2
Region	International Federation of Red Cross/Crescent Societies (IFRC): Feeding HIV/AIDS affected people	2.5
Region	WHO: regional health operation	0.13
Malawi	Agricultural Targeted Inputs Programme	6.8
Zimbabwe	NGOs: Agricultural inputs	5.0
Zimbabwe	World Health Organisation (WHO): Essential drugs and medicines	2.5
Angola	UN Bridging Request for Humanitarian Operations	0.67
July 2002		
Angola	MSF: Assistance to Displaced People in Bunjei and Huambo	0.3
Angola	MSF: Assistance to Population of Saurimo and Cuando Cubango	0.3
August 2002		
Angola	ICRC: 2002 Appeal for Angola	0.75
September 2002		
Zimbabwe	NGOs: Feeding Programmes	16.0
Malawi/Region	WFP: Nacala Rail-link	4.1
October 2002		
Zambia	Agricultural recovery through NGO's and FAO	1.5
Zambia	Improved nutrition programme	1.2
Zambia	Support to the health sector	0.2
Region	Southern African Humanitarian Information Service (SAHIMS)	0.11
Region	Southern Africa Humanitarian Crisis Unit: Monitoring and liaison	0.5
Lesotho	Livelihoods recovery through agriculture programme	1.0
Zimbabwe	Epidemic preparedness	1.2
Zimbabwe	Improved nutrition programme	1.1
Angola	UN Development Programme (UNDP): Emergency Mine Action Co-ordination	0.3
Angola	International Organisation for Migration (IOM): Assistance to Internally Displaced People in Kuanza Sul and Huambo	0.25
November 2002		
Region	SADC: Vulnerability assessments	0.2
Zambia	WFP: Emergency Feeding Operation	3.5
Lesotho	WFP: Emergency Feeding Operation	0.5
Angola	WFP: Food Assistance to Vulnerable People	2.0
Angola	WFP: Logistical Support	0.75
Angola	UN Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA): Emergency Response Fund	0.5
Angola	UNOCHA: Co-ordination of Emergency Activities	0.2
Total since September 2001	Humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes	93.7

We have also made the following contributions for humanitarian interventions in Ethiopia and Eritrea since September 2001. In addition the UK provides nearly 20 per cent. of EC Support, which has included €23 million for food aid in October 2002 and €4 million of humanitarian aid for the victims of drought.

Date/country	Description	Total (£ million)
December 2001		
Ethiopia	Contribution to ICRC 2002 Appeal	3.0
Eritrea	Contribution to ICRC 2002 Appeal	0.75
March 2002		
Ethiopia	WFP: Employment Generation Schemes	1.0
Ethiopia	WFP: Relief Food Assistance to Small Scale Farmers and Pastoralists	1.0
Ethiopia	WFP: Early Warning Systems Development and Implementation	0.16
Ethiopia	WFP: Food Assistance for Refugees and Repatriates	0.15
Ethiopia	UNICEF: Provision of Contingency Support to Emergency Response	0.5
Ethiopia	UNICEF: Jijiga Therapeutic Feeding Training and Demonstration Centre	0.23
Ethiopia	UNICEF: Mine Awareness Education	0.14
Ethiopia	UNDP: Support IDPs and Recovery Programme Coordination	0.36
Ethiopia	WHO: Prevention and Control of Epidemic Meningococcal Disease	0.35
Ethiopia	UNDP Emergency Unit for Ethiopia: Humanitarian Programme Coordination	0.25
July 2002		
Ethiopia	Second Contribution to ICRC 2002 Appeal	2.0
Eritrea	Second Contribution to ICRC 2002 Appeal	0.6
September 2002		
Ethiopia	UNICEF: Water and Environmental Sanitation	0.5
October 2002		
Ethiopia	GOAL: Emergency Relief Assistance for Drought Affected Pastoralists	0.58
Ethiopia	MSF: Pre-Harvest Food Gap Nutrition Intervention in Dehanna Woreda	0.17
Ethiopia	MSF: Tuberculosis Control Programme	0.29
Ethiopia	SCF: Emergency Drought Relief	1.43
November 2002		
Ethiopia	Oxfam: Afar Emergency Response	0.2
Total since September 2001	Humanitarian assistance and recovery programme	13.66

In addition on 3 December the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development announced a further £5 million of relief to meet humanitarian needs in Ethiopia.

West Africa (Cocoa Production)

24. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures her Department is taking to assist those employed in West African cocoa production. [84710]

Clare Short: It is imperative that we help producers in developing countries benefit from international trade, in order to facilitate economic growth and to help contribute to poverty reduction. Thus through the Doha Development Agenda agreed at the 4th WTO Ministerial in November 2001, the UK is arguing for significant reductions in trade distorting policies and greater access for developing country products to OECD markets, particularly for agricultural goods.

At a country-specific level, the UK Government are providing direct support to West African Governments for the development of smallholder agriculture. Specifically in Ghana, the UK supports feeder roads construction in cocoa growing areas, which has restored access to markets and provided alternative short-term employment for farmers. The UK has also supported a fair trade initiative to market Ghanaian chocolate in the UK.

Angola

26. **John Robertson:** What assessment she has made of the humanitarian situation in Angola. [84712]

The humanitarian situation in Angola remains serious. Since the ceasefire, already over-stretched aid agencies have been able to access several thousand more severely malnourished people. The 2003 UN CAP states that 4.3 million Angolans depend on some form of humanitarian assistance and the WFP has raised its caseload figure of people requiring assistance to 1.9 million. However, humanitarian agencies are still unable to reach 200,000 people and 40 per cent. of the countryside due to damaged infrastructure, inadequate road networks and mine infestation. Up to one million people may be cut-off during the upcoming seasonal rains.

This year, my Department has provided almost £8 million in humanitarian support. This includes £2 million to the International Committee for the Red Cross and Medicins Sans Frontieres, £300,000 to the United Nations Development Programme for demining, £250,000 to assist the International Organization for Migration with the resettlement of internally displaced people (IDPs), and over £2.5 million to the World Food Programme (WFP).

Zimbabwe (Governance)

27. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her policy on aid to Zimbabwe, with special reference to promotion of good governance. [84713]

Clare Short: Our assistance for Zimbabwe is focused entirely on the interlinked crises of the food shortage and the impact of HIV/AIDS. Both are set in the context of disastrous national policies on the economy and governance. We do not believe that the people of

Zimbabwe should be deprived of international support in the current crises because of the gross misgovernment of their country.

HIPC (World Bank)

28. **Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department is doing to increase the transparency of World Bank decisions affecting poverty in heavily indebted poor countries; and if she will make a statement. [84714]

Clare Short: Since April 2001, the World Bank has been moving towards making the work of its executive board more transparent. We have encouraged and are supportive of these efforts. The Chairman's concluding remarks or summings up are now made publicly available on most board discussions, including those on the debt sustainability analyses that underpin decisions on the level of debt relief to the heavily indebted poor countries (HIPCs). These analyses are prepared jointly by the World Bank and IMF in collaboration with the Governments in the countries themselves.

Afghanistan

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what efforts the Government are making to assist in the process of having open and democratic elections in Afghanistan in December 2003. [84201]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I have been asked to reply.

The UK is working closely with the Transitional Authority, the UN and international partners to secure the full implementation of the 2001 Bonn Agreement, the framework within which elections in 2004 will take place. Our focus is on working to ensure the elections take place in a context of stability—political, economic and security.

We are in continual dialogue with the Transitional Authority, supporting its efforts to rebuild the mechanisms of government. We contributed £1 million to the office of the UN Special Representative to assist with their work developing a political framework and £1 million to the Afghan Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank to assist them with capacity building and restructuring. The UK has earmarked a further £1 million for the development of an independent judicial system.

The UK has pledged £200 million over the next five years for both reconstruction and humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan and is also contributing 19 per cent. of the European Commission's €1 billion assistance package over the same period. Our contribution of £13 million, last week, helped Afghanistan clear its debt arrears to international financial institutions and enabled the Afghan Transitional Authority to access an Asian Development Bank concessional loan of £100 million to support the reconstruction effort.

The UK led the multi-national ISAF, authorised by the United Nations Security Council, from December 2001 until June 2002.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) is the best way of extending the ISAF effect outside Kabul. The UK has committed £22 million for SSR including support for the Office of the National Security Adviser.

Argentina

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian aid she plans for Argentina; and if she will make a statement. [84689]

Clare Short: None. We are focusing our effort on working with the international financial institutions which are providing support to address Argentina's economic crisis.

HIV/AIDS

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to increase its total spending on HIV/AIDS projects over the next three years. [86243]

Clare Short: My Department places HIV/AIDS high on our list of priorities of countries and is making significant contributions to combating the epidemic. In our bilateral programme alone, expenditure on HIV/AIDS-related work has increased from £38 million in 1997–98 to over £200 million in 2001–02. DFID's overall programme in Africa is set to increase from £640 million to £1 billion by 2006 and HIV/AIDS will remain one of the highest priorities for the region. We will continue to support health system strengthening and comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, care and mitigation programmes. We will also support the development and implementation of national AIDS control strategies to combat the epidemic, and to provide assistance in the framework of such strategies.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much her Department spent on HIV/AIDS programmes in *(a)* 2000, *(b)* 2001 and *(c)* 2002 through (i) bi-lateral, (ii) NGOs and (iii) bilateral aid. [86244]

Clare Short: Data are not held centrally in the format requested and to collate them would incur disproportionate costs. However, my Department has spent the following amounts on HIV/AIDS related work through the bilateral programme, including through NGOs.

	£ million
1999–2000	75
2000–01	120
2001–02	200

We have also made the following multilateral contributions to the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS):

	£ million
1999–2000	3
2000–01	3
2001–02	3

We have also in this period provided funding to other international agencies with significant HIV/AIDS programmes, including the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), the European Community (EC) and the World Bank. However, it is not possible to determine the portion of our contributions used for HIV/AIDS work as opposed to the other work of these agencies.

Tanzania (Prison Overcrowding)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to the Government of Tanzania regarding prison overcrowding in the country; and if she will make a statement. [84983]

Clare Short: DFID provides budgetary support to the Government of Tanzania's Poverty Reduction Strategy which this year increased resources for prisons, police, and the judiciary. Legal Sector Reform is a key priority of the Poverty Reduction Strategy and Denmark is the lead donor for this work. We are aware of concerns on lack of progress and DFID have been asked to participate in a joint donor and government appraisal early in 2003 to agree on next steps.

DEFENCE

Challenger Tanks

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contracts he has had with Vickers for the desertification of Challenger tanks; what components are covered under these contracts; what the date of the contracts was; what modifications were suggested by Vickers to the MoD regarding desertification; and what the MoD's response was. [86310]

Mr. Hoon: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 927W. There has been a wide range of discussions with Alvis Vickers Ltd. (previously Vickers Defence Systems) related to the modifications to improve Challenger 2's performance in desert conditions. I am withholding the specific details of the modification work under Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access toGovernment Information.

Compensation Claims

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many claims from *(a)* UK and *(b)* non-UK citizens for compensation are outstanding against his Department for accidents; how many claims have been outstanding for more than (i) one, (ii) two and (iii) three years; and if he will make a statement; [85874]

(2) how many outstanding claims there are for compensation for his Department from civilian employees for work-related accidents; how many are more than *(a)* one year and *(b)* two years old; and if he will make a statement; [85872]

(3) how many outstanding claims for compensation his Department is dealing with relating to service personnel who received injuries at the time of duty; how many have been outstanding for more than *(a)* one, *(b)* two and *(c)* three years; and if he will make a statement. [85873]

Dr. Moonie: The claims databases operated by the Ministry of Defence and its contracted claims handlers do not record information in such a way to distinguish between claims for compensation from United Kingdom and non-UK citizens. The following table sets out the number of current outstanding personal injury related claims against MOD from both UK and non-UK citizens.

More than one year	*More than two years*	*More than three years*	*Total number of outstanding claims*
11,654	694	1,015	5,687

The current number of outstanding claims against the Ministry of Defence from civilian employees for work related accidents are as follows:

More than one year	*More than two years*	*Total number of outstanding claims*
534	298	1,390

The current number of outstanding claims against the Ministry of Defence from Service personnel for injuries suffered on duty are as follows:

More than one year	*More than two years*	*More than three years*	*Total number of outstanding claims*
1,007	425	499	3,739

When compensation claims are submitted, they are considered on the basis of whether or not the Ministry of Defence has a legal liability to pay compensation. Where there is a legal liability to pay compensation we do so. Most claims are settled amicably on a legal liability basis without recourse to the courts.

Departmental Assets

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the value is of each agency's fixed assets *(a)* in Scotland and *(b)* elsewhere; and if he will make a statement; [86387]

(2) what the value is of his Department's assets holdings, broken down by asset holder under the headings of *(a)* Land and Buildings Scotland, *(b)* Land and Buildings UK, *(c)* Land and Buildings Overseas, *(d)* Fighting Equipment, *(e)* Nuclear Submarine Fleet, *(f)* Nuclear Missile Capacity, *(g)* Heritage Assets, *(h)* Plant and Machinery, *(i)* Vehicles and *(j)* Investments, was in the last financial year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [86403]

Dr. Moonie: Details of Ministry of Defence asset holdings are published by HM Treasury every three years in the National Asset Register. The latest information was provided in July 2001 in Section 7 of Cm 5221 which shows values, holders and (where

relevant) geographical locations, broken down by official asset category. Broader information on values is also published annually in the Ministry of Defence Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts and in the annual reports and accounts of individual agencies. Copies of the National Asset Register, Resource Accounts and agency accounts have been placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Employees (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of each of Her Majesty's forces are stationed in Scotland; how many of his Department's civilians are *(a)* working in and *(b)* based in Scotland; what the projected totals are for *(i)* 2001–02 and (ii) 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [86405]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested for civilian staff is given in the table.

Full-time equivalent [1]

Date	*MOD civilian staff working in Scotland*
April 2001	9,421
April 2002	8,597
October 2002	8,444

[1] Figures include full time equivalent values for part timers.

For civilian staff we can only tabulate where they work and do not make a distinction between, working in and based in, hence only one figure has been provided. Furthermore, we do not make predictions on future staffing levels and the three dates provided aim to give a representative snapshot for the periods requested.

At 1 April 2002 the number of United Kingdom regular forces personnel posted to Scotland was 14,250. This includes 4,670 Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel, 3,710 Army personnel and 5,870 RAF personnel. These figures exclude full time Reserve Service, Reservists mobilised for duty, Gurkhas and members of the Royal Irish Home Service.

Information (Exemptions)

Mrs. Mahon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his Answer of 3rd December (ref 84133), under which subsection of Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information he withheld the information. [86047]

Mr. Hoon: The information was withheld under subsection 'a' of Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, which relates to information whose disclosure would harm national security or defence.

Research and Development

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what total expenditure for research and development was in the last year for which figures are available, how much of it is spent in Scotland, broken down into *(a)* DERA's own research sites and *(b)* research funded in academic and non-DERA sites; and what the names of these sites were. [86006]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* In financial year 2000–01 Ministry of Defence spent £2,379 million net inclusive of VAT on research and development.

It is not possible to state how much of that total figure represented expenditure in the United Kingdom or in Scotland since our data does not include a regional breakdown.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Current Affairs Broadcasting (Scotland)

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding current affairs broadcasting in Scotland. [83618]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has not held any such discussions with the Scottish Executive.

Darts

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what action she is taking to enable darts to be recognised as a sport. [86513]

Dr. Howells: My Department is considering the potential for amendments to the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 and the wider implications of any such amendment.

Films (Funding)

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many films which have received funding from the Film Council have been screened with subtitling and audio description provision. [84961]

Dr. Howells: The figures requested are not available. However, the Film Council is drawing up a wide-ranging disabilities policy, which will strengthen requirements for the provision of subtitling in Film Council funded feature films. It has also announced *(a)* allocation of up to £350,000 towards a pilot project to install captioning and audio description equipment in selected UK cinemas *(b)* allocation of a further 60[illegible]0 to make grants available to film distributo[illegible]for captioning and audio de[illegible]ing films released on less than 100 prints *(c)* allocation of £40,000 in Lottery funding to invest in the research and development of a personal captioning device.

Listed Places of Worship

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been paid out under the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme. [84888]

Dr. Howells: £5,257,404.34 had been dispersed in grant payments under the Listed Places of Worship grant scheme as of 25 November 2002.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much has been given by English Heritage in grant-in-aid to listed places of worship in the last five years. [84954]

Dr. Howells: A total of £62,344,000 has been offered to listed places of worship (including cathedrals) in grant-in-aid by English Heritage in the last five years.

All figures £000

Financial year (to 31 March)	Places of worship except cathedrals	Cathedrals (C of E and RC)	Total
1997–98	10,023	2,043	12,066
1998–99	12,202	2,578	14,780
1999–2000	9,994	3,146	13,140
2000–01	13,747	2,924	16,671
2001–02	3,170	2,517	5,687
Grand Total			62,344

These figures are for grants offered. English Heritage makes offers against which the grantee can then claim. A number of years may elapse between a grantee receiving a grant offer and actually claiming it.

National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many grants of £48,000 or more were made by NESTA in each year since 1998; and if she will make a statement. [86376]

Dr. Howells: The following table shows how many grants of 48,000 or more were made by NESTA in each year since 1988:

Financial year	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Total*
Number of awards over £48k	4	19	50	62	135
Total number of awards	6	25	67	102	200

The figures above include every award contracted or commissioned by NESTA to 31 March 2002 (the most recent date for which audited figures are available). The total size of award includes funding that has been released directly to the awardee or to cover the costs of commissioned areas of work but does not include added value expenditure such as the cost of mentoring. It includes any agreed release of contingency funding, but not any reserved contingency which may or may not be spent in the future. It treats as distinct any separate awards to the same project which have involved separate funding decisions.

Public Entertainments Licence

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if there will be a difference in cost between a premises licence which incorporates permission to provide entertainment and one which does not. [84955]

Dr. Howells: A premises will be able to obtain permission for live music at no extra cost to the fee for obtaining permission to sell alcohol. Furthermore, the introduction of a single integrated licensing scheme is estimated to save industry £1.97 billion over the first ten years.

The level of fees will be decided following consultations with industry and local government stakeholders.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what is the cost of a public entertainments licence in each local authority; [84956]

(2) how many public entertainments licences were issued by each local authority in the last 12 months; [84957]

(3) how much was received by each local authority from the issue of public entertainment licences in the last year for which figures are available. [84958]

Dr. Howells: The information that has been requested is not held centrally and to obtain it would represent a disproportionate cost to the Department. However, The Chartered Institute of Public Finances and Accountancy estimated that approximately 46,000 public entertainment licences were issued in 2000–01 by the local authorities and that £16 million was received in connection with these.

Licences are reviewed annually and a fee is paid both for each grant and on each renewal. Fees are set by local authorities at their own discretion and in many cases a single fee is not set. Fees are often set in bands on the basis of the capacity of the venue.

Licensing Bill

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her answer of 4 December, ref.84617, what criteria were used to decide on which organisations to consult on the White Paper, Time for Reform; and for what reason Salisbury District Council was not included. [86680]

Dr. Howells: The publication of the White Paper, Time for Reform, in April 2000, was followed by a well-publicised, open public consultation announced in both Houses of Parliament and which resulted in 1,215 responses being received. Copies of the White Paper were specifically sent to those organisations, including a number of district councils, which had written to us with their views during the review that took place prior to publication and which raised issues relating to licensing generally. Salisbury District Council did not fall into these categories. The Local Government Association, with whom we had established a good working

relationship, was also sent a copy of the White Paper with the expectation that they would consult their members, including all local authorities.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the guidance to be issued to local authorities under the Licensing Bill [*Lords*]. [84959]

Dr. Howells: The Government intend to publish draft guidance in Spring 2003. We are currently working with an advisory group of key stakeholders to assist us in meeting this timetable. Detailed framework guidance was published on the Bill's First Reading on November 14.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the financial impact on the hospitality industry of the measures included in the Licensing Bill [*Lords*]. [84960]

Dr. Howells: Appendix 4 of the White Paper "Time for Reform: Proposals for the Modernisation of our Licensing Laws" published in April 2000 estimated, using figures supplied by industry, that the hospitality and leisure industry would benefit from savings of £1.9 billion over the first 10 years of the licensing regime proposed in the Licensing Bill. The calculations used were subsequently refined and the Regulatory Impact Assessment published alongside the Bill and placed in the Libraries of both Houses estimates total savings of £1.97 billion over the first 10 years.

TRANSPORT

A49

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on extending the speed restriction south of Bayston Hill on the A49. [86528]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from T. Matthews to Mr. Paul Marsden, dated 11 December 2002:

I have been asked by the Transport Minister, David Jamieson, to reply to your recent question about extending the speed limit south of Bayston Hill on the A49 Trunk Road.

There are a number of criteria that are used when deciding an appropriate speed limit, including the nature of the road and its surroundings, existing traffic speeds and the accident rate. The speed limit should appear reasonable to most drivers and have the support of the police, who have responsibility for enforcement.

The 30 mph speed limit through Bayston Hill was introduced in 1997 as part of a traffic calming scheme through the village. The length south of Bayston Hill is much more rural in character, there have been only two incidents in the last three years, resulting in two minor injuries. Most drivers would consider that a reduction in the limit there would be inappropriate for the conditions and it is unlikely that the police would support any change. In the circumstances, it would therefore be difficult for us to justify an extension of the limit.

That said, the Route Management Strategy for the A49 between Ross-on-Wye and Shrewsbury, which went out to public consultation earlier this year, is examining the appropriateness of all existing speed limits along the route, including Bayston Hill. Amongst other things, it will identify a short and long term programme of improvements and aim at a consistent speed strategy. If anomalies are found, changes will be made. A report is due early in the new year.

I hope this is helpful. If you would like more information, the Agency's Route Sponsor for the A49, Dennis Wheeler, would be pleased to assist. He can be contacted at our offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8126.

Airports

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many letters he has received *(a)* supporting and *(b)* opposing the (i) Midlands New Site Option contained within the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands and (ii) the closure of Birmingham International Airport, as proposed in the National Consultation on the Future of Air Transport in the UK: Midlands. [85735]

Mr. Jamieson: We have not yet analysed all the responses but we will produce a summary when the consultation comes to a close.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department will take to ensure that those who have responded to the consultation are *(a)* informed of the forthcoming Gatwick consultation paper and *(b)* able to adjust their submissions accordingly. [86265]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 474–75, that the consultation on airports capacity will be kept open until we have consulted on options for new runways in relation to Gatwick.

Those who have already responded to the consultation will be able to amend, add to, or replace their response having considered the new document. We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process, including how we will inform respondents, when we publish the further consultation paper in the new year.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the implications of airport policy options for the South East for the *(a)* rail and *(b)* road networks. [86264]

Mr. Jamieson: The South East and East of England Regional Air Services Study included an assessment of the type of road and rail infrastructure that would be needed both to connect the airport options to the strategic network and the type and scale of improvements that might be required on the strategic network.

The results of these appraisals are summarised for each of the published options in "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East)" main consultation document, and further details are contained in supporting reports.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Edinburgh West of 8 November on Edinburgh airport; and for what reason the reply has been delayed. [85877]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received a large number of responses to our consultation The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom, both from Members of Parliament and from members of the public. Latest estimates put the figure at over 35,000 including letters and electronic responses. These are all being processed as quickly as possible.

Central Railway Scheme

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place a copy of the Strategic Rail Authority's report to him on the Central Railway Scheme in the Library. [86581]

Mr. Spellar: We are considering whether and in what form to make available the SRA report, in line with our commitment to open government, bearing in mind that some of the information it contains may be commercially sensitive.

Concorde

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what checks are carried out on Concorde to ensure its structural integrity; and if he will make a statement. [86588]

Mr. Jamieson: The structural integrity of Concorde is ensured in service by way of a phased inspection programme designed to detect potential failures. Both visual and non-destructive examination techniques, such as ultra sound scanning, are used in this process. Inspections are repeated periodically, with the frequency depending on the structural location in question. The efficacy of these inspections is continually reviewed by the UK and French airworthiness authorities in co-operation with Concorde's Anglo-French manufacturers.

Gaul Inquiry

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the total legal costs to date have been of the inquiry into the sinking of the Hull trawler, Gaul; and if he will make a statement. [86718]

Mr. Jamieson: In 1998 the Deputy Prime Minister announced that the formal investigation into the sinking of the Gaul would be reopened. Since then the legal costs have amounted to some £600,000 to date. The reopened inquiry is due to take place in Hull next summer.

London Underground

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the original estimate supplied to his Department was of the PPP consultancy costs for London Underground. [86530]

Mr. Jamieson: London Transport's expenditure on consultants costs has been regularly reported to the House at six-monthly intervals since 13 January 1999. London Transport could not at that stage be confident of the overall requirements or costs of external advice. An estimated outturn figure of £98 million was first reported to the House on 4 December 2001. London Transport's latest estimate of between £103 million–£105 million was reported to the House on 25 November. The increase was partly as a result of the Mayor's second unsuccessful legal challenge.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the NAO about the Government's decision to accept liabilities relating to tube PPP. [86595]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State's minute of 4 December notified Parliament of a contingent liability that London Regional Transport is intending to enter into in respect of the PPPs, and a guarantee that he in turn is intending to provide to London Regional Transport in the event that the contingent liability should materialise. No discussions have been held with NAO. However, in accordance with the guidance set out in Government accounting, Treasury were consulted before notification, and a copy of the minute was also separately sent to the Chair of the Committee of Public Accounts.

Motorcycling (Emissions)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department of the European Emission Standard Directives on motorcycling; what discussions have taken place; what representations have been received; and what steps have been taken by his Department as a result. [86089]

Mr. Jamieson: EU directive 2002/51/EC provides for two stages of reductions in emission limit values for two and three wheeled vehicles to have effect from 2003 and 2006 together with a number of other measures designed mainly to maintain emissions performance in-service.

The first stage reductions should contribute a small but useful reduction in carbon monoxide and hydrocarbon emissions at a reasonable cost to manufacturers. With regard to the second stage reductions, while the Government welcome further measures for reducing motor cycle emissions, they considered that mandating a second stage of emissions reductions before its impact on the industry could be fully assessed was not in accord with the principle of better regulation, as reasserted in the Mandelkern Report and endorsed by heads of Government at the Barcelona European Council. While the UK did succeed in negotiating some relief for small manufacturers, support from other member states and the European Parliament for a review prior to any second stage implementation was not forthcoming. The Government therefore abstained from voting in the EU Environmental Council's third and final reading on this measure.

The Department has been in contact with the UK industry throughout the negotiations and continues to do so in order to revise its regulatory impact assessment to take account of the second stage measures. The Department intends shortly to provide a copy of the regulatory impact assessment to the House scrutiny committees on European legislation. Copies will also be placed in the House Libraries.

Oil Tankers

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has

made of proposals from the International Maritime Organisation to phase out single hull tankers, following the Erika oil spill disaster; what discussions have taken place; and what steps his Department has taken to take these proposals forward. [86101]

Mr. Jamieson: Following the loss of the tanker Erika in December 1999, the UK, jointly with Denmark and the Netherlands, took the lead in securing mandatory change to the International Maritime Organization's (IMO) MARPOL Convention to accelerate the international timetable to phase out single hull oil tankers. To ensure unambiguous enforcement through Port State Control in the EU area we have also supported the EU Regulation which has imposed the IMO text in EU member states. At last week's Transport Council it was agreed to invite a proposal from the Commission to accelerate the timetable even further and to consider how the carriage of heavy oil in single hull tankers might be restricted.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department has taken since October 2000 to *(a)* accelerate the phasing out of single hull oil tankers and *(b)* amend the MARPOL Convention; and what the outcome was. [86102]

Mr. Jamieson: In October 2000 the Transport Council approved proposals put forward by the UK, Denmark and the Netherlands for a common approach in the International Maritime Organization (IMO) to accelerate the existing international timetable for the phasing out of single hull oil tankers. In April 2001, following negotiations in which the UK played a major part, IMO reached agreement on an amending the MARPOL convention under which single hull tankers having no protection would be phased out in order of age between 2003 and 2007. Under the same agreement partially protected tankers would be phased out of EU ports in order of age between 2003 and 2015. At last week's Transport Council it was agreed to invite a proposal from the Commission to accelerate the timetable even further and to consider how the carriage of heavy oil in single hull tankers might be restricted.

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the risk of large oil spills from single hulled oil tankers in UK waters. [83028]

Mr. Jamieson: The risks of shipping incidents and of the resulting oil spills have been modelled as part of the analysis of the environmental characteristics and pollution risks of the entire coastline. The results are reported in "Identification of Marine Environmental High Risk Areas (MEHRA) in the UK" published by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in December 1999.

The UK has made it a high priority to reduce the risk of oil spills occurring, and to minimise the impact of any spill which does occur. We have responded positively to the large number of detailed recommendations contained in Lord Donaldson's report "Safer Ships, Cleaner Seas" (1994) and his Review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control (1999). The measures which we have taken include:

Comprehensive surveys of shipping movements;

Implementing a range of ship routeing measures around the coast;

Locating all-year round Emergency Towing Vessels at four points around the UK coasts;

Supporting the mandatory carriage of transponders to allow shipping movements around our coasts to be identified and monitored;

Creating a new function, the Secretary of State's Representative for Maritime Salvage and Intervention (SOSREP) to provide overall command and control of operations during marine emergencies;

Updating and publishing the UK's revised "National Contingency Plan for Marine Pollution from Shipping and Offshore Installations", which clarifies the role of the relevant agencies and ensures that environmental considerations are now fully integrated with operational response procedures. This plan is compatible with the International Convention on Oil Pollution Preparedness, Response and Co-operation 1990.

At the recent Transport Council, we agreed to invite a proposal from the Commission to accelerate the timetable for phasing out single hull tankers even further, and to consider how the carriage of heavy oil in single hull tankers might be restricted, with a view to reducing the risk of a spill from a single hull oil tanker even more.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many times the Prestige oil tanker has docked in the UK in the last 10 years; what safety measures are in place governing entry into UK docks for oil tankers; what measures he is taking to improve safety measures on oil tankers; what plans he has to work with European partners to bring forward the date for outlawing single-hulled oil tankers; and if he will make a statement on the reduction in size of the largest oil tankers in order to improve safety. [83151]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The records which would enable the movements of this vessel to be plotted over the last 10 years are not readily available. However, records of ship movements for the last five years have been placed in the House Libraries. These record sightings of the PRESTIGE and details of its entries into port. They indicate that the PRESTIGE has called three times at UK ports (Tees in October 1998 and at Tees Bay and Tees in May 1999). The database of inspections under the port state control system does not record ship movements but does indicate that the vessel was inspected in Hull in July 1995 and has not been inspected in a UK port since then.

The movement and manoeuvring of vessels in harbours is the responsibility of the harbour authorities.

Since July 2002 the International Safety Management Code has applied to most vessels trading internationally. It is the international standard for the safe management and operation of ships and for pollution prevention.

The UK was instrumental in securing international agreement to accelerate the phasing out of single hull tankers of 20,000 tons deadweight or more. Those

having no additional protection must be phased out in order of age no later than the dates in the following timetable:

2003 for ships delivered in 1973 or earlier,
2004 for ships delivered in 1974 and 1975,
2005 for ships delivered in 1976 and 1977,
2006 for ships delivered in 1978, 1979 and 1980,
2007 for ships delivered in 1981 or later.

Single hull tankers of 20,000 tons deadweight or more having a degree of additional protection, and all those between 5,000 to 20,000 tones deadweight, must be phased out in order of age no later than the following dates:

2003 for ships delivered in 1973 or earlier,
2004 for ships delivered in 1974 and 1975,
2005 for ships delivered in 1976 and 1977,
2006 for ships delivered in 1978 and 1979,
2007 for ships delivered in 1980 and 1981,
2008 for ships delivered in 1982,
2009 for ships delivered in 1983,
2010 for ships delivered in 1984,
2011 for ships delivered in 1985,
2012 for ships delivered in 1986,
2013 for ships delivered in 1987,
2014 for ships delivered in 1988,
2015 for ships delivered in 1989 or later.

Shipbuilding and shipowning are long-term commitments. Investment in the newer double hull tankers depends on the stability offered by this timetable.There is no evidence that reducing the size of oil tankers will improve safety. However, at the recent Transport Council, we agreed to invite a proposal from the Commission to accelerate the timetable for phasing out single hull tankers even further, and to consider how the carriage of heavy oil in single hull tankers might be restricted, with a view to reducing the risk of a spill from a single hull tanker even more.

Pollution Incidences

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the incidences of *(a)* marine, *(b)* oil and *(c)* other pollution incidences recorded in United Kingdom waters in each year since 1990 from shipping registered in (i) the UK, (ii) the EU and (iii) other countries; what actions were taken to clean up in each case; what the cost was and by whom this was paid, including details of fines levied; and if he will make a statement. [85849]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available in the form requested.

The Advisory Committee on Protection of the Sea (ACOPS) produced a report entitled long-term analysis of oil spill statistics for the waters around the British Isles 1964 to 1995. For this period there was a consistent and continuing decline in the numbers of beach pollution incidents accompanied by a significant reduction in reports of crude oil and tar in the marine environment, reductions in the annual totals of tanker-source pollution and reductions in the annual total number of incidents attributed to the handling and transportation of oil around the UK coastline.

Between 1978 and 1999 the ACOPS annual data has reported 12,746 oil pollution incidents.

The recently published ACOPS annual survey report 2001 identified 678 accidental or deliberate polluting discharges from vessels and offshore installations operating in the UK pollution control zone. There was a downward trend identified in the annual number of oil discharges in the open sea (excluding discharges from offshore installations).

Principal pollution incidents during the period 1990 to 2002 requiring a concentrated cleanup included the Braer in 1994 spilling 85,000 tonnes of crude oil, clean-up cost £52 million and the Sea Empress in 1996 losing 72,000 tonnes of crude oil, clean-up cost £39 million.

Since 1995 the Maritime and Coastguard Agency has successfully prosecuted 10 ships, with an average fine of £20,000. This excludes prosecution by port authorities.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on changes in the frequency of monitoring of pollution incidences from shipping in United Kingdom waters. [85850]

Mr. Jamieson: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) undertakes regular aerial surveillance of the UK Counter Pollution Control Zone through a contract it has with Air Atlantique. In August 2000, the contract was revised and awarded as a MCA/Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) joint contract, to provide 600 hours of programmed flying per year for the MCA to monitor pollution from shipping, and 300 hours for the DTI to monitor pollution from offshore installations. In addition to these programmed hours, the MCA has the capability to mobilise these aircraft at short notice to reports of pollution at sea.

Although the allocated hours in the new contract did not change, it provides faster aircraft and has enhanced Side Looking Airborne Radar, which allows the aircraft to scan 20 miles either side of the aircraft, compared with 10 previously. The aircraft can typically survey 32,000 square miles in a five hour period of surveillance, compared with 14,000 square miles in the past.

The aircraft are therefore able to respond quickly to reported incidents over a wider area, increasing the chances of identifying offending vessels and gathering evidence for use in court.

The MCA also commissioned a satellite oil spill sensing trial to assess whether satellites could be used to improve the detection and identification of polluters. Information from this survey was used to target surveillance aircraft to potential incidents in the survey area and surveillance flights were timed to coincide with reports from satellite imaging. The MCA are presently evaluating how this trial can be developed further to enhance their monitoring capability.

PPP

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 498W, if he will place in the Library the calculations upon which his long-term grant offer is made. [85742]

Mr. Jamieson *[pursuant to his answer, 10 December 2002, Official Report, c. 210W]:* A statement of how the Government intends to fund the London Underground in the long-term was annexed to the draft letters of comfort reported to Parliament by my right hon. Friend the then Secretary of State's Minute of 20 March 2002.

Railway Rolling Stock

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the *(a)* collisions, *(b)* derailments and *(c)* SPADs involving Mark 1 passenger carriages in each of the last four years, broken down by (i) vehicle stock and (ii) train operating company. [86554]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's Railway Inspectorate have advised that this information is not available in the form requested.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when all Mark 1 passenger carriages will be replaced, broken down by *(a)* vehicle stock and *(b)* train operating company. [86553]

Mr. Jamieson: New vehicles to replace Mark 1 rolling stock have been ordered and are being manufactured to allow the withdrawal of all Mark 1 vehicles by the statutory deadline of 31 December 2004. However, it may not be possible to introduce all the new vehicles by this date because of scale of the power supply upgrade that is required. The industry is exploring various options—one of which includes the accelerated installation of TPWS by 31 March 2003.

Stingray Mobile Camera System

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the final cost was of the implementation of the Stingray mobile camera system, broken down by *(a)* purchase of equipment, *(b)* staffing and *(c)* other costs. [85951]

Mr. Jamieson: The cost of developing and implementing the Stingray mobile camera system was some £2.2 million. This is made up of £1.4 million for purchase of equipment and IT system developments; £0.3 million staffing; and £0.5 million for other costs, including publicity.

In its first year of operation, Stingtray generated £2.08m in fines, penalties, court costs and relicensing revenue.

Transport Projects Awards

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for which transport projects awards for funding under the European Communities Objective 1 programme have been made for the period 2000 to 2006; and how much was allocated from the *(a)* Government and *(b)* the European Community in each case. [86095]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The table sets out the transport projects approved under the 2000–06 Objective 1 structural funds programmes in England.

The implementation of Objective 1 in Wales is a matter for the Welsh Assembly.

Region	*Name of transport scheme*	*Approved for Objective 1 funding (Yes/No)*	*Total amount of funding from Objective 1 (£ million)*	*Total amount of funding from government (£ million)*
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	Connecting Cornwall: project to help develop and implement transport strategy in the County	Yes	0.17	0
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	Newquay Cornwall Airport Business Development: to develop opportunities to invest in and improve airport facilities	Yes	0.22	0
Merseyside	Port of Liverpool—Strategic Transport Access Study (Applicant—Sefton MBC)	Yes	0.18	0.02
Merseyside	St. Helens Eastern Approach Phase 1: Corporation Street Bridge (Applicant—St. Helens MBC)	Yes	0.34	0
Merseyside	Axis/River Alt. Footpath (Applicant—Liverpool City Council)	Yes	0.07	0.009
Merseyside	New Pathways Bus Links to Atlantic Gateway SIA (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	0.25	0.62
Merseyside	Pathways Bus Links (Huyton/Prescot) (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	0.94	0.48
Merseyside	Pathways Bus Links (Kirkby/Gillmoss) (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	0.41	0.62
Merseyside	LTP Smart Scheme A—Stage One (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	1.55	0
Merseyside	Bus Priority Measures One—Chalon Way Bus Gate (Applicant—St. Helens MBC)	Yes	0.12	0

Region	Name of transport scheme	Approved for Objective 1 funding (Yes/No)	Total amount of funding from Objective 1 (£ million)	Total amount of funding from government (£ million)
Merseyside	LTP Smart Scheme Q—incorporating St. Helens Centre (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	1.10	0.3
Merseyside	LTP Smart Scheme E (Applicant—Merseyside Passenger Transport Authority)	Yes	1.23	0
Merseyside	Local Initiative For Transport (LIFT) (Applicant—Liverpool City Council)	Yes	0.08	0.14
Merseyside	Northwood Star Community Transport) (Applicant—Merseyside Community Transport)	Yes	0.05	0.049
South Yorkshire	M1 Junction 31–32 Widening	Yes (Design Phase)	0.39	0.72
South Yorkshire	M1 Junction 32–33 Widening	Yes (Design Phase)	0.42	0.78
South Yorkshire	M1 Junction 33 Improvements	Yes (Design Phase)	0.39	0.72
South Yorkshire	M1 Junction 33–34 Widening	Yes (Design Phase)	0.42	0.78
South Yorkshire	M1 Junction 36–37 Widening	Yes (Design Phase)	0.70	1.30
South Yorkshire	M18 Junction 2–3 Widening	Yes (Design Phase)	0.28	0.52
South Yorkshire	Halfpenny Bridge Transportation Initiative	Yes (Design Phase)	0.34	0.64
South Yorkshire	Supertram Extension	Yes (Feasibility stage)	0.09	0.16
South Yorkshire	Sheffield-Barnsley-Leeds Rail service—infrastructure and rolling stock imps.	Yes (Feasibility stage)	0.04	0.08
South Yorkshire	PICASSO (two fully accessible minibuses)	Yes	0.21	0.75
South Yorkshire	Star Line (one stop shop for access to training and employment)	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.16	0.32
South Yorkshire	Dunscroft Community Bus	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.23	0.23
South Yorkshire	Heeley Community Transport	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.06	0.06
South Yorkshire	North Sheffield Link Service	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.40	0.30
South Yorkshire	Transport for all project	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.01	0.01
South Yorkshire	Dearne Valley Playbus	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.16	0.16
South Yorkshire	Coalfields Community Transport	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.30	0.30
South Yorkshire	Community Transport Skillbuild	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.22	0.21
South Yorkshire	Sheffield East End Transport Solutions	No (approved in principle, working up application)	0.18	0.18

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many court actions have taken place against offenders who have broken the terms of their antisocial behaviour order; and if he will list the range of penalties imposed. [86428]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The available information, relating to breaches of antisocial behaviour orders (ASBOs) in England and Wales, covers the period 1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001 and is shown in the table. The analysis covers only those breaches by persons issued with ASBOs during this period and notified to the Home Office.

Persons proceeded against for breach of anti-social behaviour orders by outcome, England and Wales—1 June 2000 to 31 December 2001

	Number
Persons proceeded against	139
Persons found guilty	125
Persons fined	18
Average fine amount (£)	116
Abs/Cond discharge	6
Community sentence	29
Persons sentenced to immediate custody	56
Average sentence length (months)	5.5
Other disposals	16

Note:

Figures cover only those proceedings relating to persons issued with ASBOs between 1 June 2000 and 31 December 2001 and notified to the Home Office.

Persons are counted only once even if they breached the same order on more than one occasion.

Conditional discharge is not available for breach of an ASBO under section 1 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; instances where a conditional discharge may have been given are being investigated.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what is the *(a)* remit, *(b)* composition and *(c)* work programme of the Home Office Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. [84309]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* We are committed to reducing anti-social behaviour. The Anti-Social Behaviour Unit will act as a catalyst to drive the Government's cross-cutting agenda. The unit will be headed by Louise Casey. Once fully recruited, it will comprise of staff drawn from across Government and from outside organisations. It will develop strategy and focus on implementation of existing initiatives and legislation, and the preparation of the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill, which was announced in the Queen's speech.

Asylum Applications

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what guidance he plans to issue to clarify the circumstances in which an in-country asylum applicant should be considered to have made their claim within a 'reasonably practicable period' for the purposes of determining whether they are entitled to support by the National Asylum Support Service; whether asylum seekers will be exempt from having to show that they have made their claim as soon as reasonably practicable if they are in-county applicants who *(a)* suffer from a recognised disability, *(b)* suffer from a serious physical, mental or psychological illness, *(c)* are pregnant, *(d)* suffer from serious trauma, *(e)* have been subject to human rights abuse, *(f)* are drug or alcohol dependent, and *(g)* are over the age of 60; and if he will make a statement. [85819]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 which comes into force on 8 January 2003, will prevent the National Asylum Support Service (NASS) from providing support unless the Secretary of State is satisfied that the person applied for asylum as soon as reasonably practicable after arrival in the United Kingdom.

Case-workers in NASS will receive training on how this new measure should be applied. In addition guidance will also be issued to local authorities.

I can confirm that in practice, if an applicant makes a claim immediately on arrival at the port then they will be able to access asylum support, provided they otherwise qualify. If the person fails, without good reason, to make an asylum claim immediately at the port of arrival then support will be refused.

Families with children will, however, receive asylum support even if they did not apply as soon as reasonably practicable.

In addition, those who claim asylum in-country following a significant change in circumstances in their country of origin (provided they make their asylum claim at the earliest possible opportunity following that change of circumstance) will be supported by NASS.

In addition asylum seekers who successfully show that a refusal of support by NASS will result, for example, in a breach of Article 3 European Convention of Human Rights (ECHR) will be granted support by NASS.

Local authorities will continue to be able to provide support to asylum seekers under the National Assistance Act 1948 (or in Scotland the Social Work (Scotland) Act 1968) but only where they are presently empowered to do so, ie where special needs have been identified so as to engage those provisions.

Whether the particular types of case which are referred to will be eligible for support will depend on whether, on the particular facts of the case, the claim for asylum has been made as soon as reasonably practicable and, if not, whether the case falls within one of the exceptions referred to above.

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers from *(a)* Somalia and *(b)* Iraq have had their applications (i) approved and (ii) refused in each of the last 12 months. [85676]

Beverley Hughes: The tables show asylum applications and initial decisions and appeal outcomes for each of the last 12 months. Data on initial decisions are independent of applications data, and do not necessarily relate to applications made in the same period. Appeal outcomes in any given time period do not necessarily relate to initial decisions made in the same period.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will be available from 28 February 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Asylum applications[1] received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2] on applications, October 2001 to September 2002[3]

Principal applicants

	Somalia					Iraq			
	Applications	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*	*Applications*	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*
2001										
October	550	790	220	155	415	565	635	65	210	360
November	420	805	255	170	380	595	505	70	165	265
December	385	500	195	120	185	640	530	50	195	285
2002										
January	470	695	270	185	240	730	910	85	435	390
February	380	590	220	165	205	1,135	765	65	405	290
March	450	445	165	120	160	975	860	65	585	210
April	455	510	210	110	185	975	980	75	705	200
May	550	575	205	160	205	1,335	890	65	625	200
June	445	380	165	75	135	1,115	675	55	445	175

Asylum applications[1] received in the United Kingdom, excluding dependants, and initial decisions[2] on applications, October 2001 to September 2002[3]

Principal applicants

	Somalia					Iraq				
	Applications	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*	*Applications*	*Total decisions*	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Total refusals*
July	755	530	220	120	190	1,285	1,065	65	785	215
August	685	500	195	115	190	1,365	885	45	660	175
September	655	715	220	150	350	1,655	1,120	40	815	265
Total	6,205	7,040	2,545	1,655	2,840	12,365	9,820	755	6,030	3,035

[1] Figures rounded to nearest 5, with '*' = 1 or 2.
[2] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.
[3] Provisional data.

Outcome of asylum appeals brought by nationals of Somalia and Iraq, determined by Adjudicators of the IAA, October 2001 to September 2002 by month[1]

Principal appellants

	Somalia				Iraq			
	Total	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn[2]*	*Total*	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn[2]*
2001								
October	90	15	55	20	255	60	175	25
November	90	30	50	15	280	60	185	35
December	100	20	65	15	230	40	165	25
2002								
January	100	20	65	15	325	65	220	40
February	130	35	80	10	390	105	255	25
March	180	60	105	15	430	105	285	40
April	210	75	115	25	495	135	320	40
May	270	90	155	25	470	130	300	40
June	260	90	130	35	320	80	210	30
July	360	135	175	50	380	65	280	35
August	325	140	150	30	420	90	280	45
September	290	110	155	30	395	100	255	40
Total	2,405	810	1,305	285	4,390	1,035	2,940	420

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest 5. Appeals do not necessarily relate to initial Home Office decisions in the same month.
[2] Figures include cases withdrawn by the Home Office as well as the appellant.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many asylum seekers from Somalia have been deported in each of the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [85681]

Beverley Hughes: The latest available data for removals of Somali nationals who have sought asylum at some stage are for the 12 months to June 2002 and are given in the table.

Removal of Somali nationals[1,2]

Month	*Number*
July 2001	5
August 2001	0
September 2001	1—
October 2001	1—
November 2001	1—
December 2001	1—
January 2002	5
February 2002	1—
March 2002	5
April 2002	10
May 2002	5
June 2002	1—

[1] Figures are rounded to nearest five with — denoting 1 or 2.

Notes:
1. Estimates of asylum removals by nationality—principal applicants removed only. Includes persons departing 'voluntarily' after the initiation of enforcement action against them, and persons leaving under Assisted Voluntary Returns Programmes run by the International Organization for Migration.
2. Removal is not necessarily to country of origin.

Data on removals by nationality in the period July to September 2002 are due to be published at the end of February 2003 on the Home Office web-site: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/whatsnew1.html.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long it has taken on average since 1997 for the successful asylum seeker to receive his or her official status letter, once indefinite leave to remain has been granted; what is the longest time any successful asylum seeker has had to wait for his or her official status letter since 1997; what the target time is for official status letters to be sent out; and if the average wait for such documents is decreasing. [86135]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the processing times for individual types of application is not recorded centrally and could only be obtained by scrutiny of individual case files, at disproportionate cost. Official status letters are normally sent out without delay following the decision to grant asylum, except where the asylum claimant is no longer in contact with the Home Office.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, if the prison service is holding asylum seekers in prisons in England and Wales; and if he will make a statement. [86827]

Beverley Hughes: Our policy on the detention of asylum seekers in prison accommodation was set out in our White Paper "Secure Borders, Safe Haven—Integration with Diversity in Modern Britain". We made it clear that, although the routine use of prison accommodation for immigration detainees had ended, there would remain a need to hold small numbers of individuals, including individuals who may have sought asylum at some stage, in prison for reasons of security and control. There has been no change in that policy.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Winston Frank Tracey; [81711]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Winston Frank Tracey; [83427]

(3) when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 27 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton, with regard to Winston Frank Tracey. [85143]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary on 10 December 2002.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department will answer the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East's letter of 26 May, about Mr. Ahmed, reference A1031630; and if he will make a statement on the volume of correspondence received by his Department. [83901]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 10 December 2002. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

The Home Department receives large amounts of correspondence from hon. Members, right hon. Friends, hon. Friends and members of the public.

The number of letters received from members of the public between April 2002 and the end of October 2002 was 26,460. The volume in the previous full financial year 2001–02 was 35,549. Public volume figures exclude letters relating to immigration and nationality matters.

In addition the number of replies sent to ministerial correspondence between April 2002 and the end of October 2002 was 12,110. The total volume for the previous full financial year 2001–02 was 21,099.

We aim to send a substantive reply to all letters as soon as possible. I am determined to achieve a high level of performance in dealing quickly with correspondence and to deliver a greater standard of service to all Members of Parliament and the public.

Criminal Records Bureau

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he anticipates the Criminal Records Bureau will reach its performance targets for processing applications. [86057]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Home Secretary's independent review team is in the process of examining all aspects of the Criminal Records Bureau's (CRB's) operation with a view to identifying medium to long term improvements, which will include service standards. They will report to the Home Secretary shortly, their recommendations will then be elaborated and implemented in the course of 2003.

The Criminal Records Bureau has implemented a range of improvements to processes and working practices and the intensive focus on improvements is already yielding results. The current average turnaround time for processing correctly completed disclosure applications is now five weeks. Over the last two weeks the CRB has been averaging around 43,500 Disclosures per week, which is over double the weekly output issued by the police under the previous arrangements. Since 11 March the CRB has received 1,023,000 applications and issued over 755,000 disclosures.

Immigration

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many of those presenting themselves at each port of entry were seeking to reside in Britain in each of the past 10 years. [86745]

Beverley Hughes: The information available is on passengers (excluding EEA nationals) admitted to the United Kingdom, rather than on those presenting themselves at ports. A very small proportion of those admitted are granted settlement (permanent residency) on arrival and they are clearly seeking to reside in the UK. However, the vast majority of non-visitors are given limited leave to remain for periods of up to between one and five years. It is difficult to know at the port of entry how many of these will ultimately seek to settle in the UK as once in country, subject to immigration rules, they may extend their leave to remain and subsequently apply for settlement.

The table shows the total number of persons admitted to the UK, excluding EEA nationals, over the last 10 years. It also shows the numbers admitted in categories that might eventually lead to settlement.

Corresponding information on admissions at each of the ports of entry (of which there are more than 40) in each of the past 10 years is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Passengers given leave to enter the UK, excluding EEA nationals[1], 1992–2001

Number of journeys

		Passengers admitted in categories which might lead to settlement				
Year	*Total admissions*	*Granted settlement on arrival[2]*	*Work permit holders and their dependants*	*UK ancestry*	*Spouses and fiancé(e)s*	*Others given leave to enter[3]*
1992	9,160,000	5,320	51,140	4,645	20,740	57,200
1993	9,840,000	3,620	48,000	4,075	19,220	54,500
1994	9,180,000	2,610	47,500	5,170	18,760	44,900
1995	9,620,000	2,400	52,100	6,625	19,110	43,800
1996	10,300,000	2,120	58,200	7,420	20,950	45,100
1997	10,900,000	2,350	62,975	8,350	26,385	49,400
1998	11,500,000	2,900	68,385	10,220	32,165	50,400
1999	12,000,000	2,530	76,180	11,785	30,250	55,400
2000	13,000,000	2,290	92,045	10,930	32,970	54,100
2001	12,800,000	2,820	108,825	10,635	29,100	78,300

[1] EEA nationals are free to enter and to remain in the UK without requiring leave to do so.
[2] Excludes asylum related cases given indefinite leave to enter; these are included in 'Others given leave to enter'.
[3] Includes: common law spouses; children given leave as dependants of settled parents; investors; retired persons of independent means; same sex partners admitted for a probationary year; dependants of persons granted admission through UK ancestry; persons who have applied for asylum at ports (and their accompanying dependants) and who have been granted asylum or exceptional leave, and are hence given leave to enter; and others.

Notes:
1. The data given are of the number of journeys made: a person who makes more than one journey is counted on each occasion, either in a specific category if given fresh leave to enter or as passengers returning.
2. Data rounded to the nearest five or three significant figures.

Female Prisoners

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of female prisoners have been prescribed mental health drugs in each of the last five years. [86642]

Hilary Benn: This information is not available in precisely the form requested. A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, undertaken in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), showed that 22 per cent. of women prisoners were taking anti-depressant, 16 per cent. hypnotic and anxiolytic and 10 per cent. anti-psychotic medication.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many suicide attempts there have been among female prisoners in each of the last five years; and how many suicides there have been by female prisoners since July. [86640]

Hilary Benn: Since July 2002, there have been six self-inflicted deaths of female prisoners (all those deaths where it appears the person may have acted specifically to take her own life). The available data on 'self-harm' incidents includes both attempted suicides and self-harm (without suicidal intent, which is included as it is difficult to measure suicidal intent). The table covers the 4,933 recorded incidents of self-harm by female prisoners between 1998 and 30 September 2002.

Table showing the number of self-harm incidents for female prisoners in England and Wales between 1 January 1998 and 30 September 2002

Calendar Year	*Number of self-harm incidents*
1998	211
1999	505
2000	933
2001	2,034
2002	1,250
Total	4,933

The Prison Service has a duty of care to all prisoners in its custody, and recognises that self-harm is a particular problem among women offenders. The Prison Service is currently developing several interventions that may help female prisoners reduce and manage self-harm in prison. One such example is at Holloway prison, where all prisoners who have been identified as at risk of suicide/self-harm are offered individual crisis counselling. About 40 per cent of prisoners take up the offer, while others may be referred to alternative sources of help within the prison. Staff report that following counselling women have shown increases in self-esteem, decreases in depression and are less likely to see suicide or self-harm as the solution to their problems.

Prisons

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the impact of the measures contained in the Queen's Speech on prison occupation in England and Wales. [83714]

Hilary Benn: The Queen's Speech outlined a commitment to reform the criminal justice system to deliver justice for all and to safeguard the interests of victims, witnesses and communities, and the Criminal Justice Bill which was laid before the House on 21 November.

I have already announced that the Review of Correctional Services is addressing a wide range of questions regarding the effectiveness and value for money delivered by the correctional services and developing a strategy for managing the prison population. The impact of the proposals contained in the Queen's Speech are being considered in the context of the Review.

We have not made final decisions about the implementation of the sentencing reforms in the Criminal Justice Bill but, on the basis of the modelling which has been done of the impact of the sentencing reforms, we do not expect them to generate significant increases in the prison population. The sentencing reforms should result in a small reduction in places in 2004 and 2005 followed by a modest increase of up to 1,000 places thereafter.

Prisons (Children's Act)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the introduction of the Children's Act 1989 into prisons following the High Court ruling on 29 November; and what extra resources his Department will make available to the Prison Service to ensure its implementation. [85994]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 128W.

Rape

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what follow-up is planned to the Action Plan to implement the recommendations of the HMCPS/IHMIC joint investigation into the investigation and prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape. [85313]

Mr. Denham: An inter-agency working group, led by the Home Office and with representation from the police, Crown Prosecution Service and Court Service, is monitoring progress against the agreed action points of the plan. Alongside this, the group is considering the issue of evaluation, in order to assess the impact of the action plan once completed, and to identify any necessary follow-up. The group is also looking at the issue of dissemination of this information. I will report further to Parliament in the New Year.

Shoplifting

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* men and *(b)* women were imprisoned for shoplifting offences in each of the last five years. [83679]

Hilary Benn: The number of men and women sentenced to immediate imprisonment in prisons in England and Wales for shoplifting is given in the table.

Number of persons sentenced to immediate custody at all courts for stealing from shops and stalls (shoplifting)—England and Wales 1996 to 2000[1]

	Sentenced to immediate custody				
Statue/Offence description	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*[2]
Theft Act 1968, section 1—Stealing from shops and stalls (Shoplifting)					
Males	4,334	5,908	7,874	9,863	11,678
Females	907	1,289	1,687	2,065	2,348

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

Young Offenders

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* 15-year-olds and *(b)* 16-year-olds were remanded in prison in each year since 1997. [85641]

Hilary Benn: Information on the number of 15 and 16-year-old males received into prison on remand from 1997–2001 is given in the table.

Year	*Number of 15-year-olds*	*Number of 16-year-olds*
1997	689	1,354
1998	625	1,217
1999	530	1,182
2000	526	1,045
2001 (P)	477	1,001

15 and 16-year-old females cannot be received into prison on remand.

Dr. Vis: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been held in prisons outside the juvenile estate in each of the last twelve months; and in which prisons. [83836]

Hilary Benn: Information on the number of under-18s held in prisons outside the juvenile estate is given in the table.

The Youth Justice Board for England and Wales is responsible for the placement of under-18s remanded or sentenced to custody. It is sometimes necessary for them to be placed outside the juvenile estate, and this is particularly so where girls are concerned. The number of girls in Prison Service custody is too low for them to be accommodated in juvenile-only accommodation whilst at the same time maintaining proximity to home and providing an appropriate level of educational and recreational services. The Board nevertheless seeks to avoid mixing as far as possible and is supporting the development of under-18 wings within larger women-only establishments.

Occasionally, juveniles are held outside the juvenile estate for the duration of their trial if their case is being heard in a Crown Court without any conveniently located juvenile establishment. In such circumstances, they are held on young offender wings, ie with 18 to 20-year-olds rather than with adults as such. Even more exceptionally, a juvenile may be categorised as Category A and be accommodated in a high security establishment.

Under-18s held in prisons outside the juvenile estate

	Number	*Prisons held in*
2001		
December	8	Chelmsford, Glen Parva, Northallerton, Reading, Holloway
2002		
January	21	Glen Parva, Norwich, Reading, Holloway, Styal
February	19	Chelmsford, Glen Parva, Reading, Holloway, Low Newton, Styal

Under-18s held in prisons outside the juvenile estate

	Number	*Prisons held in*
March	31	Chelmsford, Glen Parva, Reading, Holloway, Styal
April	17	Chelmsford, Glen Parva, Reading, Holloway, Low Newton
May	11	Glen Parva, Holloway, Styal
June	12	Glen Parva, Reading, Holloway
July	13	Glen Parva, Reading, Holloway, Low Newton, Styal
August	11	Glen Parva, Holloway, Low Newton, Styal
September	8	Holloway, Low Newton, Styal
October	15	Holloway, Low Newton, Styal
November	12	Highdown, Holloway, Styal

Youth Courts

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many youth courts there are in England and Wales; and what jurisdictions they cover. [86179]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* In England and Wales, there are about 220 youth courts spread across all 42 criminal justice areas.

Youth courts have jurisdiction to deal with summary only, triable either way and indictable only offences. Nearly all criminal proceedings brought against a child or young person are dealt with in a youth court. The main exceptions are:

(a) homicide;

(b) the juvenile is charged jointly with an adult and it is in the interests of justice that they be tried together;

(c) the juvenile is charged with a grave crime and the youth court considers that the greater sentencing powers of the Crown Court ought to be available.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Members' Salaries

Ann Clwyd: To ask the President of the Council by what percentage hon. Members' salaries have increased in each year since 1997. [86650]

Mr. Robin Cook: The increases in hon. Members' salaries since 1997 are as follows:

Year	*Salaries (£)*	*Percentage change*
April 1997	43,860	2
April 1998	45,066	3
April 1999	47,008	4
April 2000	48,371	3
April 2001	49,822	3
June 2001[1]	51,822	4
April 2002[1]	55,118	6

[1] In June 2001 and April 2002 Members' pay was increased by £2,000 per year. These increases, which were recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body, were in addition to the increases delivered via the normal uprating mechanism.

Further details are in the House of Commons Information Office's Factsheet M5 "Members' Pay, Pensions and Allowances" available on the Parliament website www.Parliament.uk.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pecheney Plant Redundancies

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support he will provide for redundant workers at the Pecheney plant in Workington constituency. [85465]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus offers assistance to help companies handle any significant reduction in staffing they may have to make, and help to those employees who are affected in identifying alternative jobs or any training they require.

In the case of Pecheney Aviatube, Jobcentre Plus has already agreed to give those employees being made redundant immediate access to its employment and training programmes. In addition to this, the West Cumbria support group, which includes Jobcentre Plus, will attend the premises of Pecheney on 5 and 6 December to provide further support and guidance to the workforce.

Benefit Applications (Signing)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will provide funding to allow existing Jobcentre Plus staff to receive British Sign Language training; and if he will make a statement; [83995]

(2) what improvements the Government intends making to the availability of British Sign Language interpreters at *(a)* Jobcentre Plus offices and *(b)* other Government offices; and if he will make a statement; [83996]

(3) if he will make a statement on the availability of British Sign Language interpreters at *(a)* Jobcentre plus offices and *(b)* other Government offices; and if he will make a statement; [83997]

(4) if he will set up full time mobile British Sign Language interpreter posts to cover offices in rural areas and to assist in benefit application procedures in their home where necessary; and if he will make a statement. [84002]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Both Jobcentre Plus and The Pensions Service are committed to providing a British Sign Language interpreter for anyone who requires one to carry out their business with us. Disability Employment Advisers in Jobcentre Plus offices can also take up British Sign Language training.

Interpreters can be arranged both for office appointments and for home visits, for example in rural areas. Interviews and home visits using a British Sign Language interpreter are arranged as soon as a suitable interpreter is available. Similar arrangements are available at other Government offices.

We are continuously examining possible service improvements and Jobcentre Plus is currently in discussion with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf about improving further the service available to deaf customers.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects the new CSA IT system to be fully tested; and if he will make a statement. [85858]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 317W.

Action Teams for Jobs

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many unemployed people have received support through the Action Teams for Jobs initiative; how many found work as a consequence of the initiative; and if he will make a statement on the sustainability of such employment. [85977]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Action Teams for Jobs are having a positive impact on the lives of disadvantaged people in the most employment deprived areas of the country. Up to the end of October 2002, Action Teams had engaged with 130,160 eligible jobless people and helped 53,010 of them into work.

Our research[1] has shown that 80 per cent. of people who found jobs through Action Teams moved into sustained jobs (i.e. lasting more than 13 weeks).

[1] *Source:* "Evaluation of Action Teams for Jobs", Employment Service (April 2002).

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the budgets were for each Employment Action Team in the last five years; and what the outturn expenditure was to April. [83245]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* Action Teams for Jobs were launched in October 2000 and have so far helped over 50,000 people into work. Forty teams were in operation in the first, pilot year. In 2001, the initiative was expanded and the number of Teams increased to 63.

Information on the total budget and spend for the initiative in the last two financial years (April to March) is in the table.

£ million

Year	*Total budget*	*Total spend*
2000–01	20	10
2001–02	50	60

Notes:
All figures are rounded to the nearest £10 million. All figures include the cost of administering the Action Team initiative. The 2001–02 spend figure is forecast expenditure.
Source:
Jobcentre Plus

Information on the budgets for each Action Team has been placed in the Library, and is available on the Action Teams website, *www.dwp.gov.uk/actionteams.*

Information on the out-turn of individual Jobcentre Plus led Action Teams is not separately available. Out-turn figures for the contractor led Teams cannot be published because they are commercially confidential.

Employment Service

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what were the results of the discussions in January with the Cabinet Office and the NHS Executive about the advertisement of vacancies on the Employment Service website; and if he will make a statement. [86055]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Jobcentre Plus maintains a continuous dialogue with the Department of Health through regular meetings of the Joint Service Development Group. Discussions about the most cost-effective way of establishing an NHS-wide e-recruitment service on the internet, and how that might be linked to and supported by the Jobcentre Plus website, are continuing. The Department of Health is currently assessing responses from potential suppliers to an invitation to tender for this work.

Officials in Jobcentre Plus and the Cabinet Office are working together to improve existing internet-based services for recruitment to the Civil Service. That work is currently focused on identifying the resources needed to do the development work and on identifying an appropriate opportunity in the current programme of improvements to the Jobcentre Plus website to implement the changes required.

Employment Zones

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people are involved in *(a)* stage 1 and *(b)* stage 2 of the Employment Zone scheme in each of the Employment Zone areas. [85975]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The information is in the table.

	Number of current participants (at 30 September 2002)	
Employment Zone	*Step 1*	*Step 2*
Birmingham	1,267	1,512
Brent	352	442
Brighton and Hove	271	288
Doncaster and Bassetlaw	505	597
Glasgow	923	782
Haringey	805	753
Liverpool and Sefton	1,300	1,280
Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland	405	411
Newham	464	565
North West Wales	239	542
Nottingham	192	238
Plymouth	217	294
Southwark	441	841
Tower Hamlets	285	421
Heads of the Valleys, Caerphilly and Torfaen	241	284
Total	7,907	9,250

Note:
Employment Zones vary in size and coverage.
Source:
Employment Zone Management Information.

Health and Safety (Work Place)

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the cost of failures in health and safety in the workplace in each year since 1997. [83869]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The overall cost to the British economy of all workplace injuries and work-related ill health in the most recent year for which detailed information is available (year 1995–96) is estimated to be between £2.9 billion and £4.2 billion. When the costs of avoidable non-injury safety failures are included, the cost rises to between £4.4—£8.6 billion.

The total costs in 1995–96 to society as a whole, including our estimates for the loss of welfare resulting from pain, grief and suffering of individual victims and their families, is estimated to be between £14.5 billion—£18.1 billion.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost was to the Exchequer of workplace accidents and illnesses in each year since 1995–96. [83417]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The overall cost to the British economy of all workplace injuries and work-related ill health in the most recent year for which detailed information is available (year 1995/96) is estimated to be between £2.9 billion and £4.2 billion. When the costs of avoidable non-injury safety failures are included, the cost rises to between £4.4 to £8.6 billion.

Health and Safety Executive

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many health and safety executive staff are pursuing cases against the executive on equal pay grounds. [84780]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: HSE currently has three cases—two are for individual members of staff and the other is for a group of three staff.

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many HSE staff are suffering from *(a)* stress and *(b)* RSI; and what estimate has been made of the cost of meeting claims by staff in future years. [84781]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In 2001–02, there were 198 members of HSE staff that recorded stress or depressive disorder as the cause of the absence. This resulted in 6,522 days absence from work. Included in this number are 11 cases that reported the cause of stress as work related through the internal HSE ill health reporting system.

In 2001–02, three cases of work related upper limb disorder were reported by HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995.

HSE has not made an estimate of the cost of meeting claims in future years.

Health and Safety Legislation (Breaches)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the Crown censures which have been issued in respect of breaches of health and safety legislation in the last five years. [85221]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The Crown censures issued by the Health and Safety Executive during the period 1997–2002 are as follows:

1. MOD Army (TA), Northampton Balloon Fair—April 1997;
2. Home Office, Fire Service College, Moreton in Marsh—July 1997;
3. MOD Royal Hospital Haslar, Gosport—November 1997;
4. Prison Service Agency, HM Young Offenders Institution Portland—February 1998;
5. MOD Defence Testing and Evaluation Organisation (DTEO), Shoeburyness—May 1998;
6. Court Services—December 1998;
7. MAFF Central Science Laboratory, Weybridge—April 1999;
8. MOD Army Base Repair Organisation (ABRO), Warminster—February 1999;
9. MAFF Central Veterinary Laboratory—February 1999;
10. MOD Defence Evaluation and Research Agency (DERA), Porton Down—May 1999;
11. MOD Central Ammunition Depot, Longtown—October 1999;
12. MOD Army, Army Cadet Force, Longmoor Camp—July 2000;
13. MOD Navy, HMS Raleigh—November 2000;
14. Prison Service Agency, HMP Bristol—July 2001;
15. MOD Army, Sennybridge Training Area—August 2001; and
16. Royal Mint, Cardiff—September 2002.

A censure is a term given to the formal recording of a decision by HSE that, but for Crown immunity, the evidence of a Crown body's failure to comply with health and safety law would have been sufficient to provide a realistic prospect of conviction in the courts.

Jobcentre Plus

Mrs. Helen Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) if he will list, by region, incidents of assault in Benefits Agency, Employment Service and Jobcentre Plus offices for 2002; [80791]

(2) if he will list by office, incidents of assaults on staff using the Home Office British Crime Survey definition, which have occurred in Jobcentre Plus Pathfinder offices in the year to 22nd October. [80792]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Home Office British Crime Survey definitions are set out in legislation and are based on victims' perceptions of an incident. Jobcentre Plus does not use these definitions. Instead, assaults are categorised by what happened in the incident, as follows:

Incident	
Actual Assault	Physical contact has been made
Attempted Assault	An attempt has been made to touch a member of staff but this was unsuccessful
Verbal Assault	Threats of verbal abuse
Other	No member of staff has been involved, for example, an assault by one client on another, or property was damaged.

The available information on incidents of assault has been placed in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answers of 27 November, Refs 82508, 82511 and 82513, if he will place in the Library the written information about job entry and additional points scores and priorities sent to Jobcentre Plus managers and staff; and if he will list the key

stakeholders who were consulted in respect of the selection of the local authority areas attracting additional points scores. [85294]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* Managers and staff were informed about job entry and additional point scores and priorities in Jobcentre Plus Targets 2002–03 Achieving the Best: A Handbook for Staff, a copy of which has been placed in the Library.

Details of the key stakeholders consulted on the criteria for selecting the local authority areas attracting additional point scores have been placed in the Library.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people have taken up a place on the Environmental Task Force option of the New Deal to date; what has been the *(a)* total and *(b)* annual cost of the option to date; and if he will make a statement. [84440]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The Environment Task Force option of the New Deal is successfully improving the employability of young people through work experience and training. Up to the end of September 2002, 62,800 young people had participated in the option, many of whom faced significant disadvantages in the labour market. This year we have further improved the option by introducing work placements with private sector employers and enhancing jobsearch help. All Environment Task Force projects seek to improve the local environment and are well received.

The available information on the annual and total expenditure by the Department on the option is in the table.

£ million

	Expenditure on the Environment Task Force
1998–99	15
1999–2000	43
2000–01	43
Total	101

Note:
Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.
Source: Jobcentre Plus Finance.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons on the New Deal have left the New Deal and returned to benefits in each year since its establishment. [85972]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The number of leavers from the New Deals for Young People, 25 Plus and Lone Parents who remain on benefits is published in the respective quarterly Statistical First Releases, copies of which are available in the Library.

Evaluation of the New Deal programmes includes work looking at how many participants return to benefits and how many remain in work over the longer term. Evaluation reports are placed in the Library as they are published.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what information is available in the New Deal Evaluation Database; and if he will make a statement. [85986]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The New Deal Evaluation Database contains information on the characteristics (e.g. gender, age, ethnic group) of participants on the New Deal programme, together with details of their activity while on the programme. Full details can be found in an article entitled "New Deal Statistics and the New Deal Evaluation Database" in the April 1999 edition of Labour Market Trends, a copy of which is available in the Library.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of *(a)* subsidised and *(b)* unsubsidised sustained employment starts under the New Deal have been in the construction industry in each month since the establishment of the New Deal; and if he will make a statement about the impact of the New Deal on employment in the construction industry. [85993]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* We estimate that since April 1998 around 9 per cent. (6,800) of subsidised employment starts in the New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus have been in the construction industry. However, the underlying data are not sufficiently robust for a realistic monthly breakdown to be given. Subsidised employment is not an option in the other New Deals.

Information on the industry sector of unsubsidised sustained employment starts obtained through the New Deal is not routinely collected.

In addition to filling construction industry jobs through the New Deal, we have introduced Ambition: Construction, an employer-led initiative which is designed to help unemployed and disadvantaged people gain the specific skills which construction employers require. Ambition: Construction aims to deliver sustainable employment and an NVQ Level 2 qualification in one of the construction trades to 1,000 New Deal participants. Pilot programmes are now running in West London, West Yorkshire, Nottingham, the North West and Coventry.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what evaluation has been made of the New Deal for Disabled People; and if he will make a statement. [85990]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* New Deal for Disabled People is the first national programme designed specifically to support people with health conditions and disabilities move into and keep jobs. Since the national extension of the programme began, it has helped over 6,000 people into jobs and almost 28,000 have registered with Job Brokers to actively pursue employment.

Comprehensive evaluation is under way to measure the effectiveness of the programme. This will include qualitative and quantitative research with all key stakeholders. We will be publishing reports on different elements of the evaluation as they become available from early in the new year.

Non-working People

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the numbers of people of working age who are able and willing to work, but are neither working, nor registered as seeking work or as claimants. [80132]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: According to the Labour Force Survey for Summer 2002, there were 586,000 people who were economically inactive, had not been seeking work and were not registered as unemployed, but said they wanted to work and would be able to take up a job if one were offered in the next two weeks.

Source:
The Office for National Statistics' Labour Force Survey.

Winter Fuel Allowance

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in *(a)* residential care and *(b)* nursing care receive the £100 winter fuel allowance. [85733]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However, such information as is available shows that some 148,000 people living in various types of care home, have so far this year received winter fuel payment of £100 each.

Source:
GMS Matching Data.

PRIME MINISTER

Bali Bombing Report

Mr. Kevin Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects to lay the Intelligence and Security Committee's report into the terrorist bombings on Bali. [87121]

The Prime Minister: I am today laying before the House the Intelligence and Security Committee report of their inquiry into the intelligence, assessments and advice prior to the terrorist bombings on Bali on 12 October 2002. Copies will also be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Engagements

Mr. Walter: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 11 December. [84835]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today.

Euro

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what steps he plans to take to acquaint the public of the pros and cons of the euro; and if he will make a statement; [86590]

(2) what timetable he plans for a euro referendum, should the Government conclude in June that the five economic tests have been met. [86587]

The Prime Minister: A comprehensive and rigorous assessment of the five tests will be made within two years of the start of this Parliament. Once the assessment is complete, it will be published and will be subject to intensive public scrutiny and debate.

Gibraltar

Mr. Spring: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he had with the Prime Minister of Spain concerning Gibraltar at the NATO summit in Prague; what was agreed there on the future of the Brussels process; when he expects the next meeting in the Brussels process to occur; and if he will make a statement. [86546]

The Prime Minister: I had informal discussions at Prague with Prime Minister Aznar on a number of issues. We agreed on the need to continue the search for a more stable and prosperous future for Gibraltar. No date has yet been set for a further meeting under the Brussels process.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister when he last met the Leader of the Congress party of India. [86725]

The Prime Minister: I have not yet met Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, but hope to do so soon.

Landfill Tax Credit

Mr. Gray: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column 903, which community schemes near his constituency have benefited from the landfill tax credit. [86608]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* I understand environmental bodies within County Durham have invested in around 50 on-going or completed environmental projects as a result of the landfill tax credit scheme.

Peter Foster

Peter Bottomley: To ask the Prime Minister if he will ask the Cabinet Secretary to conduct an inquiry into the extent of the *(a)* propriety, *(b)* completeness and *(c)* accuracy of (i) attributable and (ii) non-attributable briefings given to the media in relation to information about Peter Foster provided by (A) permanent civil servants, (B) temporary civil servants and (C) others in his office on behalf of the Government and its members. [86947]

The Prime Minister: No. All contacts with the media are conducted in accordance with the Ministerial Code, the Civil Service Code, the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers and Guidance on the Work of the Government Information Service.

Social Chapter

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 4 December to the hon. Member for North-West Norfolk, *Official Report*, column 898, which areas of social policy have been influenced by signing the social chapter which would not have been had the UK not signed it. [86747]

The Prime Minister *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The Government are determined to tackle unemployment and social exclusion both at home and throughout the European Union. Signing the social chapter has allowed us to influence the broad direction of EU social policy, and to ensure that employment creation has been put at the heart of the Lisbon agenda for economic reform. Since 1997, over 10 million new jobs have been created in the EU, 6 million of which have been taken up by women, and the number of unemployed has fallen by over 4 million. This has provided a route out of social exclusion for many millions of European citizens.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Cleveland Magistrates Court

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what grants have been given to the Cleveland Magistrates Court Service in each of the last five years. [86400]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor's Department provides separate grants for revenue and capital (buildings and IT) to local authorities for magistrates courts costs. Grant is paid at 80 per cent. of expenditure, with the remaining 20 per cent. met by local authorities.

The total budget for magistrates courts in Cleveland by financial year (in 100 per cent. terms) is:

£ million

	Revenue	*Building*	*IT*	*Total grant*
1998–99	3.92	[1]—	0.12	4.04
1999–2000	3.77	0.34	0.16	4.27
2000–01	4.33	0.32	0.06	4.71
2001–02	5.26	0.43	0.09	5.78
2002–03	4.86	1.41	0.07	6.34

[1] Figures for building capital not available

Domestic Violence

Margaret Moran: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many hours training judges receive on domestic violence *(a)* per year and *(b)* during the course of their term. [86425]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Judicial training is the responsibility of the Judicial Studies Board (JSB) which is an independent body. It is chaired by Lord Justice Waller.

All newly appointed part-time judges are required to attend a residential induction course before they sit judicially. In addition all judges authorised by the Lord Chancellor on the strength of their experience and ability, to exercise an additional jurisdiction such as family law, are required to attend a further residential induction course before they start to exercise the relevant jurisdiction.

Thereafter, both full and part-time judges attend residential continuation seminars every three years in each jurisdiction they are authorised to exercise (i.e. criminal law, civil law and family law). The amount of training time provided on domestic violence in JSB courses and seminars is shown in the table. The number of hours training received by any individual judge will depend upon the number of jurisdictions they are authorised to exercise.

In addition, all full and part-time judges sitting in the Crown court attend an annual one-day circuit seminar on sentencing issues, for which the theme last year was domestic violence. This provided, on average, up to five hours of additional training on this subject in 2000–01.

The term of appointment of an individual judge varies according to their age on appointment and their age of retirement, as determined by the Judicial Pensions and Retirement Act (1993). It is therefore not possible to determine how many hours training on domestic violence in total a judge may receive during his or her term of office.

Time provided on training for judges in relation to domestic violence

Course-seminar	*Lecture*	*Group discussion*
Criminal Induction		Sentencing exercise (15 mins.)
Criminal Continuation		Sentencing exercise (15 mins.)
Civil Induction	Domestic violence (15 mins.)	
Civil Induction	Committals (15 mins.)	
Civil Continuation	Judicial responses to violence in the home (45 mins.)	Syndicate exercises (45 mins.)
Induction course for district judges authorised under Section 8 Children Act 1989	Emergency applications (45 mins.) Current issues in contact (30 mins.) Psychiatric overview of contact (45 mins.) Making contact work/The National Association of Child Contact Centres (60 mins.)	Syndicate exercises (45 mins.)
Seminar for potential care judges	Proof of fact in physical/sexual abuse (15 mins.)	
Nominated care district judges induction and continuation	Making the best of a contact centre (30 mins.)	
Induction (private family law)	Proof of fact in physical/sexual abuse cases (15 mins.) Applications for contact (4 hours). This comprises a talk by a circuit judge with particular reference to the decision by the Court of Appeal in the case of Re LVMH, the report by Drs. Sturge and Glaser and the guidelines produced by the advisory board on family law. A talk by a child psychiatrist and a plenary discussion exclusion orders and non-molestation orders (40 mins.)	Syndicate discussion (1 hour 30 mins.)

Time provided on training for judges in relation to domestic violence

Course-seminar	*Lecture*	*Group discussion*
Continuation (private family law)	Split trials in domestic violence cases (15 mins.) Psychiatric perspective of children with a violent parent (45 mins.) Injunctions and committals (1 hour)	Syndicate discussion (1 hour 30 mins.)

The seminars for care district judges include sessions, which cover domestic violence. Dr. Dare speaks on the effects upon a child witnessing violence between parents.

The Family Law Act seminars deal with orders made under Part IV of the Family Law Act 1996.

James Shepherd

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the Office of Public Guardianship intends to release court documents to the family of James Shepherd. [85662]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The PGO has now, at the direction of the Court of Protection, released copies of all documents requested to date.

Speed Cameras (Cleveland)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many *(a)* trials and *(b)* convictions based on speed camera evidence have taken place in the Cleveland Magistrates Court Service since the speed cameras initiative was begun in 2000. [86401]

Yvette Cooper: Neither my Department nor magistrates' courts record statistics on trials and convictions relating to speed (safety) cameras. It is therefore not possible to provide the information requested.

HEALTH

Admission Procedures

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what changes his Department has made to admission procedures to accident and emergency departments since 1997 through *(a)* statutory instrument and *(b)* changes to departmental guidance given to hospitals. [85771]

Mr. Lammy: Since 1997, there have been no changes made to admission procedures to accident and emergency departments through statutory instrument.

The Department has issued guidance on admission procedures to accident and emergency departments in the following documents:

Health Service Circular 1999/239: "Final Preparations for the Winter and Millennium Holiday including Incident Reporting and Millennium Operating Regimes for the Year 2000 Problem".

Health Service Circular/Local Authority Circular HSC 2000/016—LAC 2000/14: "Winter 2000/01: Capacity Planning for Health and Social Care".

Health Service Circular/Local Authority Circular HSC 2001/014—LAC (2001)17: "2001/2002: Arrangements for Whole System Capacity Planning".

Copies of these documents have been placed in the Library.

Ambulance Staff

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change in the amount of time spent by ambulance crews in accident and emergency departments as a result of the requirement to hand over patient records personally to a member of the hospital staff. [85794]

Mr. Lammy: There is no absolute requirement for ambulance crews to hand over patient records personally to a member of hospital staff.

It is considered good practice for ambulance crews to provide information to nursing or medical staff when handing over a patient. While this does add to the time that the ambulance crew spend at hospital it is vital to patient safety and there is no reason why it should cause significant delays.

Area Child Protection Committees

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to put area child protection committees on a statutory footing. [86289]

Jacqui Smith: The joint chief inspectors' report, "Safeguarding Children", published on 14 October 2002, contains a recommendation that the Department should review the current arrangements for area child protection committees, to determine whether they should be established on a statutory basis to ensure adequate accountability, authority and funding.

The Government have welcomed the publication of this report. The Government recognise that there is still more to be done to ensure that the high standards of child protection are applied in every case. That is why they commissioned the joint chief inspectors' report. It is also why my right hon. Friends, the Secretary of State for Health and the Home Secretary, set up the statutory Inquiry, chaired by Lord Laming, into the circumstances leading up to and surrounding the death of Victoria Climbie. The issues raised by Victoria's case are wide-ranging, in terms of both policy and practice. The recommendations of the joint chief inspectors' report and those of the Victoria Climbie Inquiry will provide us with an authoritative basis for any reforms to child protection that may need to be made and if radical reform is necessary, we will implement it. The Government will respond to both reports after they have carefully considered them.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what arrangements he has made to ensure that local authorities monitor the number of asylum seekers who make a claim for social services assistance

under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948 on the basis of their need for care and attention, for reasons other than their destitution; and if he will make a statement; [85817]

(2) whether arrangements have been made to offer local authorities additional financial support to deal with changes in the number of asylum seekers who make a claim for social services assistance under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948 on the basis of their need for care and attention for reasons other than their destitution after January 2003, and if he will make a statement. [85818]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 10 December 2002]:* Following implementation of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, it is not anticipated that from January 2003 local councils will incur additional costs in supporting asylum seekers who make a claim for social services assistance under section 21 of the National Assistance Act 1948. Individual councils may monitor the number of asylum seekers claiming assistance but there is no legal requirement for them to do so.

Benefits Uprating

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his oral statement of 18 November on benefit uprating, what will be the entitlement of a single person receiving contributory JSA in 2002–03 and 2003–04 to free prescriptions; and what estimate he has made of the number of recipients of contributory JSA who receive free prescriptions. [82415]

Mr. Lammy *[pursuant to his answer 25 November 2002, Official Report, c. 130W]:* I regret my previous answer was incorrect. The final sentence should read as follows:

"In 2001–02, around 7,700 people (including partners) receiving contributory jobseekers allowance successfully claimed entitlement to free prescriptions through the NHS low income scheme."

Carers

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that benchmarking standards for NHS trusts promote support for carers; and if he will make a statement. [84235]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Support for carers is detailed within the Government's priorities for mental health services, as set out in the document "Investment, Expansion and Reform the next 3 years, Priorities and Planning framework 2003–06". In addition, the national service framework for older people sets out a 10-year programme of action to ensure that older people and their carers are always treated with respect, dignity and fairness.

National health service performance ratings, which publish nationally comparable performance indicators on a wide range of NHS services, are made available to NHS trusts to help compare standards among organisations. Performance indicators are being developed to support delivery of the priorities set out in "Investment, Expansion and Reform the next 3 years, Priorities and Planning framework 2003–06".

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* carers and *(b)* young carers of school age there are in (i) the Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside and (iii) Tyne and Wear; and what support is given to (A) carers and (B) young carers of school age. [86452]

Jacqui Smith: The information on numbers of carers is not held centrally.

Carers are entitled to an assessment to determine their needs as carers and eligibility for support. The carers grant provides money for local councils to provide short breaks for carers to enable them to continue in their caring role.

Additionally for young carers we are supporting the development of over 100 projects across the country to give carers of school age access to appropriate advice, information and support or leisure.

Child Abuse

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many children *(a)* suffered child abuse and *(b)* were killed in each parliamentary constituency in each of the last five years. [86143]

Jacqui Smith: Information on children who suffer abuse or were killed in each parliamentary constituency is not held centrally.

Information detailing the number of children on the Child Protection Register over the last five years by local authority has been placed in the Library.

Information detailing the number of children under 16-years-old, who are currently recorded as being victims of homicide, a category which covers murder, manslaughter and infanticide, over the last five years by police force areas of England and Wales, has been placed in the Library.

Correspondence

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Chelmsford of 8 August, reference PO1014287; and if he will make a statement on the reasons for the delay in replying. [84007]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* A reply was sent to the hon. Member on 9 December.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department intends to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Manchester, Central of 24 September regarding Miss AL, reference PO1016982, and of 10 September regarding Mr. DS, reference PO1016009. [85238]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Replies to my hon. Friend's correspondence concerning his constituents, Mrs. A Leslie and Mr. Steven, were sent on 25 November and 9 December respectively.

Deaf Children (Mental Health)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on mental health services

for deaf children in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement on his Department's strategy for mental health services for deaf children. [86159]

Jacqui Smith: The mental health in-patient service for deaf children, adolescents and their families was dedicated as a national specialist service in April 1998 and has received departmental funding as follows:

1998–99: £640,000

1999–2000: £820,000

2000–01: £1.4 million

2001–02: £1.581 million

Details are also available on expenditure on the designated out-patient service for children and adolescents, the deaf child and family services provided by the South West London and St. George's Mental Health National Health Service Trust. This is shown in the following table. Information on spending on other services for deaf children, in other localities, is not collected centrally.

Deaf Child and Family Services—Out-patient South West London and St. George's Mental Health NHS Trust

	Total
1997–98	
Child	323,763
Family	50,525
1998–99	
Child	375,406
Family	38,732
1999–2000	
Child	452,341
Family	24,696
2000–01	
Child	429,684
Family	19,900

Deep Vein Thrombosis

Mr. John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many NHS patients treated for *(a)* a hip replacement, *(b)* a knee replacement and *(c)* a hip fracture contracted a deep vein thrombosis in each of the last five years; [85613]

(2) how many orthopaedic departments in the NHS have venous thromboembolism prevention protocols; [85612]

(3) how many *(a)* knee and *(b)* hip replacements were performed in the NHS in each of the last five years; and how many hip fractures were treated in the NHS in each of those years. [85618]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not collect information centrally on prevention protocols for venal thromboembolism. Information is collected on the number of hip replacements, hip fractures, hip and knee operations where deep vein thrombosis was recorded and cases where hip fractures and deep vein thrombosis were recorded in the same episode.

The following tables show the information recorded on each of these in the last five years by national health service hospitals in England.

Finished consultant episodes (FCEs) where a hip replacement operation was recorded in NHS hospitals, England

	Number of hip replacements
1996–97	64,505
1997–98	62,257
1998–99	68,726
1999–2000	69,600
2000–01	73,444

FCEs where hip fracture was the main diagnosis in NHS hospitals, England

	Number
1996–97	62,194
1997–98	63,824
1998–99	64,967
1999–2000	66,321
2000–01	68,693

FCEs where Deep Vein Thrombosis was recorded in NHS hospitals, England

	Knee replacement	*Hip replacement*	*Hip fracture*
1996–97	280	316	355
1997–98	275	304	397
1998–99	317	350	384
1999–2000	354	327	406
2000–01	407	315	413

Notes:

1. The count is restricted to patients who were actually diagnosed with DVT within the same episode as if DVT developed after the patient had left the hospital, this will not show up in the record.
2. ICD-10 (diagnosis) code 180.2—Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of other deep vessels of lower extremities.
3. The primary diagnosis is the first of several diagnosis fields in the HES data set and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
4. A FCE is defined as a period of patient care under one consultant in one health care provider. The figures do not represent the number of patients, as one person may have several episodes within the year.
5. Data in these tables are grossed for both coverage and unknown/invalid clinical data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health

Delayed Admissions

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many delayed admissions from ambulances to accident and emergency departments there were, in each ambulance trust in each of the past five years. [85763]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is not available centrally.

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health from where within the NHS budget the extra £100 million for social services budgets for tackling delayed discharge will come. [85231]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 4 December 2002]:* The funding will come from within the extra resources announced for the national health service as part of Spending Review 2002.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will provide a breakdown on the other reasons for the national and regional summaries of delayed discharge as referred to in Annex A of the reasons and numbers of delayed discharges. [85708]

Jacqui Smith: The available information on delayed discharges for June 2002 is available in the Library. There is no further breakdown of the "other" category.

Diabetes

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what facilities there are in each hospital in the North Cheshire hospitals trust for the treatment of diabetes; how many dedicated beds there are; and *(a)* how many beds and *(b)* what outpatient facilities will be available in each hospital under the plan "A vision for future services" drawn up by the trust; [85430]

(2) how many admissions there were to each hospital in the North Cheshire hospitals trust for *(a)* respiratory problems and *(b)* diabetes in each of the past five years. [85429]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The figures for hospital admissions are shown in the table.

Admissions, primary diagnosis as specified

	Warrington hospital	*Halton general hospital*
Diabetes		
1996–97	561	67
1997–98	441	64
1998–99	773	75
1999–2000	781	62
2000–01	700	62
Respiratory		
1996–97	2,735	791
1997–98	3,012	876
1998–99	3,373	968
1999–2000	2,985	1,005
2000–01	3,216	851

Notes:
ICD10 Codes Diabetes Problems E10-E14, P70, 024, E23, R73.
ICD10 Codes Respiratory Problems J00-J99.
Ungrossed data.
The primary diagnosis is the first of seven diagnosis fields in the HES data set, and provides the main reason why the patient was in hospital.
Source:
Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), Department of Health.

Warrington hospital currently has 244 acute medical beds including five coronary care, seven medical day beds and 21 transitional care beds. There are no dedicated diabetes beds, since diabetes patients can be admitted to any general medical bed. There are 28 respiratory care beds, although patients can be admitted to any general medical bed for respiratory care.

Halton hospital currently has 152 general medical beds. There are 28 respiratory and general medical beds on one ward, which take a mixture of respiratory and general medicine patients. Respiratory patients can be admitted to any of the general medical beds. There are no dedicated diabetes beds because diabetes patients can be admitted to any of the general medical beds.

There are outpatient clinics for diabetes at Warrington hospital four times a week, plus a foot clinic with podiatry support on alternate weeks. All diabetes clinics have specialist nurse input. There is no dedicated space for diabetes in outpatients; shared facilities are in use in the main outpatients department. There is an assessment area with an office and assessment room that is shared with the rehabilitation team, which is used by the specialist nurses for patient interviews and education sessions.

There are four diabetes clinics on the Halton site and an alternate weekly high-risk foot clinic with podiatry support. All diabetes clinics have specialist nurse input. There is no dedicated diabetes space in outpatients; shared facilities are in use in the main outpatients department.

The specialist nurses share an office that is used for patient interviews and education sessions.

There is no change in bed numbers for diabetes patients under the plan "A vision for future services". The plan does, however, identify the need for dedicated outpatient facilities on both sites, with improved facilities for patient consultation, education and interviews.

Doctors

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has for increasing the number of doctors employed by the national health service; and if he will make a statement. [84658]

Mr. Hutton: The NHS Plan makes a commitment to substantially increase the national health service work force by March 2004. The numbers of consultants are expected to increase by 7,500, specialist registrar numbers by 1,000, general practitioner (GP) numbers by 2,000 and GP registrar numbers by 550 over a 1999 baseline.

The latest forecasts for growth, set out in "Delivering the NHS Plan", expect the NHS to have net increases by 2008, over a 2001 baseline, of at least 15,000 doctors, both consultants and GPs.

Between September 1997 and September 2001, the number of total NHS doctors increased by 11 per cent. and specialist registrar (SpR) numbers specifically also increased by 11 per cent. Between September 1997 and March 2002, the number of consultants and GPs increased by 23 per cent. and 3 per cent. respectively and GP registrar numbers by 42 per cent.

In respect of consultants, we are not solely relying on the output from training to deliver a sufficient supply of applicants for consultant posts. We are implementing a range of measures to:

- Improve retention—through a flexible careers scheme and flexible retirement;
- Identify and encourage suitable doctors on the specialist register to compete for posts;
- Target action to reduce delay to certificate of completion of specialists training completion and encourage recent qualifiers to take up consultant posts;
- Establish more part-time and job-share posts;
- Increase international recruitment, including government to government agreements, a global recruitment campaign and the international fellowship programme.

With regard to SpR numbers, we have adopted a new approach to maximising the numbers of SpRs trained within existing resources. The current training system has been freed up by taking a service-led approach, which will meet educational needs. We expect this to result in substantial increases in SpR numbers beyond the 1,000 assumed in the NHS Plan.

We have also introduced a GP vocational training scheme for senior house officers in 2002, which has resulted in 84 appointments.

To meet the GP targets, the Department has implemented a number of recruitment and retention initiatives, which include:

golden hellos to new and returning GPs

delayed retirement payments

flexible career scheme

extension of the improving working lives initiative to primary care

international recruitment.

Drug Addiction (Fareham)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drug rehabilitation places are available to registered drug addicts in Fareham; and how many registered drug addicts in Fareham are receiving *(a)* rehabilitation and *(b)* other forms of drug treatment. [85712]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Drug misuers have access to a community drug team in Fareham. Most community drug services can refer patients to rehabilitation services throughout the country: not just those in the local area. There are 138 residential treatment services in England. There are around 3,100 bedspaces within the drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation sector.

The information available for drug users presenting to drug treatment agencies and general practitioners in health authorities in Hampshire in the six-month periods from October 2000 to March 2001 is shown in the table.

Number of users who presented for treatment for drug misuse in health authorities in Hampshire and England April 1997 to March 2001

	October 2000–March 2001
England	33,234
North and mid Hants	89
Portsmouth and south-east Hants	281
Southampton and south-west Hants	220
Total for all three HAs	590

Source:
Department of Health series of Statistical Bulletins, "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases".

Drug Addicts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many registered drug addicts there were in *(a)* Fareham, *(b)* Hampshire and *(c)* England in each year from 1997. [85710]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. The information available for drug users presenting to drug treatment agencies and general practitioners in health authorities in Hampshire and England in the six months periods from April 1997 to March 2001 is shown in Table 1. Information on the numbers in treatment is only available for 2000–01 and is shown in Table 2.

Table 1: Number of users who presented for treatment for drug misuse in health authorities (HAs) in Hampshire and England April 1997 to March 2001

	England	*North and mid Hampshire*	*Portsmouth and south-east Hants*	*Southampton and south-west Hampshire*	*Totals for these three HAs*
April–September 1997	21,996	61	138	255	454
October 1997–March 1998	23,916	50	161	257	468
April–September 1998	28,599	48	163	296	507
October 1998–March 1999	28,499	60	196	118	374
April–September 1999	30,545	55	307	145	507
October 1999–March 2000	31,815	21	231	153	405
April–September 2000	33,093	154	259	266	679
October 2000–March 2001	33,234	89	281	220	590

Source:
The Department of Health series of statistical bulletins "Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases"

Table 2: Number of drug misusers in treatment in 2000–01

Area of treatment	*Number*	
England	118,500	
North and mid Hampshire	329	
Portsmouth and south-east Hants	836	1,863
Southampton and south-west Hampshire	698	

Source:
Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01

Drug/Alcohol Treatment Centres

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many residential drug and alcohol treatment centres are operated by the NHS; and how many are proposed to be closed. [86031]

Ms Blears: There are over 700 drug and alcohol treatment services in England. Of these, 138 are residential treatment services. The majority of

residential services are provided through the voluntary sector. Their primary role is to provide non-medical social care services. For this reason they are funded through social services community care.

Since 1997 the number of overall treatment services has increased by a third. We have no information to suggest that any treatment services are being prepared for closure.

Ebixa

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will make a statement on the availability to NHS patients of the drug Ebixa for the treatment of Alzheimer's disease; when the National Institute of Clinical Excellence will issue guidance on the use of Ebixa for the NHS in England and Wales; and what interim measures have been put in place to ensure that the drug Ebixa will be available to NHS patients pending the outcome of the NICE appraisal; [85467]

(2) what estimate his Department has made of the cost per annum of providing the drug Ebixa to NHS patients suffering from late stage Alzheimer's disease in *(a)* Dorset and *(b)* England; [85470]

(3) what provisions his Department has put in place to ensure that NHS patients in Dorset who suffer from Alzheimer's disease and who would benefit from the drug Ebixa are able to receive that drug. [85468]

Jacqui Smith: The drug memantine (Ebixa) was launched in this country for the treatment of people with severe dementia in October 2002. In line with Circular HSC1999/176, national health service bodies should use existing arrangements to access the publicly available evidence about memantine (Ebixa) and to determine local policies for the use of this drug. No estimates have been made about the likely future cost of this drug for people with severe dementia. No decision has been made as to whether to ask the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to carry out an appraisal of memantine for the treatment of people with dementia.

General Practitioners (Age)

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level of applications for partners in GP practices was in *(a)* England, *(b)* York and *(c)* North Yorkshire on (i) 1 May 1997 and (ii) 1 September 2002. [85804]

Mr. Hutton: We do not have specific detail of the level of applications for partners in general practitioner (GP) practices in the areas and at the times requested. However the Medical Practices Committee survey of GP recruitment in England and Wales 1997 estimated that there was an average of 8.4 applicants per general medical service partner vacancy in 1997.

The latest Department report—"the General Practitioner Recruitment, Retention and Vacancy Survey 2002 for England and Wales", estimated that there was an average of 4.4 applicants per unrestricted principal or equivalent GP vacancy in the 12 months period ending 28 February 2002.

We do not have estimates for the number of applicants on any regional basis.

General Social Care Council

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what fee levels for social workers the general social care council will charge; what revenue will be generated from such fee levels; and if he will make a statement. [81718]

Jacqui Smith: Under the provisions of the Care Standards Act 2000, each social care council in the United Kingdom has the right to apply reasonable registration fees. The general social care council (GSCC) has consulted on a fee structure in England, and set a registration fee of £30 a year for qualified social workers. This was announced by the GSCC on 25 November 2002.

England's estimated 70,000 social workers will be registered first, starting in April 2003, followed by other categories of social care workers. When complete the registration of social workers will generate in the region of £2.1 million. The GSCC are currently developing their Business Plans for the next three years, including financial assumptions.

Health Authority Boards

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list for each health authority *(a)* the number and *(b)* the proportion of board members from (i) ethnic minorities and (ii) the disabled. [86149]

Mr. Lammy: The information requested is shown in the table.

Strategic health authority	*White*	*Ethnic minority*	*Disabled*
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	7	0	0
Bedford and Hertfordshire	6	0	3
Birmingham and Black Country	5	1	0
Cheshire and Merseyside	6	1	0
County Durham and Tees Valley	7	0	0
Coventry, Warwickshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	6	1	0
Cumbria and Lancashire	7	1	0
Dorset and Somerset	6	1	0
Essex	7	0	0
Greater Manchester	6	0	0
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	7	0	0
Kent and Medway	7	0	1
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	7	1	0
London South West	5	1	0
London South East	5	2	0
London North West	5	2	0
London North East	4	1	0

Strategic health authority	White	Ethnic minority	Disabled
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	6	0	0
North and East Yorkshire and North Lincolnshire	7	0	1
North Central London	5	2	0
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	7	0	0
Shropshire and Staffordshire	7	0	0
South West Peninsula	6	0	0
South Yorkshire	7	0	0
Surrey and Sussex	6	0	0
Thames Valley	5	0	0
Trent	7	1	0
West Yorkshire	6	1	0
Total	172	16 (8.5%)	5 (2.7%)

Hospital Trolleys

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition is of a hospital trolley for statistical purposes. [85772]

Mr. Lammy: There is no definition of a hospital trolley held centrally.

IT Projects

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which IT projects being undertaken by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* the NHS Executive are (i) running over budget and (ii) have been subject to a significant respecification. [86039]

Ms Blears: The Department currently has one project that is projected to exceed budget tolerance, the national drugs treatment monitoring system. There are no projects that have been subject to a significant respecification.

The National Health Service Executive ceased to exist in 2000. Consequently the information requested is not available.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of primary care organisations have a board member dedicated to promoting mental health services. [86144]

Mr. Lammy: The Department does not require primary care trusts to have a board member with dedicated responsibility for promoting mental health services. No information is held centrally on any such responsibility placed by the boards themselves.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time to receive *(a)* counselling, *(b)* cognitive therapy and *(c)* psychotherapy was in each health authority in the last year for which figures are available. [86152]

Mr. Hutton: Data about waiting times for psychological therapy services is not collected centrally at the present time. However, the mental health national service framework emphasises the importance of access to assessment for and ready access to effective psychological therapies.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of primary care organisations' written training plans for staff on mental health issues. [86154]

Jacqui Smith: There is no requirement on primary care organisations to have written training plans for staff on mental health issues. However, the document "Working Together—Learning Together" issued by the Department states that "By July 2002, all NHS employer organisations, supported by workforce development confederations will have in place a clear organisational strategy and annual plan for education, training and development, which links explicitly with local modernisation priorities and the delivery of clinical governance".

Mental Health Services (Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will publish its report on its study of children's mental health services. [86466]

Jacqui Smith: The only study currently being undertaken into children's mental health services is that by the child and adolescent mental health external working group for the children's national service framework (NSF). We will shortly be publishing a document, that will signpost the likely areas for inclusion in the NSF to assist with local planning. It is intended that the children's NSF will be published towards the end of next year.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much it will cost to transfer all children who are mental health patients from other in-patient units to specialist child and adolescent mental health services' in-patient facilities; and if he will make a statement. [86468]

Jacqui Smith: The information needed to estimate the cost is not available. We recognise the importance of treating children and adolescents in facilities appropriate to their age. The child and adolescent mental health module of the children's national service framework is addressing the development of standards for children's services, and the use of in-patient mental health care is being considered within the module.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of local joint strategies between local social services and child and adolescent mental health services have been approved by his Department. [86470]

Jacqui Smith: All local authorities and their health partners have agreed strategies for the development of child and adolescent mental health services. These

strategies are regularly updated as part of the planning process but there is no requirement for them to be submitted to the Department.

Mr. Sorenson

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when Mr. Eric Sorenson ceased to be project director of the Paddington Health Campus; how much compensation has been paid to Mr. Sorenson; when a new project director will be appointed; where the vacancy was advertised; and how many applicants there have been. [85663]

Mr. Hutton: Eric Sorenson resigned as project director of the Paddington Health Campus on 4 October 2002. Mr. Sorensen's employment with St. Mary's Hospital National Health Service Trust, the Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust and Imperial College terminated on 22 November 2002 in accordance with his standard contractual terms. As such, the terms of his employment are a matter for these employing organisations.

The post for project director of the Paddington Health Campus was advertised in the Health Service Journal on 31 October 2002. The closing date for applications was 15 November 2002. St. Mary's Hospital NHS Trust's human resources department, on behalf of the Paddington Health Campus Project, which is made up of St. Mary's NHS Trust, Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust and Imperial College, has received 12 application forms. Five people were short-listed, one has dropped out and the two trust chief executives from St. Mary's and the Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trusts are interviewing on 20 December 2002 with opportunities to meet the senior team on 12 and 16 December 2002.

NHS Resource Allocation

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is his intention to consult on the proposed new formula for allocating NHS resources following the review by the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation; and if he will make a statement. [85741]

Mr. Hutton: The existing formula used to allocate national health service resources has been reviewed by the Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation (ACRA). ACRA's terms of reference are to advise my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health on the distribution of resources across primary and secondary care. ACRA is an expert body whose membership is made up of individuals with a wide range of relevant experience and expertise from within and outside the NHS. We do not consult on ACRA's recommendations.

NHS Services (Legal Entitlement)

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people who used the NHS but were not entitled to use it in each year since 1997. [85532]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service is first and foremost for the benefit of people who live in the United Kingdom. A person who is not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, but who requires NHS hospital treatment, is subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended—in 1991 (SI No: 438), 1994 (SI No: 1535), 2000 (SI No: 602), 2000 (SI No: 909).

These regulations place a duty on NHS trusts to establish the residential status of all patients. Where an NHS trust identifies a person who is not ordinarily resident in United Kingdom and is not otherwise exempt from charge then the regulations provide for the making and recovery of a charge by the trust for most types of hospital treatment.

Detailed information on the numbers of NHS charged patients are not collected centrally.

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what provision creates the legal entitlement for use of the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [85533]

Mr. Hutton: Sections 1–5 of the National Health Service Act 1977 give powers and place duties on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, in respect of the continued promotion of a comprehensive health service and the provision of services to be provided free of charge unless an enactment provides for the recovery of charges.

Section 121 of the National Health Service Act gives power to make regulations to enable charges to be made to those not ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom. The relevant regulations are National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989 (as amended).

Mr. Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of *(a)* the number of people using the NHS who are not entitled to do so and *(b)* the cost of the treatment of those people to the NHS in the last 12 months. [86533]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service is first and foremost for the benefit of people who live in the United Kingdom. A person who is not ordinarily resident in the UK, but who requires NHS hospital treatment is subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended—in 1991 (SI No: 438), 1994 (SI No: 1535), 2000 (SI No: 602), 2000 (SI No: 909).

These regulations place a duty on NHS trusts to establish the residential status of all patients. Where an NHS trust identifies a person who is not ordinarily resident in the UK and is not otherwise exempt from charge then the regulations provide for the making and recovery of a charge by the trust for most types of hospital treatment.

The amounts collected from NHS charged patients are not separately identifiable in trust accounts and are not collected centrally.

Nosocomial Infections

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the proportion of premature deaths in England in 2001 attributed to nosocomial infections. [85297]

Ms Blears: There are no centrally held statistics on the contribution of nosocomial infections to mortality. The Department has recently published rates of methicillin

resistant *Staphylococcus aureus* bacteraemia for every acute national health service hospital trust in England as the first phase of a mandatory surveillance scheme for health care associated infection. Results for the first year of this scheme (April 2001 to March 2002) were published in the Communicable Disease Report Weekly on 20 June 2002 and are available on the Public Health Laboratory Service website www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf.

Paramedics

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what length of time is recommended for the training of paramedics. [85783]

Mr. Hutton: Paramedics are a regulated profession. They are autonomous practitioners providing specialist care and treatment to patients who are either acutely ill or injured. They are able to administer an approved range of drugs as well as carrying out certain invasive techniques.

The Health Professions Council (HPC) recommendation for paramedics training, leading to registration, is two years.

Personal Medical Services Contracts

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs in the Adur, Arun and Worthing Primary Care Trust work to personal medical services contracts. [86804]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

GMS and PMS practitioners in Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT and England as at 31 March 2002

Number (headcount)

	Adur, Arun and Worthing PCT	*England*
All Practitioners[1]		
Total	137	32,011
GMS	129	26,278
PMS	8	5,733
Of which:		
NHS Plan GPs[2]		
Total	127	28,950
GMS	120	23,759
PMS	7	5,191
Unrestricted Principals and Equivalents (UPEs)[3]		
Total	123	27,956
GMS	116	23,091
PMS	7	4,865

[1] All Practitioners include UPEs, Restricted Principals, GP Registrars, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Others and GP Retainers.

[2] NHS Plan GPs include UPEs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Others.

[3] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.

Note:

March 2002 data has been converted to match April 2002 PCT boundaries.

Source:

Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Mr. Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* new cases and *(b)* new cases per head of population there were of (i) HIV/AIDS, (ii) syphilis, (iii) gonorrhea, (iv) chlamydia and (v) other forms of sexually transmitted disease in each (A) health authority and (B) PCT area in each year since 1996. [85731]

Ms Blears: Information has been placed in the Library which gives the number of new cases (diagnoses) and new cases per 100,000 population for each of the infections, by region, for the years 1996–2001. Data are not available at the health authority/primary care trust level.

Diagnoses of HIV were derived from voluntary clinician and laboratory reporting and the sexually transmitted infection (STI) data were derived from statutory reporting of diagnoses made at genitourinary medicine (GUM) clinics on form KC60. Data on STIs are only collected from GUM clinics, so STIs diagnosed and treated by general practitioners or in other settings do not form part of the data set.

Silicofluoride Chemicals

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason silicofluoride chemicals classified as medicinal substances under the Codified Pharmaceutical Directive are, exempt from such classification by the Medicines Control Agency when used as an additive to public water supplies. [85840]

Mr. Lammy: The inclusion of silicofluoride chemicals in a product does not necessarily make that product a medicinal product. Silicofluoride has many different uses and can therefore be subject to a number of different regulatory regimes. For example, various forms of fluoride can be included in oral hygiene products under the Cosmetic Products (Safety) Regulations and some forms of fluoride will be permitted in food supplements through the forthcoming Food Supplements (England) Regulations. The decision as to whether a particular product is a medicinal product is made by the Medicines Control Agency using the definition of that term in Article 1 of Directive 2001/83, relevant legal precedent and its own published guidance. The MCA considers that neither fluoride added to drinking water nor the resulting fluoridated water are medicinal products which require marketing authorisations as medicines.

Suspended Consultants (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants employed by the Leeds health authority and its trusts are suspended; and for how long they each have been suspended. [83482]

Jacqui Smith: Neither the former Leeds health authority nor the West Yorkshire strategic health authority employ consultants. However there is only one consultant from all the national health service trusts within the West Yorkshire strategic health authority area who is currently suspended. That individual has been suspended since May 2001.

Source:

West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority

Transport

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether it is his policy that NHS acute trusts should take over responsibilities for local transportation from ambulance services. [85786]

Mr. Lammy: No.

Wheelchair Services

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will define, in reference to the wheelchair services collaborative programme, the phrase 'all teach, all learn' in his Department's press release of 27 November "NHS and wheelchair users unite in initiative to improve services". [86708]

Jacqui Smith: Across the national health service 45 services are taking part in the wheelchair service collaborative programme to improve the service that they already provide. The collaborative will operate for approximately 18 months and it is hoped that the services will share their learning and experience in order to make specific improvements.

Every service will have its part to play specifically in sharing good practice in particularly what works well for them and what could be adopted by other services to improve their own. Similarly there will be ideas that they in turn will adopt—hence the reference to everybody teaching and everybody learning.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 12 December 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Predatory Lending

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what measures she plans to take to control predatory lending. [87014]

Miss Melanie Johnson: In July last year I announced a review of the Consumer Credit Act 1974. As part of this review, I have consulted on proposals to extend the protection the Act provides by removing the financial limit and to make the terms for early settlement of loans fairer to consumers. I will be consulting in 2003 on proposals for improving the current licensing regime to ensure better regulation of lenders and increasing protection for consumers against extortionate credit.

Insolvency Services (Pay)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the annual pay negotiations for employees in the Insolvency Services will be concluded. [84462]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Treasury agreed the Insolvency Service pay remit on 9 December 2002 and pay negotiations will begin very shortly.

Invest UK

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry which chemical industry specialist was appointed to work with Invest UK in January 2001; and if she will make a statement on Invest UK, including the terms of reference for the organisation and its work. [85492]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The chemical industry specialist appointed to work with Invest UK is James W. Walpole, a senior executive, who has been seconded to the DTI by BP Chemicals for three years and works alongside Invest UK's team in the USA.

Invest UK's mission is "to attract, to retain and add value to inward investment." It does so by marketing the UK abroad as an investment location, working with its partner agencies in Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the English Regional Development Agencies.

A copy of the Invest UK Operations Review for 2002, reporting its activities in 2001–02, can be found in the Libraries of the House.

Inward Investment

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what estimates she has made of the level of inward investment into *(a)* Roxburgh and Berwickshire, *(b)* the Scottish Borders, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* the UK over the last 10 years. [85704]

Nigel Griffiths: The number of inward investments in Scotland and the UK during the financial years 1992–2002 are as follows:

	Scotland	*UK*
1992–93	61	332
1993–94	87	432
1994–95	81	455
1995–96	72	497
1996–97	76	497
1997–98	75	631
1998–99	55	669
1999–2000	75	800
2000–01	74	881
2001–02	61	827

Invest-UK does not hold inward investment for sub regions.

The figures are based on information provided by companies at the time of announcement of the decision to invest in the UK. There is no requirement to notify Invest-UK of such decisions. These figures include only those projects where Invest-UK and its regional partners were involved or which have come to their notice.

Steel Industry

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support she will provide to the UK steel industry to help it reach its maximum capacity of output. [86942]

Alan Johnson: The state aid rules applicable to the steel industry do not allow for direct help to enhance primary steel production. Nonetheless my Department works closely with industry representatives to try to ensure the UK's steel production capacity is utilised by helping its customers in the metals downstream industry sectors to access state of the art technology; best practice to move up the value added chain; and to diversify into new high technology products, in order to remain competitive.

War Pensions

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether war pensions will be in the card account proposed by the Post Office. [86559]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

Yes.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Defence Grant

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what the criteria were by which the civil defence grant for 2003–04 was allocated to individual local authorities; [85835]

(2) what the aggregate amount of civil defence grant was in each financial year since 1996–97. [85836]

Mr. Alexander: I refer the hon. Member to my written ministerial statement on 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 68WS, which explains how civil defence grant was allocated for 2003–04, and the level of allocation to each authority in England and Wales.

To determine the individual allocations mentioned in that statement, the following formula was adopted:

Each authority received £53,000. Each county council received £12,000 in respect of each shire district within the authority's boundaries. These flat-rate payments accounted for approximately 65 per cent. of the aggregate grant, in recognition of the fact that every authority, regardless of size and population, would incur similar unavoidable costs in conducting the basic emergency planning function.

The remaining 35 per cent. of the aggregate grant was distributed according to the Bellwin threshold, using population size as a proxy for the scale of the emergency planning that authorities need to undertake.

In order to keep year-on-year changes to individual authorities' allocations within reasonable bounds, a damping was added to the formula, so that no authority lost more than 10 per cent. or gained more than 20 per cent. compared with the previous year.

Before the formula was applied for the financial year 2002–03, £100,000 was retained for discretionary grant for special projects and special events of benefit to the wider emergency planning community in England and Wales.

Before making decisions on this allocation method, consultations were held with local authority representatives on the basis of a draft formula. As a result of the representations made, the formula was amended to give greater weight to the flat rate element and less weight to the element distributed according to the Bellwin threshold. The damping was also changed to reduce the floor level for losses.

The aggregate amount of civil defence grant in each financial year since 1996–97 is as follows:

Aggregate civil defence grant

Financial year	*£ million*
1996–97	14.93
1997–98	14.46
1998–99	14.44
1999–2000	14.44
2000–01	14.44
2001–02	18.97
2002–03	18.97
2003–04	19.04

In the absence of cash limits, the aggregate amount of civil defence grant increased in 2001–02, following discussions with local authorities. It was decided to maintain the grant at around the 2001–02 national level to reflect factors such as the fuel crisis, foot and mouth outbreak and flooding.

Departmental Reorganisation

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate has been made of the cost of the reorganisations of the *(a)* DETR, *(b)* DTLR, *(c)* DFT and *(d)* DEFRA Departments. [86369]

Mr. Alexander: This information is not collected centrally. Departmental costs and other expenditure are accounted for in departmental annual reports and National Audit Office audits of departmental accounts.

Shropshire Civil Defence Grant

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) if he will list *(a)* the amount of civil defence grant for Shropshire, *(b)* the yearly percentage change for Shropshire and *(c)* the average percentage change for England in each year since 1997; [86462]

(2) if he will make a statement on the impact of *(a)* the disruption in the supply of fuel, *(b)* the foot and mouth outbreak and *(c)* flooding on Shropshire's civil defence grant. [86445]

Mr. Alexander: There are two authorities in Shropshire currently in receipt of civil defence grants: Shropshire county council and Telford and Wrekin unitary authority. The reorganisation of local government and the creation of new all-purpose authorities has led to the redistribution, over several years, of civil defence grant among authorities.

The yearly percentage change for Shropshire and the average percentage change for England and Wales as a whole, are as follows:

Financial year	*Shropshire county council civil defence grant (£)*	*Telford and Wrekin civil defence grant (£)*	*Total civil defence grant for Shropshire (£)*	*Percentage change*	*England and Wales percentage change*
1997–98	212,800	[1]—	212,800	—	—
1998–99	171,288	35,000	206,288	−3	0
1999–2000	170,688	35,000	205,688	0	0
2000–01	153,619	48,000	201,619	−2	0
2001–02	170,498	79,999	250,497	+24	+31
2002–03	153,448	71,999	225,447	−10	0
2003–04	153,834	72,385	226,219	0	0

[1] Did not exist

TRANSPORT

Air Travel

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the consequences for the demand for flying of a 1 per cent.

increase in the cost of flying per annum; and what assessment he has made of the consequences for *(a)* air pollution, *(b)* greenhouse gases, *(c)* noise and *(d)* wildlife if the demand for flying is halved. [87061]

Mr. Jamieson: No assessment assuming an annual increase in the cost of flying of 1 per cent. has been made. The forecasts in "Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom 2000" assume a 1 per cent. per annum decrease in air fares. A sensitivity test, assuming constant fares over the forecast period, indicates a demand reduction of 25 per cent. by 2020. No assessments have been made on the assumption that the demand for flying were halved.

Car Pounds

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many publicly operated car pounds there are in *(a)* London and *(b)* the UK; what their locations are; and how many car pounds are operated by the DVLA in (i) London and (ii) the UK. [86910]

Mr. Jamieson: DVLA operates one permanent car pound in London and 13 permanent pounds in the rest of the UK. Temporary pounds are set up to service DVLA's two mobile wheelclamping teams as required.

In addition, six local authorities have taken on devolved powers to clamp and impound unlicensed vehicles in partnership with DVLA. These are the London boroughs of Croydon, Lewisham, Newham and Wandsworth, together with Hastings and Southend-on-Sea. Each authority has a separate car pound for this purpose. DVLA is in discussion with a further 11 local authorities on devolved powers.

The information requested on publicly operated car pounds is not immediately available. I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as it has been obtained and will place a copy of my letter in the Libraries if the House.

Cycling Helmets

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he plans to legislate to make the wearing of helmets by children when cycling compulsory. [86858]

Mr. Spellar: A study published by the Department in November found that overall, the evidence suggests that cycle helmets are effective at reducing the severity of brain and upper facial injuries for all ages, and especially children. This reinforces our view that helmets should be worn by children. Our latest knowledge of wearing is that the rate for all cyclists on built-up major roads is now 22 per cent. The wearing rate is continuing to increase, but at this level, making helmets compulsory would cause enforcement difficulties, and without greater public acceptance, could have an effect on levels of cycling. We will continue to monitor wearing rates and review the option of compulsory wearing from time to time.

DLVA Clamping Teams

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many DVLA clamping teams operate in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* London; what plans he has to increase the number of DVLA clamping teams in (i) the UK and (ii) London; how much time was spent by DVLA clamping teams in each London borough in each of the last five years; what criteria are used to measure the effectiveness of DVLA clamping teams; what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of DVLA clamping teams, in the last five years, broken down by region. [86911]

Mr. Jamieson: DVLA has an overall total of 18 clamping teams operating from 14 pounds throughout the UK. Four of these teams operate in the London area.

The extension of the wheel clamping scheme is being addressed as part of our proposals to modernise the vehicle registration and licensing system.

Over the last five years DVLA clamping teams have spent two weeks twice a year in each London borough. In addition, DVLA is developing partnerships with local authorities to clamp and remove unlicensed vehicles. Such partnerships already operate in the London boroughs of Newham, Lewisham, Croydon and Wandsworth. Other boroughs have expressed an interest in joining the scheme.

DVLA's clamping contractor has to meet closely monitored targets for the number of vehicles clamped. The current target in the UK is over 1,000 vehicles per week. The overall impact of the wheel clamping scheme on the level of relicensing is regularly monitored by the Department's statisticians. The scheme consistently achieves a return of 3:1 when factors such as induced relicensing are taken into account.

Motorcycling Task Groups

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the *(a)* benefits and *(b)* value for money of each of the motorcycling task groups; what the outcome of each task group was; and when the task groups met. [86090]

Mr. Jamieson: The Advisory Group on Motorcycling established five Task Forces to consider integration and traffic management, vehicle safety and security, environmental and fiscal issues, research and statistics. They have been meeting as necessary since 1999 and will continue to do so until they have completed their work in 2004. Their initial work was detailed in the Interim Report of the Advisory Group on Motorcycling, published in April 2001, and is available in the Libraries in the House.

Some of the key work streams will not reach fruition until 2004. Even then it would be difficult to assess the value for money of the Task Forces. The nature of their work does not involve specific costs and benefits which can be quantified. However, the work of the Advisory Group is highly valued by Government and provides the motorcycling community with the opportunity to input to the development of motorcycling policy.

Network Rail

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if the head of the accountancy profession at his Department engaged in *(a)* correspondence, *(b)* discussions and *(c)* meetings with (i) his Department's Ministers or officials and (ii) Treasury

Ministers or officials in relation to the establishment of Network Rail from October 2001 to September 2002; and if he will make a statement; [86846]

(2) if the head of the accountancy profession at the Department for Transport participated in meetings about the establishment, design and accounting for the successor organisation for Railtrack, between September 2001 and 4 July 2002; and if he will make a statement. [86845]

Mr. Jamieson: The participation of DfT's head of accountancy profession in discussions about Network Rail was as follows:

A meeting with Department officials on 15 April 2002 to discuss the likely accounting treatment of the CLG proposals based on UK GAAP and Treasury advice on Government accounting.

A meeting with Department and Treasury officials, Strategic Rail Authority and accountancy advisers on 7 May 2002 to discuss likely accounting treatment from UK GAAP perspective.

A meeting with National Audit Office, SRA and Department officials on 9 May 2002 to discuss the Network Rail proposals and the likely UK GAAP accounting treatment.

A letter dated 4 July 2002 to the Office for National Statistics confirming the contingent liabilities.

Rail Franchise Holders (Hospitality)

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what hospitality was received by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* his special advisers from each rail franchise holder over the past 12 months. [85333]

Mr. Jamieson: None.

South West Trains

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the franchise for South West Trains has been extended for one year with the possibility of an extension to 2007. [85534]

Mr. Jamieson: The South West Trains franchise has been extended for one year, with the possibility of a further extension, to provide a period of stability while the Mark 1 trains are replaced, and to allow the Strategic Rail Authority time to negotiate a competitive re-letting.

Unlicensed Vehicles

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of the estimated total number of unlicensed vehicles in the UK is represented by *(a)* London and *(b)* the south-east. [86912]

Mr. Jamieson: The percentage of the estimated total number of unlicensed vehicles in the UK represented by *(a)* London is 11 per cent. and *(b)* the south-east is 14 per cent. assuming that Essex, Surrey, Sussex, Kent and Hampshire make up the south-east region.

Siobhain McDonagh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the number of unlicensed vehicles in the London area. [86913]

Mr. Jamieson: It is estimated that there are around 171,000 unlicensed vehicles in the London area in 2001–02.

DEFENCE

Aircraft Carriers

Rachel Squire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where each of the competitors in the UK's aircraft carrier competition is proposing to locate the final assembly of the two ships; and where each of the competitors is proposing to conduct the commissioning and acceptance of the vessels. [86682]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: Proposals for the construction of the new carriers have been submitted by the potential prime contractors and are currently being assessed within the Ministry of Defence. We expect to announce the preferred contractor early next year. The choice of final assembly location proposed by each bidder is a matter for them, but will be taken into account—along with a range of other factors—within that assessment period.

Ammunition

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the stocks of stockpiled ammunition have changed since 1997; and what measures there are to ensure that the armed forces have adequate reserves of ammunition in case of a crisis. [86300]

Dr. Moonie: Details of stockpiled ammunition are withheld under Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. However, it can be confirmed that stockpile planning is subject to continuous review in order to ensure that the derived liabilities for munitions are robust and reflect current Defence Planning Assumptions.

Armed Forces Personnel (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Royal Marines, *(c)* Army and *(d)* RAF personnel are stationed in Scotland, (i) in total and (ii) in each location; and if he will make a statement. [86383]

Dr. Moonie: The number of United Kingdom Regular personnel as at 1 April 2002 is given as follows. These figures include both trained and untrained personnel. They exclude FTRS, Gurkhas, Reserves mobilised for duty, and members of the Royal Irish Home Service. From these figures it is not possible to separate the Royal Marines from the Royal Navy figures.

Total UK regular personnel in Scotland as at 1 April 2002

	Naval Service[1]	*Army*	*RAF*
Scotland	4,670	3,710	5,870
City of Aberdeen	—	10	—
Aberdeenshire	0	0	360
Angus	710	100	—
Argyll and Bute	3,690	0	—
City of Dundee	10	40	—
City of Edinburgh	0	1,350	30
Falkirk	0	—	0

Total UK regular personnel in Scotland as at 1 April 2002

	Naval Service[1]	*Army*	*RAF*
Fife	130	30	1,290
City of Glasgow	20	1,250	20
Highland	—	510	10
Inverclyde	10	0	0
Midlothian	0	360	0
Moray	0	—	4,020
North Ayrshire	0	—	—
Perthshire and Kinross	0	40	O
Renfrewshire	0	—	—
Shetland Islands	0	0	30
South Ayrshire	100	—	100
Stirling	0	10	0
West Lothian	0	—	0
Cornhaire nan Eilean Siar	0	—	—

[1] These figures include both Royal Navy and Royal Marine personnel
[2] Figures under 5 have been suppressed and all other figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.
— denotes figure is 5 or under, and has therefore been suppressed to avoid disclosure.

Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency

Mr. Mike Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much has been spent on the PFI contract for the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency; whether the contract is on schedule; and if he will make a statement. [85866]

Dr. Moonie: Details of the Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency's contract costs and performance against Key Targets for financial years 1997–98 to 2000–01 inclusive appear in the Agency's Annual Report and Accounts, copies of which are held in the Library of the House.

The Annual Report and Accounts for the financial year 2001–2002 should be published early in the New Year and will indicate that all Key Targets were met. Contract costs for the same period were some 64 million.

Armed Forces Widows (Northern Ireland)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* UDR and *(b)* RIR widows have been created as a direct result of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland since 1973; and how much money has been distributed by the Army Forces Pension Scheme to each class of widow since 1973. [86653]

Dr. Moonie: Between 1973 and 1992 there have been 103 UDR widows, two UDR widowers and six RIR widows as a direct result of terrorist activity in Northern Ireland. Information is being collated to determine the level of payments made through the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. I will write to the hon Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial assistance the widow of a soldier killed on duty will receive from the Armed Forces Pension Scheme. [86655]

Dr. Moonie: The widow of a soldier killed on duty as a result of his service will for the first three months receive a short-term pension at annual rate equal to her husband's annual rate of pay. After this period she receives a long-term attributable pension for herself and any children reflecting her husband's rank and linked to his rate of pay. The resulting benefits equate to around 90 per cent.of the members full career pension. From 31 October 2000, attributable widows' pensions have been paid for life, regardless of whether the widow remarries or cohabits with a man as her husband. In addition to the short and long-term pensions, she would receive a death-in-service gratuity equal to amount that would have been payable to the soldier on invaliding grounds, or if greater, twice the full career rate of the invaliding pension. An additional attributable gratuity is payable which is set according to the rank of the soldier. Benefits would also be paid under the War Pension Scheme.

Arrangements are currently under review as part of an examination of pension and compensation arrangements for the Armed Forces, and widows' provisions are one area where we are considering improvements. We expect to make an announcement on this work early next year.

Armed Services (Fatalities)

Mr. Stinchcombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service men under the age of 18 years have suffered accidents involving firearms in each of the last five years. [82928]

Dr. Moonie: Information on accidents involving firearms and casualties is not held centrally by the Army and can be obtained only at disproportionate cost. In the Royal Navy (RN), records of casualties indicate that one 17-year-old Royal Marine (RM) died as a result of a gunshot wound in training in 2000, but no other RN (or RM) personnel under 18 have been injured by firearms over the last five years. No RAF personnel under the age of 18 have suffered accidents involving firearms over the last five years.

Army Welfare Service

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military female members of staff of the Army Welfare Service are based in each of the agency's offices in Scotland. [86129]

Dr. Moonie: The Army Welfare Service currently employs three female members of staff in its offices in Scotland. One civilian and one military female member of staff are employed in Edinburgh. One further military female member of staff is employed in Inverness.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what routes of appeal are available to *(a)* civilian and *(b)* military members of staff of the Army Welfare Service who are dissatisfied with the outcome of the agency's internal complaints procedure. [86132]

Dr. Moonie: There is no specific internal complaint procedure for staff employed within the Army Welfare Service, further to that which is available to all military and Ministry of Defence civilian staff. Complaint procedure for military personnel is detailed within Army General Administrative Instructions Volume 2 Chapter 70—Management and Resolution of Complaints; further guidance is provided in Army General Administrative Instructions Volume 2 Chapter 75—Equal Opportunities Policy, Guidance and Instructions.

Complaint procedure for civilian personnel is detailed within the Ministry of Defence Personnel Manual, Volume 13.

Battalion Strength

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) on what occasions in the past five years units have been detached from a battalion of the foot guards and attached to another battalion to bring that latter battalion up to strength for the purposes of operational deployment, giving in each case *(a)* the length of the period of detachment and *(b)* the date of the detached unit's return to its own battalion; [85229]

(2) when in the past five years battalions of the foot guards have been deployed for operational purposes; [85227]

(3) on what occasions in the past five years battalions of the foot guards have been brought up to strength for operational deployment by the attachment of units from other battalions, identifying for each occasion *(a)* the deployed battalion and *(b)* the source and size of the attached unit. [85228]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 3 December 2001]:* Units which have, within the last five years, been detached from a battalion of the Foot Guards and attached to another battalion to bring mat battalion up to strength for the purposes of an operational deployment are detailed in the following table:

Battalion detached from	*Battalion detached to and reason*	*Period of detachment*
1 Grenadier Guards	Detached 26 men to 1 Scots Guards for a Northern Ireland tour	May 2001-November 2001
1 Coldstream Guards	Detached 1 Platoon of 30 personnel to 1 Scots Guards for a Northern Ireland tour	March 1998-October 1998
	Detached 1 Platoon of 30 personnel to 1 Irish Guards for a tour in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Kosovo	February 1999-September 1999
	Detached 17 men to the Household Cavalry Regiment for a Bosnia tour	May 1999-November 1999
	Detached 26 men to 1 Grenadier Guards for a Northern Ireland tour	June 1999-December 1999
	Created a company to reinforce a resident Battalion in Northern Ireland	October 2000- April 2002
1 Scots Guards	In common with other Residential Battalions in Northern Ireland detached individual reinforcements to meet various operational commitments	March 1998-April 2000
1 Irish Guards	Have only detached personnel for routine procedures in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Kosovo.	
1 Welsh Guards	Detached 1 Platoon of 30 personnel to 1 Scots Guards for a Northern Ireland tour	March 1998-October 1998
	Detached 1 Company to 1 Devonshire and Dorset Regiment for a Northern Ireland tour	October 2000- April 2001

Details of battalions of the Foot Guards which have, in the last five years, been deployed for operational purposes are show in the following table:

Battalion	*Period of operational deployment*	*Area of operational deployment*
1 Grenadier Guards	March 1996-March 1998	As a residential battalion in Northern Ireland
	June 1999-December 1999	Northern Ireland
	November 2001-May 2002	Northern Ireland
1 Coldstream Guards	September 1999-March 2000	Northern Ireland
	April 2000-now	As a residential battalion in Northern Ireland
1 Scots Guards	March 1998-April 2000	As a residential battalion in Northern Ireland
	June 2000-July 2000	Northern Ireland
	March 2001-November 2001	Northern Ireland
1 Irish Guards	February 1999-September 1999	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Kosovo
1 Welsh Guards	October 2000-March 2001	Northern Ireland (one company only)
	March 2002-September 2002	Bosnia

Details of Foot Guard battalions which have been brought up to strength for operational deployment by the attachment of units from other battalions, within the last five years, are shown in the following table.

Deployed battalion	*Source and size of attached unit and deployment details*
1 Grenadier Guards	Received 13 personnel from The King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, 26 personnel from 1 Coldstream Guards and 26 personnel from 1 Duke of Wellington's Regiment from June 1999 to December 1999 for a Northern Ireland tour
1 Irish Guards	Received 30 personnel from 1 Coldstream Guards from February 1999 to September 1999 for a tour in Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia/Kosovo
1 Scots Guards	Received 1 Platoon of 30 personnel from 1 Coldstream Guards and 1 Platoon of 30 personnel from 1 Welsh Guards from March 1998 to October 1998 for a Northern Ireland tour Received 26 personnel from 1 Grenadier Guards from May 2001 to November 2001 for a Northern Ireland tour
1 Welsh Guards	While in Bosnia (March-September 2002), the battalion was reinforced by 84 reservists and Territorial Army personnel for Bosnia specific jobs. The battalion itself was at full strength

Bullying

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 19 November, *Official Report*, column 36W, how many complaints about bullying have been recorded in each year at the Dalton Barracks in Oxfordshire; and what measures have been taken to protect service personnel against bullying. [86051]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1 January 1999, the Royal Military Police has received one report of alleged assault/bullying at Dalton Barracks, Abingdon. The case was considered by the Commanding Officer and the individual found not guilty.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Armed Forces on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan). Bullying and harassment in any form are not tolerated, and the Services incorporate procedures and undertake training at all levels in an attempt to raise awareness of these issues, minimise, and if possible eradicate, such practices.

Cadet Forces (Funding)

Andy King: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what criteria he uses to decide the level of funds for *(a)* the Sea Cadets, *(b)* the Army Cadets and *(c)* the Air Training Corps; and if he will make it his policy that the Sea Cadets are funded on an equal basis to the Army Cadets and Air Training Corps. [85803]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 3 December 2002 *Official Report*, columns 691–92W. The budget for the cadet organisations is reviewed in the same way as the rest of the Ministry of Defence. The budget is considered against the requirement to sustain a vigorous and vibrant youth organisation which sustains active membership for enrolled cadets. Risks to sustaining the cadet organisations are then considered alongside the other risks to the MOD's output targets. In the case of the Sea Cadet Corps, this process is based on the Corps's known annual requirements and any specific changing needs. Consideration is also given to the Sea Cadet Corps's other sources of income, on a year-by-year basis.

Challenger 2 Tanks

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions he and his Department have held with Vickers Defence Systems regarding the modification of Challenger 2 tanks for desert conditions; and if he will make a statement. [85361]

Mr. Hoon: There has been a wide range of discussions with Alvis Vickers Ltd. (previously Vickers Defence Systems) related to the deployment of Challenger 2 in desert conditions. This dialogue continues and a Post Design Services enabling agreement with Alvis Vickers Limited was authorised at the end of October 2002 to deal specifically with the modification of Challenger 2 tanks for these environments.

Confidential Support Line

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel have phoned the Army's confidential support line in each year since its formation; in what form statistical information about calls is monitored; and how general observations drawn by advice workers are passed on to appropriate authorities for action to prevent bullying. [86048]

Dr. Moonie: The purpose of the Army Confidential Support Line, which was established on 1 December 1991, is to provide a means of support to serving soldiers and their dependants, although calls may also be taken from members of the other Services, Ministry of Defence civilians and ex-Service personnel. The collation of statistics is not a primary function of the support staff and as no personal information is requested from any caller, those statistics which are available are, inevitably, incomplete. As such, no specific analysis of the available statistics is undertaken.

Those statistics which are available for 1998–2001 are contained within the Soldiers Sailors Airmen's Families Association—Forces Help Confidential Support Line Annual Report 2001, a copy of which I will place in the Library of the House.

Deepcut/Catterick Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the balance is between civilian and ranking officer staff responsible for advice work carried out at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick Barracks by (i) the regimental medical office, (ii) the Padre, (iii) the unit

welfare officer, (iv) the local army welfare worker and (v) the Women's Royal Voluntary Service welfare office. [86076]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is as follows:

	Medical centre		*Padre*		*Unit welfare office*		*Army welfare service*		*WRVS/Salvation Army*[1]	
	Civilian	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Military*	*Civilian*	*Military*
Deepcut	2	0	0	1	1[2]	0	1[2]	2[3]	2	0
Catterick	7	1[4] 1[3]	0	3[5]	2[6]	1[3]	1	4	5	0

[1] At Catterick.
[2] Retired officer.
[3] NCO.
[4] Officer.
[5] At present, shortly to become four.
[6] Of which one is a retired officer.
Note:
The information for Catterick is in respect of the Infantry Training Centre only.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many welfare agency case conferences have been held at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick Barracks since 1990; what venues have been used for the meetings; and on how many occasions each year the conferences have passed on concerns about bullying to the Officer Commanding. [86077]

Dr. Moonie: Given the number of agencies involved in the provision of welfare support, no central records of case conferences, or their venues, are maintained by either establishment. Catterick Garrison alone comprises the School of Infantry, seven other major and fifteen further minor units. Welfare meetings will vary across all units but may range from regular staff meetings to Commanding Officer's conferences. All cases of bullying which are reported to any welfare agency or the chain of command will be passed to the Commanding Officer for appropriate action.

Defence Establishments (State of Alert)

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the states of alert which are operated by defence establishments, and the criteria which apply in each case. [86448]

Dr. Moonie: I am withholding details on the states of alert operated across the various sectors in accordance with Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Defence Industries (Employment)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how his Department calculates the number of people employed in and by defence related industries in the regions of the UK; what multiplier is used; and what the regional and national totals are. [86012]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Estimates of employment can be determined as the addition of three elements. These are:

"direct". The "direct" numbers are those employed in the supplying manufacturer i.e the company contracted by the Ministry of Defence to undertake the work, or the exporter;

"indirect". These include those indirectly employed through work generated in subcontractors and those who supply the main contractor. As well as manufacturers of products which are embodied in the final product, these will include suppliers of services e.g. consultants and electricity generators; and

"induced", i.e. employment resulting from the additional consumer spending which arise from the direct and indirect employees.

The Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) has never produced figures for the number of "induced" jobs. Estimates, however, have been calculated for UK direct and indirect employment dependent on (i) MOD equipment expenditure, (ii) MOD non-equipment expenditure, and (iii) defence exports. These have been published since 1992 in United Kingdom Defence Statistics (UKDS) and, before then, in Volume 2 of the Statement of Defence Estimates. The method of derivation is as follows:

the "final demand" of expenditure by (grouped) standard industrial categories is determined for MOD UK expenditure on equipment and non-equipment using information from MOD systems. Figures for exports are more problematic—various sources are used for these;

direct employment. Using MOD final demand and turnover per (full-time equivalent) employee for the sectors involved, direct employment follows by division; and

indirect employment. Total and indirect demand is calculated using the MOD final demand and (adapted) UK Input-Output Analytical Tables. The latest available Analytical Tables, which are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), are for the year 1995. They were published in May 2002. The Analytical Tables are assumed to change slowly, so may be applied to years other than the ones for which they were prepared. There are various ways of deriving indirect employment. The one proposed by DASA is to calculate it as derived indirect demand divided by the appropriate rates (output at basic prices) for the sectors concerned. Such details are still subject to review (see below).

The ONS has not published employment multipliers for the UK.

DASA has been leading a review into the method for estimating employment dependent on MOD equipment and non-equipment expenditure and exports. One of the outcomes of the review is that regional estimates of direct equipment related employment should not be published as National Statistics any more. The

underlying data are not of a good enough quality and they only ever represented less than a third of the total employment estimates.

Estimates of regional indirect employment have never been prepared. They are more difficult to establish. Although Analytical Tables and multipliers are produced for some areas, for example, for Scotland (by the Scottish Executive), the calculation of employment would require knowledge of the volumes of "exports" and "imports" of MOD defence equipment from other regions. These data are not available. Analytical Tables are not produced by the ONS for the English regions.

A detailed report on the calculation of the UK employment estimates has been prepared. This is currently being peer reviewed and will be made available on the DASA website.

Provisional figures for the UK were published as Table 1.11 of UK Defence Statistics 2002, a copy of which is available from the Library of the House.

	2000–01 (thousands)[1]
Total employment	310
Direct (total)	155
Indirect (total)	150
Employment from MOD expenditure (sub total)	235
Equipment expenditure	
Direct	70
Indirect	70
Non-equipment expenditure	
Direct	55
Indirect	40
Employment from defence exports (sub total)	70
Direct	30
Indirect	40

[1] Provisional. The figures are rounded to the nearest 5,000. Differences between the totals and the sums are caused by the rounding.

Although numbers are no longer published as National Statistics, the Defence Analytical Services Agency has continued to derive regional breakdowns of the direct MOD equipment expenditure. The latest, provisional, and, as indicated above, qualified figures are:

	Direct employment (thousands)[1]
Scotland	5
Wales	1
Northern Ireland	1
England	
North East	1
Yorks and Humberside	1
East Midlands	2
Eastern	8
London and South East	20
South West	16
West Midlands	2
North West	15
Total	72

[1] Provisional. The numbers calculated have been rounded to the nearest thousand, but are indicative only. The difference between 'region totals' and the 'UK total' is due to rounding anomalies.

Defensive Decoy System

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on *(a)* the defensive decoy system and *(b)* the active decoy round. [86298]

Dr. Moonie: The active decoy round forms part of the defensive decoy system, more usually known as the active off board decoy system. The other main element is the ship control system. The purpose of the decoy system is to provide improved defence against anti-ship missiles. It is planned to enter operational service in all major Royal Navy warships from early 2004.

Executive Agencies (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people are employed by DERA; how many are based in Scotland; and if he will make a statement. [86390]

Dr. Moonie: DERA was disestablished on 1 July 2001, when two new organisations, QinetiQ and the Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl), were created.

QinetiQ is a plc, and therefore all operational inquiries should be addressed to the chief executive. Dstl remains a part of the Ministry of Defence. Dstl currently employs approximately 3,100 staff, of whom 52 are based in Scotland.

Industrial Policy

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the costs were of implementing the Ministry of Defence's industrial policy in the last 12 months. [85656]

Dr. Moonie: The Government's new defence industrial policy published on 14 October is not expected to incur any additional administrative costs to implement, nor do we envisage that it will entail additional costs to the equipment programme. The policy aims to enhance the competitiveness of United Kingdom industry and will therefore increase the value for money delivered to the taxpayer. A copy of the policy is in the Library of the House.

Lockheed Martin F35s

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many of the short take off and vertical landing versions of the new Lockheed Martin F35s have been ordered by the Ministry of Defence; and what he expects the costs to be of *(a)* the individual aircraft and *(b)* the cost of the entire procurement project; [85455]

(2) if he will make a statement on the timetable for the short take-off and vertical landing versions of the Lockheed Martin F35s entering service with the Royal Navy and RAF; and if he expects this programme to remain within the Ministry of Defence's estimated budget. [85654]

Dr. Moonie: The current System Development and Demonstration Phase of the Lockheed Martin Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) programme began in October 2001. We announced on 30 September this year that the Short Take-Off/Vertical Landing (STOVL) variant of the JSF

had been selected to meet our Future Joint Combat Aircraft (FJCA) requirement. The current planned United Kingdom in-service date is 2012.

In order to align with the US acquisition cycle, we do not expect to place orders for JSF aircraft before 2006. The average UK unit production cost of the STOVL variant of JSF is estimated to be around $50 million US.

The procurement cost for the FJCA programme, including certain spares and training facilities, is forecast to be up to £10 billion-working on a current planning assumption of 150 aircraft required. There is no reason to believe that the JCA programme will not remain within budget.

Medical Conditions

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what standard manuals of diagnostics and directories of medical conditions he relies in instances where his discretion is exercised on the basis of a medical opinion. [80592]

Dr. Moonie: It would be inappropriate for Ministers to intervene in clinical matters. Armed forces medical personnel and civilian medical practitioners employed by the Ministry of Defence consult numerous medical textbooks and other publications accepted by the medical and scientific community.

Military Training Sites

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will list the military training sites in the UK where live ammunition has been used since 1972 which have been accessible to the public on non-training days; [86828]

(2) what contracts the Ministry of Defence has with private contractors for searching for unexploded ordnance on Ministry of Defence training sites in the UK; [86831]

(3) which sites in the UK used for military training with live ammunition are accessible to the general public. [86832]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Missile Defence

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects his Department's programmes work on theatre missile defence will be published. [84537]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* I presume that the hon. Member is referring to the Technology Readiness and Risk Assessment Programme, an unclassified summary of which was released earlier this year and a copy placed in the Library of the House as confirmed in my answer to the hon. Member for Dover (Mr. Prosser) on 26 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 1134W. Further work on the technical and other issues associated with theatre missile defence is continuing.

Mr. Jack Palfrey Wakefield (Gratuity Payment)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what records his Department maintains of individuals receiving a gratuity in respect of invalidity, on leaving HM armed forces, from 1941 to the present; and whether he has a record of a gratuity in respect of invalidity being paid to Mr. Jack Palfrey Wakefield, date of birth 24 September 1916, army serial number 1895475, formerly resident in Crewe. [85667]

Dr. Moonie: For members of the armed forces who have been invalided from service, records relating to consideration of entitlement to war pensions have been held on these cases by the Veterans Agency and its predecessors since prior to 1941. No war pensions files were destroyed until 1989 when a retention and destruction exercise was carried out. The criteria were that files were to be destroyed where no action had been taken on the case for more than 30 years, no pension was in payment and the claimant was over the age of 80.

Under the Armed Forces Pension Scheme, records containing details of invaliding gratuities paid are held by all three services for personnel who left between 1941 and the present day. How long these records are retained for depends on when the person left the armed forces. In general, the following applies:

Left service between 1941–72:

Where the pensioner dies and there is no widow/er or other dependant, the records would be destroyed after seven years for Royal Navy (RN) and Army personnel and after three years for RAF personnel. If not informed of this, records would be kept for 100 years from the date of the service member's birth for all three services. If there were a surviving widow/er, records would be destroyed some two to three years after the death of the spouse of RN and RAF personnel and seven years after the death of the spouse of Army personnel.

Left service between 1973–present:

Across all three services, records are retained for 100 years from the date of the service person's birth.

Records are held relating to both Mr. Wakefield's entitlement to war disablement pension and to his armed forces pension. However, information from these records cannot be supplied as disclosure of personal information is prohibited under Schedule 2 of the Data Protection Act 1998.

Nuclear Tests (South Pacific)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what measures he has put in place for tracing and monitoring armed forces personnel who served between 1950 and 1965 and were involved in nuclear tests in the South Pacific during this period; how many of these servicemen have been traced; what proportion this represents; and if he will make a statement. [86308]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* As is well known, the National Radiological Protection Board conducted two studies, reported in 1988 and 1993, which assessed incidences of cancers and mortality rates in test participants and a closely matched control group. The results of the third study are expected in 2003. At the outset, some 22,000 personnel were identified as participants from service and other records

representing about 85 per cent. of those believed to have participated in the United Kingdom nuclear testing programme.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made since 1972 concerning the risk of cancer among the *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civilian population surrounding the British nuclear testing in the Monte Bello Islands in the 1950s; and if he will make a statement. [86877]

Dr. Moonie: Two epidemiological studies of participants of the British nuclear test programme as a whole have been carried out on the Ministry of Defence's behalf by the National Radiological Protection Board. The results of these studies were published in 1988 and 1993. The studies showed that, as a group, participation in the tests has not had a detectable effect on the expectation of life, or on the risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases by those who took part. No separate assessment has been made of those service personnel who took part in the tests on the Monte Bello Islands.

The Monte Bello Islands were uninhabited and had no civilian population. In 1983 the Australian Ionising Radiation Advisory Council reassessed levels of radiation which had reached the Australian mainland from the tests on the Monte Bello Islands. It was concluded that exposure to radiation by the civilian population had been insignificant.

Nuclear Waste

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total volume was of nuclear waste produced and requiring storage by *(a)* his Department and *(b)* military installations in each year since 1990, broken down by (i) the level of waste and (ii) whether the waste is in temporary or permanent storage; and if he will make a statement. [86416]

Dr. Moonie: No central records are held on volumes of nuclear waste produced and requiring storage for each year since 1990. However, I refer the hon. Member to the "United Kingdom Radioactive Waste Inventory" to which the Ministry of Defence contributes, and which provides periodic snapshots on radioactive waste stocks, including levels of waste, location and whether the waste is held in temporary or permanent storage. The inventory has previously been published to show snapshots of waste stocks in 1991 and 1994, and a copy of the most recent inventory, for 1998, is available in the Library of the House. A new inventory, for 2001, is being completed and will be published shortly and a copy will be placed in the Library.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many decommissioned nuclear submarines have been awaiting waste treatment and storage for each year since 1990; where they are; what steps are being planned to tackle the task; and if he will make a statement. [86417]

Dr. Moonie: Since 1990, 10 nuclear-powered submarines have been decommissioned, and are stored safely afloat.

Submarine	*Date decommissioned*	*Afloat storage location*
Churchill	1990	Rosyth Dockyard
Warspite	1990	HMNB Devonport
Conqueror	1991	HMNB Devonport
Swiftsure	1991	Rosyth Dockyard
Courageous	1992	HMNB Devonport
Revenge	1992	Rosyth Dockyard
Resolution	1994	Rosyth Dockyard
Valient	1994	HMNB Devonport
Renown	1996	Rosyth Dockyard
Repulse	1996	Rosyth Dockyard

As soon as possible after a nuclear-powered submarine leaves naval service, the reactor is de-fuelled and the vessel prepared for safe storage afloat. Daily inspections and annual maintenance periods are carried out to ensure the vessel is maintained to a high standard of preservation and safety.

We are currently considering options for land storage of radioactive waste from nuclear powered submarines (the ISOLUS Study) and we will shortly be seeking proposals from industry. These will inform a public consultation and, following detailed negotiations, a preferred bidder will be selected. This is expected to take around three years to complete. The aim is to have the land storage facility in service by 2012.

RAF West Freugh

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether depleted uranium shells or projectiles manufactured in other NATO countries have been tested at RAF West Freugh in Galloway; whether aircraft operated by other NATO countries have used the base for training or experimenting with depleted uranium munitions; and if he will make a statement on progress made with radioactive remediation at the West Freugh test range. [86485]

Dr. Moonie: Experimental firings of the Phalanx weapons system, which uses depleted uranium rounds (DU), took place at West Freugh in 1988 and 1990. The firings involved rounds that were manufactured in the United Kingdom from DU processed in the USA. No aircraft were involved in the tests, and there has been no further use of the West Freugh range for DU firings. A subsequent radiological survey of beach, sand and seawater by staff from the AtomicWeapons Establishment concluded that there was no detectable contamination.

Research Contracts

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department is spending on research contracts in each region; and if he will make a statement. [86404]

Dr. Moonie: The net expenditure outturn for the Ministry of Defence's major customers research budgets as published in the Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts for financial year 2000–02, was £1 billion. It is not possible to provide a regional breakdown of research expenditure from available data.

Reserve Forces

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the per capita per annum cost per rank of *(a)* regular personnel, *(b)* the RNR, *(c)* the RMR, *(d)* the TA and *(e)* the RAuxAP; and if he will make a statement. [86395]

Dr. Moonie: The capitation rates for regular personnel show the average annual cost. They include pay, allowances, earnings-related National Insurance contributions and superannuation as well as allowances for support, training and higher formation costs.

The rates for Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) personnel include pay, earnings— related National Insurance contributions and superannuation Information for the Territorial Army and Royal Auxiliary Air Force cost is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. I am therefore unable to provide a substantive answer under the terms of exemption 9 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

However, capitation rates are produced for the Army Full Time Reserve Service (FTRS) and the RAF FTRS, and these are listed as follows:

Rank	*Capitation rate Royal Navy*	*Capitation rate Royal Navy Reserve FTRS*
Captain	125,196	87,257
Commander	109,002	74,770
Lieutenant Commander	82,724	64,369
Lieutenant	67,273	47,492
Sub Lieutenant	61,987	37,568
Midshipman	42,729	27,851
Warrant Officer	63,493	39,997
Charge Chief Petty Officer	59,781	37,705
Chief Petty Officer	56,703	35,526
Petty Officer	51,559	31,279
Leading Rate	46,441	27,394
Able Rate	35,072	19,291
Colonel	125.196	87,257
Lieutenant Colonel	109,002	74,770
Major	82,724	64,369
Captain	67,273	47,492
Lieutenant	61,987	37,568
Second Lieutenant	42,729	27,851
WO1	63,493	39,997
W02	59,781	37,705
Colour Sergent	56,703	35,526
Sergeant	51,559	31,279
Corporal	46,441	27,394
Lance Corporal	40,011	—
Marine	35,072	19,291
Colonel	125,598	74,770
Lieutenant Colonel	109,404	64,369
Major	83,126	47,492
Captain	67,674	37,568
Lieutenant	52,389	27,851
Second Lieutenant	43,131	21,927
W01	63,895	39,997
W02	60,183	37,705
Staff Sergeant	57,105	35,526
Sergeant	51,961	31,278
Corporal	46,843	37,394
Lance Corporal	40,413	23,592
Private	35,475	19,291
Group Captain	125,386	74,770
Wing Commander	109,192	64,369
Squadron Leader	82,914	47,492
Flight Lieutenant	67,462	37,568
Flag Officer	52,177	27,851
Pilot Officer	42,919	21,927
Warrant Officer	63,682	39,997
Flight Sergeant	59,970	37,705
Chief Technician	56,892	35,526
Sergeant	51,748	31,278
Corporal	46,630	37,394
SAC	40,173	23,592
LAC		19,291

Royal Navy Vessels

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Royal Navy vessels will be fitted with *(a)* the upgraded Type 1022 Radar and *(b)* the Type 996 Radar; and if he will make a statement on the increased capability this will provide. [86296]

Dr. Moonie: Radar Type 1022 is fitted to Type 42 Destroyers and Invincible Class Carriers. At present, there are no plans to upgrade the Radar but, as part of the normal planning process, consideration is being given to an upgrade that would deliver performance improvements in specific operating environments.

Radar Type 996 is in service with Type 42 Destroyers, Type 23 Frigates and Invincible Class Carriers, and is also being fitted to the new Landing Platform Dock (Replacement) vessels, the first of which is expected to come into service next year. Two programmes have been undertaken to improve the Radar's performance and availability. A further programme, to increase the Radar's capability against future airborne and surface threats, is currently in its assessment phase.

Sea Dart Missile

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the infra red fuse to be fitted to the Sea Dart missile. [86297]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave him on 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 815W.

Sea Harrier

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what impact the withdrawal of the Sea Harrier FA2 will have on the Royal Navy's ability to defend its ships against an attack from the AS17/Krypton anti-ship missile; and if he will make a statement. [86440]

Dr. Moonie: Royal Navy Task Groups will retain a significant air defence capability after the Sea Harrier is withdrawn from service in 2006, including against AS17/Krypton anti ship missiles. Task Groups typically include Type 42 Anti Air Warfare Destroyers armed with updated Sea Dart anti-aircraft missiles, Type 22 and 23 Frigates armed with Point Defence Missile Systems (including the enhanced Sea Wolf missile system) and Close in Weapons Systems. Many other Task Group warships will also include air defence assets for self protection and decoy systems against air and surface launched anti-ship missiles.

The upgraded Sea King airborne early warning aircraft has now entered service providing an improved detection capability over land and sea. Additionally, from late 2007 onwards the Type 42 Destroyers will be

replaced by the Type 45 Destroyers, fitted with the highly capable Principal Anti-Air Missile System (PAAMS).

Service Personnel (Deaths)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the results were of the investigations into the circumstances of the deaths of *(a)* Private Paul Cochrane on 30 July 2001 at Drumadd Barracks, Northern Ireland, *(b)* Private David Shipley in June 2002, in Germany, *(c)* Private Richard Robertson on 21 September 1995 at Catterick Barracks, *(d)* Private Gary Riches in Bosnia on 24 October 1995, *(e)* Private Alfred Manship in Osnabruck on 6 April 1992, *(f)* Private Dale Little in Bosnia on 22 July 1994 and *(g)* Trooper Aled Martin Jones in Bosnia on 18 July 1996; in each case, what time the police were called; what steps were taken to secure evidence at the scene of death; what the conclusions of the inquiry were; what the nature of the post mortem examination was; by whom it was carried out; what the findings were; when relatives of the deceased were informed; what the conclusion was of the coroner's inquest; when a board of inquiry was established; when it reported; and what measures were taken as a result of its findings; [86275]

(2) what the result has been of the investigation into the circumstances of the death in 1997 of Private Ross Collins of Nanstallon near Bodmin in Cornwall; at what time the police were called; what steps were taken to secure evidence at the scene of death; what the conclusions were of their inquiry; what the nature was of the post mortem examination; by whom it was carried out; what the findings were; at what time relatives of the deceased were informed; what the conclusion was of the Coroner's Inquest; when a board of inquiry was established and what date it reported; and what measures were taken as a result of its findings. [86586]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost, if at all, as we do not know whether all of it is held on departmental files. Furthermore, information pertaining to the associated police investigations and boards of inquiry would not normally be placed in the public domain. Only the death of Trooper Aled Jones has, so far, been subject to a board of inquiry; a copy of the final report was passed to the next of kin in 1997. A board of inquiry into the death of Ranger Paul Cochrane is on-going. No decision has yet been made as to whether a board of inquiry will be held into the death of Private David Shipley; this is subject to an on-going investigation by the Royal Military Police Special Investigation Branch, who have jurisdiction in this case. It would, therefore, be inappropriate to release any related information at this time.

Coroner's verdicts, in those cases where an inquest has been held, are as follows:

Name	*Verdict*
Private Richard Robertson	Open
Fusilier Gary Riches	Open
Sapper Alfred Manship	Suicide
Private Dale Little	Open
Trooper Aled Jones	Suicide
Musician Ross Collins	Open

According to our records, the deaths of Privates Little and Riches occurred on 22 July 1995 and 25 October 1995 respectively.

Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employer Programme

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the establishment of the Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employer programme. [85650]

Dr. Moonie: The Strategic Defence Review required the Reserve Forces to be integrated, relevant and usable. To ensure this requirement is met we need the support of those who employ members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces.

During the last 18 months the Ministry of Defence has carried out a review of its existing and long-standing campaign designed to win and maintain the support of Britain's employers for the Volunteer Reserve Forces. This has resulted in the launch of a new campaign called SaBRE (Supporting Britain's Reservists and Employers). Its purpose is to explain to employers not only the benefits of employing Reservists but also the attendant rights and obligations that employers have, including the requirement to release individuals for mobilisation should it be necessary to do so. The SaBRE campaign has already made good progress. Its strategy is to make use of the expertise available in the commercial world combined with a regional network of civilian volunteers, to deliver a campaign with a national identity at a regional level. A number of organisations, including the Confederation of British Industry, the Institute of Directors, the British Chambers of Commerce, the Engineering Employers' Federation and the Trades Union Congress together with some 6,200 companies, who between them account for a substantial part of the nation's workforce, have previously declared their support for the Reserves of the Armed Forces.

Trafalgar Bicentennial

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to mark the Bicentennial of the Battle of Trafalgar. [86959]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is working closely with a number of organisations to develop the Royal Navy's plans for the commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar in 2005. Lead by the Official Nelson Celebrations Committee, which brings together the interests of a wide range of maritime museums and associations connected with the Nelson heritage, a national and international programme of cultural and commemorative events is being discussed, among which a number of events involving the Royal Navy are being considered. At this stage, it is too early to be precise.

Unexploded Ordnance

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when and where unexploded ordnance has

been found by contractors when clearing publicly accessible military training sites for construction and infrastructure projects since 1972; [86830]

(2) when and where in the UK unexploded ordnance has been found by persons not employed by the Ministry of Defence on *(a)* byelawed and *(b)* non-byelawed land since 1972. [86829]

Dr. Moonie: The information is not held centrally and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the discovery of unexploded ordnance by Transco in the Brecon Beacons area. [86833]

Dr. Moonie: An amount of unexploded ordnance, believed to date from the Second World War period, was found earlier this year by Transco while working on a pipeline scheme in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The police were informed and the ordnance was subsequently disposed of by the Army.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abattoirs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make funds available to enable abattoirs to provide additional space for hanging carcasses of animals over 30 months old slaughtered under the Beef Assurance Scheme separately from other animals. [85370]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: EU rules require that cattle for human consumption must be tested for BSE if aged over 30 months or, if subject to casualty slaughter or found sick at ante-mortem inspection, if aged over 24 months. In the event of a positive result, the carcase before and two carcasses after the positive case on the slaughter line must be destroyed unless there is a system in place preventing contamination between carcasses. The latter does not necessarily require significant extra space but this is a matter for the Official Veterinary Surgeon in individual abattoirs. There are no funds available to provide abattoirs with additional space.

Agriculture Expenditure

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much money is being reclaimed by the European Commission from the United Kingdom because of inadequate control procedures or non-compliance with EU rules on agricultural expenditure. [84522]

Mr. Morley: In 2001, the UK claimed £2.5 billion from the EU agriculture budget. Of this, £3 million was reclaimed due to non-compliance with EU rules on agricultural expenditure (which includes control procedures). The Commission has the right to reclaim further sums should additional cases of non-compliance come to light.

Albatrosses

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimates she makes, in respect of the last year for which figures are available, of the number of albatrosses killed within United Kingdom waters as a by-product of fishing by *(a)* Spanish and *(b)* other vessels; what percentage of the United Kingdom population this represents; and what steps she is taking to prevent such deaths. [86415]

Mr. Morley: Although the metropolitan United Kingdom is outside the normal migration range of albatrosses, there are globally important breeding sites in UK Overseas Territories in the Southern Hemisphere.

While there are no overall figures available, we do have information about the Falkland Islands, where the breeding population of albatrosses is about 382,000 pairs. Recent estimates of bycatch there have included between 85 and 193 albatrosses in a year in licensed long-line fisheries, and about 1,000 during the peak spring fishing season from licensed trawling (some three quarters of which is carried out by Spanish vessels). There will also be losses to illegal, unreported and unregulated fisheries.

The UK and Spain are Parties to the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources, the Commission of which is responsible for managing fisheries in the Convention area and imposes conditions aimed at reducing bycatch.

The UK intends to ratify early next year the Agreement on the Conservation of Albatrosses and Petrels, which will require UK flag vessels fishing in the Agreement area to implement measures designed to mitigate bycatch. Our ratification will be extended to those Overseas Territories that wish to implement the Agreement and have appropriate legislation in place. Spain has also signed this Agreement.

The Falkland Islands Government is funding Falklands Conservation to study the effect on mortality resulting from birds being attracted to vessels by offal discarded as a by-product of on-board fish processing.

Beef Exports

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much UK produced beef has been exported by *(a)* weight and *(b)* value in the last five years for which figures are available; and how much of these exports comprised (i) beef of UK origin and (ii) beef of foreign origin. [85420]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]*: Official overseas trade statistics do not differentiate between beef of UK origin and beef of foreign origin.

The following table shows the volume and value of UK exports of beef and beef products between 1997 and 2001.

	Beef		*Beef products*	
	Tonnes	*£000*	*Tonnes*	*£000*
1997	6,061	15,104	4,030	6,626
1998	4,884	12,157	7,746	6,110
1999	5,647	19,720	3,708	5,598
2000	5,387	20,983	3,884	6,070
2001	5,409	18,763	2,963	5,616

Sources:

HM Customs and Excise.

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA.

Bio-Security

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to introduce voluntary disposal bins for meat products at UK immigration points. [84163]

Mr. Morley: As indicated by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State in the House on 21 November 2002, there are a number of concerns on how in practice amnesty bins for illegal meat would operate. These issues continue to be examined. Decisions which will also take account of the planned transfer of the responsibility for anti-smuggling checks to HM Customs and Excise, will be made as soon as possible.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason UK landing cards have not been amended to reflect bio-security measures. [84168]

Mr. Morley: An inter-departmental 'borders' group exists to look at amendments to the immigration card. Defra asked them to consider amendments to the card to include provisions about meat imports, either in a way that would be covered by a signed declaration, or a prominent Warning Note.

The group has also identified a number of other issues which might need to be covered in a revised version of the landing card, including other prohibitions and restrictions. No firm conclusions have yet been reached on the best way forward.

Brucellosis

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has carried out concerning whether the Yersinia organism can affect the blood test for Brucellosis in cattle; and if she will make a statement. [86247]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* Exposure to Yersinia enterocolitica in some cattle is known to cause cross reaction to serological tests for exposure to Brucella abortus.

DEFRA is currently funding a brucellosis research programme which is being carried out by the Veterinary Laboratories Agency (VLA) at Weybridge. This research includes a project to differentiate between serological cross reactions and other reactors identified in the surveillance of brucellosis in cattle.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* suspected and *(b)* confirmed cases of Brucellosis were recorded in cattle in each year since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [86248]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* Great Britain is officially brucellosis free. An ongoing national brucellosis screening programme has identified a number of serological reactors over the years but Brucella abortus has not been isolated in any of those animals since October 1993. The numbers of serological reactors and suspect contact animals identified in each year since 1997 are as follows.

Year	*Number*
1997	16
1998	51
1999	67
2000	11
2001	20
2002 (to date)	18

CHP Plant

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of how much combined heat and power plant has been *(a)* withdrawn and *(b)* created in each of the last five years. [86197]

Mr. Morley: A separate assessment of CHP plant withdrawn and created is not available. The net increase in Good Quality CHP electrical capacity in each of the last five years is taken from the most recent Digest of UK Energy Statistics (DUKES, 2002):

	Increase in MWe
1997	150
1998	292
1999	239
2000	844
2001	38

Departmental Assets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will place in the Library a list of those assets identified by the National Asset Register, Cm 5221, as belonging to *(a)* the former Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and *(b)* the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, and their respective agencies, non-departmental bodies and public corporations, which now belong to her Department, together with the current value of each such asset. [85011]

Margaret Beckett: The National Asset Register (NAR) was last updated for March 2000 and published in June 2001. Our understanding is that it is updated every five years.

Defra has a Departmental Asset Register (DAR) which lists all assets held currently for its core activities with current values. This does not include details of assets held by its agencies and NDPBs. It does include assets transferred from the former Department of Environment, Transport and Regions (DETR) to Defra in June 2001.

With the changes to the machinery of government, to provide the information requested considerable work would have to be done on the DAR to reflect and reconcile with what was listed in the NAR Cm 5221. We would also have to request detailed lists from all of our agencies, NDPBs and public corporations of assets included in the NAR with current values.

The compilation of the information requested could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

I will arrange for a copy of the Defra DAR, which is currently being updated to be placed in Library of the House in early January.

Discharges into the Envrionment

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many locations there are where *(a)* acid and *(b)* other discharges from (i) mine, (ii) landfill sites, (iii) radioactive waste storage sites and (iv) animal burial mounds workings have been identified as (A) exceeding permitted levels and (B) resulting in poor river quality in nearby river courses broken down by individual sites, in each year since 1997; what action has been taken or is planned as a result; and if she will make a statement. [86411]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency is currently updating its information on mine waters, landfills and burial grounds. The agency should be able to provide a comprehensive answer by the new year, and I will write when it is available.

However, I understand that since 1997 no radioactive discharges from radioactive waste storage sites have exceeded permitted levels or resulted in poor water quality in river courses.

Drinking Water

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent research has been *(a)* conducted for her Department and *(b)* assessed by her Department on a potential link between drinking water and blue baby syndrome; what representations have been received; what discussions have taken place; and if she will place copies of the research in the Library. [86418]

Mr. Morley: The term "blue baby syndrome" is sometimes used to refer to infantile methaemoglobinaemia. This is a condition in which the pigment in the blood is altered and its ability to carry oxygen is impaired. Nitrate, nitrite and bacterial contamination of water supplies are among the potential causes. The condition is very rare—there have been no confirmed cases of methaemoglobinaemia in the UK since 1972. I am not aware of any recent reports that this condition is attributable directly to public water supplies within the United Kingdom.

The Department is aware of the studies that have established a relationship between methaemoglobin levels and nitrate levels, but has not conducted, commissioned or assessed any recent research on the link. Discussions and review of current scientific research take place within expert groups of the World Health Organisation, who expect to finalise the third edition of its "Guidelines for Drinking Water" in February 2003. Any changes in the guidelines will be considered by the European Commission and my Department.

The Department has received regular correspondence about the Nitrates Directive and also meets stakeholder groups. Officials have also replied to letters from or on behalf of farmers, for example from Farmers for Action, about the nitrate standard and health, including blue baby syndrome.

English Nature

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice her Department has issued to English Nature regarding environmental assessments necessary under the Conservation Regulations 1994 for the extraction of marl in the Fal and Helford Candidate Special Area of Conservation. [86278]

Mr. Morley: I believe my hon. Friend is referring to Maerl.

Comments on the scope and process by which English Nature could offer management scheme advice was given in writing on 25 October 2000. No further advice has been issued. In the first instance it is the responsibility of competent authorities, such as the Falmouth Harbour Commissioners, to satisfy themselves that they are exercising their functions in compliance with the Conservation (Natural Habitats etc.) Regulations 1994.

Environment Agency

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total budget of the Environment Agency is in 2002-03; and how this budget has changed since 1998–99. [86985]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency's planned expenditure for 2002–03 totals £758.212 million—an increase of £165.211 million over the Agency's expenditure in 1998–99.

Farm Businesses

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farms and *(b)* farmers were in business in each region in each year since 1990. [85351]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The number of *(a)* holdings and *(b)* farmers by region in England 1990, 1995–2001. Data for 1991–94 is currently not available by Government office region.

Government office region	*1990*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
North-east region				
Total holdings	5,243	5,202	5,200	5,178
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	7,895	7,745	7,752	7,768
North-west region, inc. Merseyside				
Total holdings	18,603	17,665	17,533	17,397
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	27,598	26,461	26,412	26,199
Yorkshire and Humberside region				
Total holdings	16,782	16,195	16,094	16,042
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	24,790	23,896	23,778	23,715

Government office region	*1990*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
East Midlands region				
Total holdings	16,624	16,256	16,052	15,799
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	24,032	23,406	23,262	23,058
West Midlands region				
Total holdings	19,233	18,761	18,847	18,871
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	27,336	26,751	26,971	26,912
East of England region				
Total holdings	18,651	17,716	17,574	17,326
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	26,353	24,883	24,676	24,254
Greater London				
Total holdings	478	431	418	400
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	658	622	593	580
South-east region				
Total holdings	19,502	18,464	18,286	18,161
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	25,717	24,395	24,214	24,050
South-west region				
Total holdings	35,537	35,419	35,634	35,603
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	50,013	49,891	50,149	49,885

Government office region	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
England				
Total holdings	150,653	146,109	145,638	144,777
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	214,392	208,050	207,807	206,421
North-east region				
Total holdings	5,144	5,280	5,674	6,073
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	7,829	7,779	8,105	8,598
North-west region, inc. Merseyside				
Total holdings	17,374	17,609	20,492	21,048
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	26,059	25,546	27,538	28,682
Yorkshire and Humberside region				
Total holdings	15,996	16,204	18,530	19,661
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	23,774	23,289	25,695	27,280
East Midlands region				
Total holdings	15,760	15,715	17,754	19,095
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	22,631	21,925	23,839	25,433
West Midlands region				
Total holdings	18,903	19,161	22,281	23,247
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	26,796	26,312	29,524	31,076
East of England region				
Total holdings	17,224	17,064	19,357	21,054
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	23,844	22,934	25,870	27,325
Greater London				
Total holdings	399	402	424	434
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	538	491	520	543
South-east region				
Total holdings	18,645	18,921	20,937	22,461
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	23,683	23,376	25,642	27,673
South-west region				
Total holdings	35,648	36,864	42,406	44,861
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	49,383	48,651	54,198	57,218
England				
Total holdings	145,093	147,220	167,855	177,934
Farmers, partners, directors and spouses	204,537	200,303	220,931	233,828

Notes:

1. Figures for 2000 and 2001 include minor holdings.
2. Spouses are included only if working on the holdings.
3. Between 2000 and 2001 a register improvement exercise took place which resulted in the addition of holdings not previously included in the Census. An increase in the number of holdings was also seen after the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak.

Source:

June Agricultural and Horticultural Census.

Farmers

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 159W, on farmers, what the average age of farmers was in *(a)* 1990, *(b)* 1993, *(c)* 1995, *(d)* 1997 and *(e)* 2000 broken down by (i) sex, (ii) whether they were owners or tenants and (iii) whether they were full or part time. [85390]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* Pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Gentleman on 20 November, further information on the average age of farmers in England, broken down by the categories requested, is given in the table.

	1990	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*	*2000*
England					
Gender					
Male	53	53	54	53	54
Female	55	54	55	54	55
Land tenure					
Own all land	53	54	55	54	55
Rent all land	52	52	52	52	52
Part owned/part rented	53	53	54	53	53
Working time					
Full-time	53	53	53	53	53
Part-time	53	53	54	53	54

Source:
EC Farm Structure Surveys.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the aquis communautaire on fisheries will be fully implemented by Poland on the first day of her accession to the European Union. [85511]

Mr. Morley: Negotiation of the Fisheries Chapter was provisionally closed with Poland in June 2002. In the negotiations Poland fully accepted, and undertook to implement by the date of accession, the aquis communautaire for fisheries. Agreement on access to resources and catch quotas for all candidates is currently under discussion.

Flood Cover

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, Ref: 84186, on flood cover, what actions she is taking to ensure that those homes who will not get continued provision of flood insurance get cover; and how many homes the Association of British Insurers has told the Government will not continue to be provided with flood insurance. [85969]

Mr. Morley: The Association of British Insurers (ABI) have advised us that, for those homes unprotected to their minimum standard and unlikely to be so by 2007, they will consider each case on an individual basis using their best efforts to provide some form of cover. The ABI has not given the Government any specific figures relating to numbers of homes which will not continue to be provided with flood insurance.

Flood Defence Committees

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what powers the Flood Defence Committee has to add items to the budget of the Environment Agency. [86222]

Mr. Morley: The Flood Defence Committees' budgets are separately identified within the overall budget of the Environment Agency. Each Committee sets its own budget for the year based on its programme of works, and contributes towards the general cost of running the Environment Agency's Flood Defence service.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many flood defence committees there are in England and Wales. [86219]

Mr. Morley: There are nine Regional Flood Defence Committees in England and one in Wales. There are statutory Local Flood Defence Committees in Anglian, Southern and Wessex Regions and in Wales. In the North West region there are three non-statutory advisory committees.

All committees are listed below:

1. Anglian Region

   Local committees (5): Lincolnshire, Welland and Nene, Great Ouse, Norfolk and Suffolk, Essex.

2. Northumbrian Region

   No local committees.

3. North West Region

   Non statutory advisory committees (3): Cumberland, Lancashire, Mersey and Weaver.

4. Severn Trent Region

   No local committees.

5. Southern Region

   Local committees (3): Isle of Wight and Hampshire, Sussex, Kent.

6. South West Region

   No local committees.

7. Thames Region

   No local committees.

8. Wessex Region

   Local committees (3): Bristol Avon, Somerset, Avon and Devon.

9. Yorkshire Region

   No local committees.

10. Wales

    Local committees (6): Dee and Clywd, Gwynedd, South West Wales, Wye, Usk, Glamorgan.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines have been set for appointments by her to flood defence committees; and how many on the committees she appoints. [86223]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend appoints the Chairman and a number of members to each of the English Regional Flood Defence Committees (RFDCs). Sections 15–19 of, and Schedules 4 and 5 to, the

Environment Act 1995 set out the statutory basis for these appointments and the rules concerning composition of the committees.

RFDCs vary in size but always contain a bare majority of persons appointed by local authorities. The Environment Agency appoints two members and my right hon. Friend appoints the Chairman and the remaining members one of whom is normally appointed to represent environmental and conservation interests. When making these appointments, my right hon. Friend adheres to guidance issued by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments.

My right hon. Friend does not make appointments to Local Flood Defence Committees. The Chair is appointed from among the RFDC members; other members are appointed by the RFDC and constituent local authorities again to form a bare majority.

The composition of each RFDC is as follows:

Anglian RFDC:
One Chairman and six members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
10 members (Local Authority appointed)

Northumbria RFDC:
One Chairman and five members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Nine members (Local Authority appointed)

North West RFDC:
One Chairman and four members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Eight members (Local Authority appointed)

Severn Trent RFDC:
One Chairman and seven members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
11 members (Local Authority appointed)

Southern RFDC:
One Chairman and five members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Nine members (Local Authority appointed)

South West RFDC:
One Chairman and five members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Nine members (Local Authority appointed)

Thames RFDC:
One Chairman and eight members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
12 members (Local Authority appointed)

Wessex RFDC:
One Chairman and four members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Eight members (Local Authority appointed)

Yorkshire RFDC:
One Chairman and three members (Defra appointed)
Two members (Environment Agency appointed)
Seven members (Local Authority appointed)

Floods

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many organisations coordinate control of particular areas of high risk from flooding in conjunction with non-governmental organisations; and if she will make a statement. [86220]

Mr. Morley: Defra has policy responsibility for flood and coastal defence in England. Operational responsibility for flooding from main rivers and the sea rests with the Environment Agency. The Agency is also responsible for flood warning arrangements and exercises a general supervision over all matters relating to flood defence. Operational responsibility for flooding from ordinary watercourses rests with the relevant local authority or, in areas where they exist, the relevant internal drainage board. Emergency planning arrangements are the responsibility of the local authority.

The responsibilities for flood and coastal defence are currently being reviewed along with the funding arrangements. I expect to make an announcement in the new year.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what alternative plans there are to the sluice for Bridgwater and the Parrett for the protection of Bridgwater and the surrounding area from flooding. [86226]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant to local operating authorities for flood defence capital works that meet certain criteria. However responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities, in this case the Environment Agency.

I understand that the Agency is undertaking studies into viable options for flood management measures for Bridgwater but as yet they have not submitted any proposals to Defra for grant aid.

Illegal Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to inform *(a)* residents and *(b)* visitors to the UK of the rule change on 1 January regarding the personal import allowances for animal products from their countries. [86577]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* We will provide information on the new rules for personal imports as part of our ongoing campaign to highlight to travellers the risks posed by illegal imports. This campaign has already used a variety of methods, including posters, leaflets, information videos, and interviews. Future publicity highlights include having a Defra presence at "Destinations 2003" and "The Holiday Show 2003". Our publicity campaign remains under constant review.

Specifically to highlight the new rules, the poster detailing the personal allowances for personal imports of plant and animal products is being updated. It will be displayed at ports of entry into the UK and aimed at travellers arriving from outside the EU.

We are continuing to work with our posts and embassies abroad to raise awareness of our import rules at points of departure.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many seizures of illegal imports there were, broken down by *(a)* weight and *(b)* region in each of the last five years. [86578]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: A central database of illegal animal product seizures notified to DEFRA was set up in April 2001.

From 31 March 2001 to 30 March 2002

Region	*Number of seizures*	*Weight (kg)*
England	2,040	113,082
Wales	2	13
Scotland	10	50
Northern Ireland	14	28
Total	2,066	113,173

From 31 March 2002 to 6 December 2002

Region	*Number of seizures*	*Weight (kg)*
England	2,042	29,707
Wales	4	23
Scotland	155	595
Northern Ireland	168	1,386
Total	2,369	31,711

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 230W, which regions have been targeted for additional checks on passenger baggage and freight for illegal imports. [86613]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: Additional checks are being carried out by teams at three major seaports and two airports. One of these teams will also operate at other airports around the country.

Specific details of staff and ports of operation could benefit potential smugglers, so we cannot make public this information.

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her answer of 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 237W, how many seizures of illegal imports of animal products in commercial consignments and personal baggage have been carried out under Regulation 8 of the Products of Animal Origin (Third Country Imports) (England) Regulations 2002 since 22 May 2002 . [86614]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: There have been 2,087 seizures of products of animal origin reported to us by the enforcement agencies since 22 May 2002.

Of these, 1,903 were in personal baggage, with a total weight of 16,598 kg, and 184 were in commercial consignments, with a total weight of 12,533 kg.

Landfill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what percentage of costs incurred by the Environment Agency in respect of landfill inspections were covered by charges levied, in the most recent year for which figures are available. [85844]

Mr. Meacher: 100 per cent. of landfill inspection costs are covered through charges.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* number and *(b)* total size was of landfill sites in the United Kingdom broken down by region, in each year since 1995. [85891]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: The number of landfill sites in England and Wales is provided in the table. Data on the numbers of sites before 2000 are not readily available because the Environment Agency used to collect information on the number of licences rather than number of sites (a site could have several licences). Data are not available for Scotland or Northern Ireland.

	2002–03	*2001–02*	*2000–01*
Anglian	151	171	224
Midlands	166	201	294
North East	186	216	255
North West	114	126	153
South West	100	113	132
Southern	78	101	123
Thames	98	110	111
Wales	68	81	91
Grand total	961	1,119	1,383

The following tables provide a breakdown, by Government Office region, of landfill capacity in 1998–99. Landfill capacity covers two types—open gate (open to anyone) and restricted access (usually in-house landfills for the private use of a single company). Similar figures for 2000–01 will be available shortly on the Agency's website once data have been quality assured. These data are based on surveys carried out every two years. The first survey was not commissioned until 1998.

Region	*Inert/C&D*	*Biodegradable*	*Co-disposal*	*Total*
East of England	9,412	26,527	65,391	101,330
East Midlands	14,167	15,810	41,802	71,779
London	3,949	15,303	358	19,610
North East	200	15,958	23,015	39,173
North West	12,712	6,255	57,860	76,827
South East	18,706	63,539	33,184	115,429
South West Wales[1]	8,221	19,839	21,319	49,379
West Midlands	8,178	13,805	55,754	77,737
Yorkshire and the Humber	8,473	32,384	43,431	84,288
National total	84,018	209,420	342,114	635,552

Region	Degradable	Cap&Cover	Inputs	Life expectancy
East of England	91,918	36,767.2	9509	4.8
East Midlands	57,612	23,044.8	3,678	7.8
London	15,661	6,264.4	1,234	6.3
North East	38,973	15,589.2	2,206	8.8
North West	64,115	25,646.0	6,437	5.0
South East	96,723	38,689.2	7,306	6.6
South West	41,158	16,463.2	3,669	5.6
Wales[1]	35,926	14,370.4	2,643	6.8
West Midlands	69,559	27,823.6	4,026	8.6
Yorkshire & the Number	75,815	30,326.0	5,439	7.0
National total	587,460	234,984	46,147	6.4

[1] Information split not available—total Wales landfill capacity 52,619,000 cubic metres

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* complaints, *(b)* court actions and *(c)* fines against landfill sites for problems related to (i) odours, (ii) water pollutions, (iii) air pollution and (iv) human health impact there were in each year since 1995, broken down by region. [85894]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* The data are not available in the form requested. Environment Agency reports have been collated centrally since April 2001 and so annual data are not available before this date. The following tables show the number of incidents broken down into impacts on water, land and air, and by region for the period April 2001 to March 2002. No specific record of impact on health is kept. It should be noted that each incident can be recorded as having an impact on more than one media. Therefore, adding records for impacts on single media will involve some double counting.

Region	Cat1 (major)	Cat2 (significant)	Cat3 (minor)	Cat4 (no impact)
Water impact				
Anglian	0	0	9	142
Wales	0	0	15	239
Midlands	0	2	8	119
North East	0	2	9	169
North West	0	0	19	1,105
South West	0	0	8	77
Southern	0	1	15	188
Thames	0	1	7	73
Total	0	6	90	2,112
Land impact				
Anglian	0	9	51	91
Wales	0	3	15	236
Midlands	0	1	26	102
North East	0	13	50	117
North West	0	2	36	1,086
South West	0	1	24	60
Southern	0	3	22	179
Thames	0	3	23	55
Total	0	35	247	1,926
Air impact				
Anglian	0	8	86	57
Wales	0	7	209	38
Midlands	0	2	91	36
North East	0	15	89	76
North West	0	196	868	60
South West	0	2	54	29
Southern	0	11	159	34
Thames	0	3	51	27
Total	0	244	1,607	357

In relation to court action and fines, data are available from 1999 from the National Enforcement Database.

Region	Year	Number of court actions	Number of fines	Total fines (£)
Midlands	1999	5	12	16,250
	2000	2	8	88,500
North East	2000	3	4	16,750
North West	2000	1	3	35,000
	2001	1	1	3,000
	2002	1	3	17,000
EA Wales	2000	2	3	23,000
	2001	3	4	14,500
Anglian	2002	1	4	60,000
South West	2002	1	2	2,500

Litter

Mr. Peter Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans the Government have to extend the new biodegradable carrier bag incentives to include other plastics. [86021]

Mr. Meacher: I am not aware of any incentive scheme aimed at biodegradable plastic carrier bags.

Farmgate and Retail

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average *(a)* farmgate and *(b)* retail price is of (i) one kilogram of (A) beef, (B) lamb, (C) pork, (D) chicken, (E) turkey, (F) bacon, (G) dessert apples, (H) potatoes, (I) tomatoes, (J) cauliflower and (K) peas, (ii) one pint of (A) milk, (B) cream, (C) yoghurt, (iii) one dozen eggs and (iv) one litre of (A) English wine and (B) brandy, distinguishing between (1) organic and (2) conventionally produced foodstuffs in each case. [85349]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The farmgate and retail prices of conventionally grown foodstuffs, where available, are shown in table 1. Prices are not collected for English wine or brandy. Small quantities of cream and yogurt are sold at the farmgate direct to consumers at retail prices. The amount of processing taking place between farmgate and retail varies from commodity to commodity; an indication is given in the table. Farm gate prices include produce destined for highly processed food, which is normally lower quality and sells at a lower price.

Limited information is available on prices of organically produced food. Indications of current farm gate prices are shown in table 2, where available, as provided by the Soil Association. There are no retail prices available.

Table 1: conventionally grown produce

£

Produce	*£ per*	*Farmgate value*	*Retail value*	*Indication of further processing*
Beef[1]	Kg	1.70	3.84	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Lamb[1]	Kg	2.36	4.84	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Pork[1]	Kg	0.94	2.26	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Chicken[2]	Kg	0.68	2.24	Slaughtered
Turkey[3]	Kg	1.16	—	—
Bacon[1]	Kg	0.96	3.54	Slaughtered, trimmed, cut and cured
Apples, dessert[4]	Kg	0.38	1.22	Packing and grading where off farm
Potatoes[5]	Kg	0.09	0.50	Packing and grading where off farm
Tomatoes[4]	Kg	0.73	1.43	Packing and grading where off farm
Cauliflower[4]	Kg	0.23	0.68	Packing and grading where off farm
Peas[3]	Kg	0.57	—	—
Milk[4]	Pint	0.10	0.37	Pasteurised, bottled and delivered
Eggs[2]	Dozen	0.54	1.64	Packing and grading where off farm

[1] Farmgate and retail prices provided by the Meat and Livestock Commission, average of January to September 2002.
[2] Retail prices provided by the ONS, average of Janaury to October 2002.
[3] Retail prices not available from the ONS.
[4] Retail prices from DEFRA's aggregate agricultural account, estimates for 2001–02 crop year.
[5] Retail prices from the expenditure and food survey.

Table 2: organically grown produce

£

Produce	*£ per*	*Farmgate value*
Beef	Kg	2.20–2.30
Lamb	Kg	2.50–2.60
Pork	Kg	1.90–2.10
Chicken[1]	Kg	2.22
Turkey	Kg	—
Bacon	Kg	—
Apples, dessert	Kg	0.90–1.10
Potatoes	Kg	0.25–0.30
Tomatoes	Kg	—
Cauliflower	Kg	[2]0.40–0.50
Peas	Kg	2.51
Milk[3]	Pint	0.18
Cream	Pint	—
Yoghurt	Pint	—
Eggs	Dozen	1.20–1.50

[1] Calculated from an average weight of 2.25 kg per chicken.
[2] Head.
[3] Price for milk sold as organic, does not include organic milk that is sold in the conventional market.

Nitrates

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what average level of nitrates there has been *(a)* within river courses and *(b)* in drinking water in the United Kingdom in each year since 1990, broken down by river course, type and region. [86407]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for Scotland and Wales falls to the relevant devolved administrations.

(a) Nitrate levels in river courses in England and Northern Ireland

England: The Environment Agency monitors nitrate levels in rivers in England as part of the General Quality Assessment (GQA) network. Average annual nitrate levels are published each year and regional breakdowns are available from the Environment Agency. Detailed data can be obtained via www.environment-agency.gov.uk. The recent Environment Agency publication "Rivers and Estuaries: a decade of improvement" contains details of the latest GQA nutrient monitoring data. This is available from the Environment Agency on 08459 333111 and from www.environment-agency.gov.uk/yourenv/eff/water/213902/river_qual/24904/?lang=_e&region.

Northern Ireland: Since the early 1990s the Department for Environment's Agency the Environment and Heritage Service has monitored nitrate levels on a monthly basis at approximately 260 river sites throughout Northern Ireland. In the period 1990 to 2001, a total of 45,109 samples have been analysed for nitrate and 13 samples (0.03 per cent.) have failed the 50mg NO_3/L standard laid down in the EC Nitrates Directive (91/676/EEC).

(b) Nitrate levels in drinking water in England and Northern Ireland

The Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 set a maximum standard for nitrate in drinking water at 50 milligrams per litre. This standard remains the same within the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 2000, which come into force on 25 December 2003.

England: It is not possible to give a breakdown of nitrate in drinking water by river course and region. The percentage of tests which failed to meet the nitrate standard within England and Wales has fallen from 2.8 in 1990 to 0.08 in 2000. In 2001 there was a small rise in the percentage of tests failing to 0.38. This is linked to the occurrence of nitrate being found in groundwater supplies, as a result of pollution from long term agricultural runoff.

The table shows the data in each of the years.

Year	Percentage contravening the standard
1990	2.8
1991	2.8
1992	1.9
1993	0.9
1994	0.8
1995	0.4
1996	0.1
1997	0.04
1998	0.05
1999	0.06
2000	0.08
2001	0.38

Where there has been a contravention of a standard which is not trivial and is likely to recur, the Drinking Water inspectorate requires the water company concerned to give a legally binding undertaking to take remedial action to achieve compliance. In the case of nitrate the simplest option is to blend the high nitrate containing water with low nitrate containing water, if available. Otherwise more complex treatment is needed.

Northern Ireland: Between 1 October 1994 (when Northern Ireland's Water Quality Regulations came into force) and the end of 2001 the nitrate standard in drinking water supplies was contravened on 16 occasions out of a total of 5,873 tests. The number and percentage of tests failing in each year is given in the following table.

The contraventions in 1998 occurred in one water supply zone. Blending action was taken to achieve compliance thereafter.

Year	Number of tests	Percentage contravening the standard
1995	1,216	0.00
1996	851	0.12
1997	809	0.12
1998	746	1.88
1999	777	0.00
2000	732	0.00
2001	742	0.00

Poultry Industry

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact of third world imports on the UK poultry industry; and what recent meetings she has had with the National Farmers Union and representatives of the poultry industry to discuss this. [84601]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* In common with other EU countries, the UK imports substantial quantities of poultry meat from third countries, particularly as a source of raw material for further processing. UK poultry producers therefore face significant competition from third country supplies.

I have had no recent meetings with the National Farmers Union on this issue. My most recent meeting with the poultry industry was on 3 December 2002, when I attended the annual awards ceremony of the Breeders and Hatcheries Sector Group of the British Poultry Council. Third country imports was one of the issues referred to at that event.

Organic Oilseed Rape

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the separation distances are between GM and non-GM or organic oilseed rape. [86611]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Separation distances have been applied to the Farm Scale Evaluation GM crop trials under the terms of a code of practice drawn up by the farming and industry body SCIMAC (Supply Chain Initiative on Modified Agricultural Crops). The following distances have applied in respect of oilseed rape:

Metres

	Separation distance in SCIMAC code where neighbouring oilseed rape crop is:	
	Conventionally grown	Organic
Oilseed rape variety: conventional varieties and restored hybrids	50	200
Varietal associations and partially restored hybrids	100	200

Parrett Catchment Project

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what power the Chairman of the Parrett catchment project has to assist in setting the budget of the Environment Agency. [86224]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett catchment project is an independent body. It is a local stakeholder group aiming to help the Environment Agency and others to direct investment in appropriate flood management and other measures to benefit the Parrett catchment area. This project has no part in setting budgets of the Environment Agency. Budgets for Environment Agency flood defence programmes are agreed by statutory Flood Defence Committees, including the Local Flood Defence Committee, which Mr. Humphrey Temperley also chairs. This is a separate role to his position as Chair of the Parrett catchment project.

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidelines she follows on the reappointment of the Chairman of the Parrett catchment project when his term is ended. [86225]

Mr. Morley: The Parrett catchment project is an independent body, as advised in my reply to the hon. Member's previous questions. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has no role in the appointment or reappointment of the Chairman of this project.

Pesticides

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the

(a) volume by weight and *(b)* total value of the export from the United Kingdom of pesticides produced in the United Kingdom, broken down by those which are (i) legal and (ii) illegal to use within the United Kingdom in each year since 1990. [86419]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs does not hold any details in respect of the export of pesticides from Great Britain as such information is not required for the regulation of pesticides in this country.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations control United Kingdom companies' *(a)* production and *(b)* export of pesticides which would be classified as illegal to use within the European Union; what recent changes have taken place and are planned to these regulations; and if she will make a statement. [86420]

Mr. Morley: The United Kingdom's pesticide legislation does not extend to the manufacture of pesticides or to those pesticides intended solely for exportation from the United Kingdom. The fact that a pesticide may not be approved in this country does not, in itself, prevent companies from selling such products in another country. The product would, of course, have to comply with the other country's own legislation.

The Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure (PIC) for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, among other things, gives importing countries the choice to decide which hazardous chemicals they receive and exclude. At present the Convention covers 22 'banned' pesticides.

European Community Regulation 2455/92 concerning the export and import of dangerous chemicals provides for export notification procedures for other restricted substances and pesticides. Negotiations on a replacement for this regulation are in the final stages. I welcome these proposals which, as well as increasing the number of chemicals covered by the regulation, will also enable the European Community to approve the Rotterdam Convention and all member states to legally ratify it.

Recycling

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs for what reason she estimates the percentage of glass recycled decreased last year. [85837]

Mr. Meacher: Most of the glass recovered for recycling is in packaging. The tonnages of glass packaging waste recycled in the UK in the last few years show an upward trend, rather than a decrease. The figures are as follows:

	Number
1998	503,800
1999	582,577
2000	715,037
2001	735,594

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many *(a)* mobile phones and *(b)* printer cartridges were (i) recycled, (ii) reused overseas and (iii) disposed of within the UK waste stream in each year since 1990; [85852]

(2) what research has been conducted *(a)* by and *(b)* for her Department relating to the recycling and reuse of (i) mobile phones and (ii) printer cartridges. [85854]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* There are no accurate figures on the number of mobile phones discarded in the UK, although it is estimated that around 15 million are replaced each year. An independent consumer survey carried out as part of a pilot study in 1997 for 'Mobile Take Back UK' shows that in the UK very few phones are actually discarded. The majority of people keep old phones, give them to relatives, or store them for emergency use. However, a number of schemes are now collecting mobile phones for refurbishment and recycling. A certain number of refurbished phones are also sold to eastern Europe, Asia and Africa where there is a strong second hand market.

Approximately 40 million printer cartridges are sold annually. Remanufactured supplier cartridges account for between 15–20 per cent. of the sector.

No research has been done to date either by or for the Department on the recycling and reuse of mobile phones and printer cartridges.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to increase funding for local authority recycling schemes. [86284]

Mr. Meacher: The 2002 Spending Review increased the local authority Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS) spending block, which includes waste management. EPCS spending will increase by £671 million by 2005–06.

Over the same period, Defra has been allocated £355 million of future PFI credits for waste projects. This is around 60 per cent. more than the provision in SR2000. We will use these funds to help local authorities increase their recycling levels.

The 112 schemes that were approved in the first round of the ring-fenced National Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund of £140 million for local authority recycling are now receiving funding and being put into action. A further 142 schemes have now been successful in the second round of bidding with funding amounting to 76.3 million next year.

In addition to these funds, following the publication of the report on waste by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit, a ministerial group has been formed to take forward their recommendations, specifically including those relating to funding for waste.

Sewage

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the sites in the United Kingdom where untreated sewage is disposed of at sea from *(a)* short outfall pipes, *(b)* long outfall pipes and *(c)* shipping; what assessment of water quality has been made in each case; and what plans there are to strengthen treatment. [85847]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* The question as it relates to Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved Administrations. For England and Northern Ireland the position is as follows.

Sewage discharges from land to coastal waters

Through our implementation of the requirements of the Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC) significant improvements have and are being made to raise standards of sewage treatment. For example, as at 31 October 2002, 99 per cent. of sewage discharges (539 of 544) from treatment works serving over 15,000 people in England received primary and secondary treatment.

The following table sets out the untreated discharges from communities with over 15,000 inhabitants in England and Northern Ireland, the length of their outfalls, an assessment of water quality (against the mandatory and guideline standards of the Bathing Waters Directive), and expected date for provision of primary and secondary treatment. These dates are dependent on the resolution of planning and/or funding issues.

Discharge name	*Outfall length*	*Water quality situation*	*Treatment expected (primary and secondary)*
Bangor (NI)	Short	Regular passes of mandatory standard	December 2008
Brighton (E)	Long	Regular passes of mandatory and guidelines standards	June 2007
Donaghadee (NI)	Short	No identified impact on receiving waters	December 2008
Hastings and Bexhill (E)	Long	Regular passes of mandatory and guidelines standards	March 2003
Larne (Sandy Bay) (NI)	Short	Regular passes of mandatory standard—although failed in 2002	September 2005
Margate and Broadstairs (E)	Long	Regular passes of mandatory and guidelines standards	March 2006
Portrush (NI)	Short	Regular passes of mandatory standard	December 2008
Torquay (E)	Short	Regular passes of mandatory and guidelines standards	Early 2004

As required by the directive we expected, by 31 December 2005, to provide secondary treatment for two discharges in Northern Ireland from communities with over 10,000 inhabitants, and appropriate treatment for 19 discharges below this threshold.

In England it is Government policy that all coastal discharges from communities with more that 2,000 inhabitants receive a minimum of secondary treatment. Consequently 20 discharges above this threshold are to receive this by 31 December 2005, and a further 22 below this threshold are to receive appropriate treatment.

Sewage discharges from shipping

The International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution from Ships (MARPOL 73/78) has an Annex on Regulations for the Prevention of Pollution by Sewage from Ships. Although the UK ratified this Annex in 1995, it was not until 27 September 2002 that the entry into force requirements were met at the International Maritime Organisation. The UK has 12 months from that date to implement legislation bringing it into force.

The legislation will apply to new ships of 400 gross tonnage and above; new ships of less than 400 tonnage which are certified to carry more than 15 persons; existing ships of 400 gross tonnage and above, five years after the date of entry into force of the Annex and existing ships of less than 400 gross tonnage which are certified to carry more than 15 persons, five years after the date of entry into force of the Annex.

Under the regulations, sewage can be discharged from ships using a treatment plant anywhere. Ships using a comminuting and disinfecting system can only discharge sewage more than three nautical miles from land. Sewage from a holding tank can only be discharged 12 nautical miles from land, at a moderate rate and when the ship is travelling at a speed of four knots or over. States can opt for less stringent discharge requirements in waters under their jurisdiction.

Snowfall

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the historical data which she collates on snowfall; and what the predicted future annual number of days when there is snowfall are for *(a)* London and *(b)* Edinburgh in (i) 2010, (ii) 2020, (iii) 2030 and (iv) 2050. [86408]

Mr. Meacher: Defra does not collate historical data on snowfall. However, the Met Office, which is an agency of the Ministry of Defence, records daily snowfall frequency and amount at 80 stations in the UK. Most of these records go back to 1971. In April this year, the Department published new climate change scenarios for the UK. These scenarios include information on total winter snowfall amounts, but not number of snowfall days. The scenarios show that snowfall in the London and Edinburgh areas could be reduced by between 55 and 90 per cent. by the 2080s (compared to the 1961–90 baseline), depending on the degree of future climate change. Scaling these figures back to the years in question gives the following estimates of the reduction in snowfall amount at both locations, depending on whether there is a low or high degree of climate change:

Year	*Percentage reduction*
2010	17–30
2020	22–38
2030	27–47
2050	37–65

These figures represent general trends, not predictions of the amount of snowfall in specific years, which will be greatly influenced by natural year-to-year variability, particularly in the first few decades of the century. Further information is available in the full report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the predicted changes in the frequency of the number of days when there is snowfall in the United Kingdom under future scenarios of climate change, including regional variations. [86412]

Mr. Meacher: In April this year, the Department published new "Climate Change Scenarios for the UK". The scenarios do not contain an analysis of the changes in the number of snowfall days, but show that climate change will cause the amount of snowfall to decline significantly throughout the UK in the future. By the 2080s, large areas of the UK are likely to experience quite long sequences of snowless winters. Coastal areas and the English lowlands are likely to show the largest percentage reductions (up to 90 per cent. or more by the 2080s compared to 1961–90 baseline), while the Scottish Highlands and parts of Northern Ireland may experience smaller percentage reductions (50 per cent. or less).

Further information is available in the full report in the Libraries of both Houses.

Timber Procurement

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the joint guidance issued by DEFRA and Her Majesty's Treasury, through the Office of Government Commerce, on Environmental Issues in Purchasing has been updated to take account of Government requirements that all timber purchased by Departments comes from legal and sustainable sources; and if she will make a statement. [83929]

Mr. Meacher: OGC and Defra have agreed to revise their joint note on "Environmental issues in procurement" to reflect the Commission's interpretative communications on environmental and social issues and other developments such as the new EC procurement directive. It will also refer to new initiatives such as the Government's committed aim to procure its timber and timber products from legal and sustainably managed sources. Advice on the timber procurement strategy is currently given in Section 3 of the Green Guide for Buyers which, with other advice, is on the "Sustainable Development in Government" website. URL: development.gov.uk/sdig/improving/contextf.htm.

This will also be updated. My officials have also provided Departments with a model specification clause for inclusion in contracts for timber procurement.

Turkey Producers

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has of the UK production of turkeys in the last five years. [84109]

Mr. Morley: UK turkey meat production over the last five years is as follows.

	Tonnes
1997	293,000
1998	294,000
1999	267,000
2000	255,000
2001	254,000

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with turkey producers trade associations about the likely UK turkey production for the next 12 months. [84110]

Mr. Morley: I have had no discussions with turkey producers on this issue.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which recent EU directives affect domestic turkey production. [84111]

Mr. Morley: The principal regulation covering EU turkey production is Council Regulation (EEC) No. 2777/75 (as amended) which establishes the common organisation of the poultry meat market. Council Regulation (EEC) No. 1906/90 and Commission Regulation (EEC) No. 1538/91 (both as amended) implement harmonised standards for trade and quality.

Turkey producers also have to meet the requirements of relevant horizontal legislation on a number of other issues including welfare, slaughter and feed.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the availability of free-range, domestic and organically produced turkeys for Christmas 2002. [84112]

Mr. Morley: I expect there to be adequate supplies of turkey to meet consumer demand. The Christmas market is important to the turkey industry and accounts for nearly 40 per cent. of the 36 million turkeys produced each year. Most of the turkeys in the UK are reared indoors. Around 1.5 million turkeys are reared for Christmas as traditional farm fresh. Only 1 per cent. of the UK's annual turkey production is either free-range or organically produced.

Waste

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the *(a)* environmental and *(b)* financial implications of (i) waste incineration, (ii) landfill dumping and (iii) recycling of household waste. [85329]

Mr. Meacher: The waste hierarchy set out in 'Waste Strategy 2000' (from reduction, through re-use, recycling, composting, and energy recovery to disposal to landfill) sets out the broad relative environmental implications of the different approaches to waste.

In deciding which form of treatment or disposal to adopt in each case, decision makers need to take account of what is the Best Practicable Environmental Option. The costs and environmental impact of both the facility and the associated transport of waste can vary greatly in each case.

However, the general position on the costs of each option was taken into account by the Prime Minister's Strategy Unit in the recent report on waste. In response to that, the Government have already announced that they will consult on increasing the landfill tax to £35 per tonne for active wastes.

The Pre-Budget Report 2002 announced the Government's intention to commission a review of the environmental and health effects of all waste management and disposal options, including incineration. The case for using economic instruments for incineration will be considered in light of this work and in consultation with other stakeholders.

Water Quality

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment has been conducted by *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the Environment Agency of the risk to river water quality from discharges from (i) abandoned mine workings, (ii) landfill sites, (iii) radioactive waste storage sites and (iv) animal burial mounds; and if she will make a statement. [86409]

Mr. Morley: (i) The Environment Agency and the Department hold a database of discharges from abandoned mines, with those presenting the greatest risk to the environment on an agreed "priority listing".

(ii) A full assessment of pollution risks and the preventative measures needed to protect surface waters is made when waste management licence applications are considered under the Environmental Protection Act (EPA) (1990) Pt II, and under the Pollution Prevention Control (PPC) Act (2000). The agency has recently begun a programme of work under the EU Landfill Directive to review all operating landfill sites.

(iii) The agency has not carried out any assessments of risks to river quality from sites at which radioactive waste is stored. However, the agency undertakes an extensive programme of monitoring for radioactivity in the environment and would carry out a specific assessment of a particular site if this monitoring, or any other information, indicated cause for concern. For example, the principal site for the disposal of low-level radioactive waste is the Drigg site in Cumbria. The agency recently required BNFL to submit radiological assessments for the site, which indicated that the levels of risks generally meet current regulatory requirements and that the site can be operated safely for the foreseeable future. The agency is carrying out an independent appraisal of the BNFL assessment.

(iv) The agency recently undertook a specific water quality monitoring programme at selected farm-burial sites which has now been handed over to DEFRA. DEFRA also undertakes water quality monitoring of surface and groundwater at all mass burial sites. The agency continues to audit and monitor water quality at all its routine monitoring points.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the *(a)* European Directives and *(b)* other regulations under which pollution to rivers from discharges from (i) abandoned mine workings, (ii) landfill sites, (iii) radioactive waste storage sites and (iv) animal burial mounds are covered. [86410]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency and the Department hold a database of discharges regulation of discharges to controlled waters is exercised through the following measures:

(i) From abandoned mine workings, The Mines (Notice of Abandonment) Regulations 1998 under the Water Resources Act 1991, as amended by the Environment Act 1995.

(ii) From landfill sites, Waste Framework Directive 1975 (75/442/EEC), as amended by 1991 (91/156/EEC) and Council Directive 1999/31/EC on the Landfill of Waste, Implemented in England and Wales by the Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (SI 2002 No. 1559).

(iii) There are no directives or regulations relating specifically to discharges to rivers from radioactive waste storage sites, but Directive 96/29/Euratom and the Radioactive Substances Act 1993 are relevant to the control of radioactive discharges generally.

(iv) Animal carcass disposal is covered by Council Directives 90/667/EEC (Animal Waste Directive) and 80/68/EEC (Groundwater Directive), the Animal By-Products Order (ABPO) (1999) and the Groundwater Regulations (1998).

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Bali Bombing

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the relatives of the Bali bomb victims, who went to Bali in the aftermath of the bombing, were assisted by his Department with the costs of *(a)* hotels and *(b)* telephone calls to the United Kingdom; and what assistance was provided towards funeral costs. [86836]

Mr. Straw: On 15 October, in the aftermath of the Bali bomb , I announced a package of measures to help the victims of the attack and their families. This included making arrangements to reimburse the costs of bringing home the bodies of those who died, of the medical evacuation of the injured and of paying the travel and certain accommodation costs of up to two relatives of the dead and injured who wished to travel to the region. 12 families have used the package to travel to Bali.

We did not meet the costs of telephone calls, but Vodaphone UK provided each family with two mobile phones, with one month's unlimited calls free of charge.

We paid the repatriation costs for all British victims of the Bali bomb and for ensuring the deceased arrived at their local undertakers. The package did not cover the cost of funeral expenses.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress has been made by his Department in setting up a Bali appeal fund; and if he will make a statement. [86839]

Mr. Straw: We have no plans to set up a Bali appeal fund. It is open to the families and relatives of the victims of Bali to do this if they wish. Some families have already set up private trusts in the name of the family member they lost.

Emergency Response Team

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what personnel and equipment his Department's Emergency Response Team has. [86838]

Mr. Straw: Personnel, both in the UK and overseas, have volunteered to join the Rapid Deployment Teams, each of which are likely to comprise eight staff. They have a range of skills including consular, media, management, organisational and communications skills. The teams are being equipped with mobile telephones, satellite telephones, laptop computers, printers, fax machines, digital cameras, hand-held radios, office stationery and a first-aid kit.

IT Systems

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much the overspend was on its new IT system; and what fee was paid to consultants on the new IT systems. [82532]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 25 November]*: The FCO's major IT system is Firecrest, developed and delivered by FCO Services since 1997, providing a modern office-wide system to over 10,000 staff in the UK and overseas. The initial programme was expanded over time, and revised budgets approved in step. The total capital costs to date are £106 million compared with initial estimates totalling £118 million. Annual running costs are now around £19 million. The confidential version of this should be completed on budget by mid-2003.

Using this infrastructure, two programmes, Prism and Focus, are being developed. The aim of Prism is to provide an integrated world-wide financial and management accounting and human resources system. The planned expenditure for the programme from inception to the expiry of the contract in early 2009 was £80 million (including a £53 million contract with CGEY). This estimate has now risen to £90 million. Expenditure so far has been £28.3 million, in line with the planned budget. Focus is a programme designed to provide the FCO with a new global registry and intranet, allowing more efficient management, sifting, storage and retrieval of information. A contract for £10.5 million was awarded to Fujitsu in January 2002, as part of an initial budgeted cost of 23 million over six years. This estimate has now risen to £42 million because of the increased scope of the project. Given the scale of this increase and other relevant factors the Secretary of State is conducting an urgent review of the whole future of this programme. A further announcement will be made as soon as possible.

Mombasa Bombing

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department's Emergency Response Team was put on alert immediately following the Mombasa bombing. [86837]

Mr. Straw: Yes. A Rapid Deployment Team was put on standby to travel to Kenya as soon as news broke about the Mombasa bombing. It was stood down once it became clear that no British nationals were involved in the incident.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Adult Learning

Dr. Francis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which organisations the Government have consulted on the review of the funding for adult learning; and what further consultation is planned. [82888]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government have already consulted a wide range of external organisations following the announcement of the review of funding of adult learning last July. The first stage of this has included a series of regional Skill Summits. The consultations so far has included representatives from colleges, employers, training providers, voluntary organisations, educational representative bodies, and learners themselves.

The Government welcome the interest that the review has generated and the process of consultation will continue until the review is concluded in the summer of next year.

Classroom Assistants

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence he has assessed on the use of classroom assistants to mind classes in place of teachers. [86493]

Mr. Miliband: On 22 October we published the "Developing the role of school support staff" consultation document in which we set out our plans for enhancing the role played by support staff in support of teachers and pupils, as opposed to replacing teachers with support staff. The paper drew on case study material of how schools are already making more effective use of different kinds of support staff and consideration of research carried out by a range of organisations, including Ofsted. The paper proposes for the first time to regulate the involvement of support staff in teaching and learning, based on the principle that qualified teachers must always have responsibility for ensuring high standards within a system of supervision and support staff must be suitably trained for the activities they undertake. The way in which the proposals are taken forward will depend on the outcomes of the consultation. Copies of the consultation document have been placed in the Library of the House.

Connexions Service

Mr. Rooney: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the timetable is for the National Audit Office Review of the establishment of the Connexions Service arising out of the Learning and Skills Act 2000. [86990]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is a matter for the Comptroller and Auditor General to decide which subjects to review and whether or not to report to Parliament on them. As the proposed study on the Connexions Service is still at the feasibility stage, and the Comptroller and Auditor General has not yet approved a full-scale study, it would be inappropriate at this stage to commit him to a definitive timetable.

In general, parliamentary questions about the work of the National Audit Office should be directed to the right hon. Alan Williams, Chair of the Public Accounts Commission.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evidence he has assessed on the change in the number of supply teachers hours worked in *(a)* primary schools and *(b)* secondary schools over the last two years for which figures are available. [86491]

Mr. Miliband: The total number of occasional teachers with contracts of less than one month, working for the whole day of the survey date, fell from 19,600 in January 2001 to 17,500 in January 2002. In the nursery and primary phase, the number of occasional teachers went down by 1,900 to 10,100 in January 2002, and in the secondary sector, by 200 to 6,400. There were also 1,000 occasionals in special schools and providing education outside of school in 2002 (1,100 in 2001). Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred. Information on the number of hours worked is not collected centrally.

Truancy (West Sussex)

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many children played truant from schools in West Sussex each day in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what plans he has to tackle this. [84762]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department does not hold absence data for any particular day, only for the total period from the start of the academic year to the end of the spring term (i.e. September to May) each academic year. The number of pupils absent for at least one half day due to unauthorised absence in West Sussex is as follows:

Academic year[1]	*Number of pupils absent for at least one half day*	*Number of day pupil of compulsory school age*
1997–98	9,807	89,626
1998–99	10,877	91,568
1999–2000	10,743	93,171
2000–01	13,438	94,177
2001–02	12,493	94,885

[1] September to May

Source:
Pupil Absence Survey

Truancy is a multi-faceted and long-term problem which requires a range of responses. We have targeted areas that have experienced high levels of truancy with intensive support and there is emerging evidence that initiatives are beginning to have an impact.

Recently initiatives include: a Fast-Track to Prosecution pathfinder starting in January 2003 across a number of LEAs will focus on multi-agency early intervention to address truancy; and a national exercise of intensive truancy sweeps taking place this month which will increase the focus on school attendance as a community issue. This is backed up by a sustained publicity campaign raising the profile of school non-attendance.

Other current activities include: requiring LEAs and schools to set targets for improvement through Education Development Plans; providing funding for electronic registration systems for 525 schools with high rates of unauthorised absence; and conducting research into the causes of absence from school in order to fully understand the issues.

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 29 October 2002, regarding a constituent. [86874]

Margaret Hodge: I replied today to the hon. Member's letter of 29 October on 5 December 2002.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

River Nile

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her officials have had with representatives of *(a)* British water companies and *(b)* Water UK on water retention around the Nile basin. [86755]

Clare Short: DFID have not held discussions with UK companies specifically on the Nile Basin. However, DFID is also supporting a range of initiatives to encourage private sector involvement to improve access to water and sanitation, while ensuring that services are provided at an affordable price to the poor.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the governments of those countries through which the River Nile flows on effecting a common policy towards water use. [86754]

Clare Short: DFID has agreed to support the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI), which encompasses the 10 riparian countries in a programme of dialogue and benefit sharing for the protection and development of the waters of the Nile. DFID has joined World bank facilitated discussions with riparian countries and a number of bilateral donors. DFID has pledged £3.3 million in support of NBI.

St. Helena

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her timetable is for airport development on St. Helena; what the prospects are for private sector co-funding; and whether decisions will have been made by 1 July 2003. [86488]

Clare Short: The St. Helena Government, with our assistance, intends to invite proposals for private sector involvement. The future timetable should become clearer early next year.

TREASURY

Terrorism (Insurance)

12. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy in respect of insurance against acts of terrorism. [85259]

Dawn Primarolo: We have looked carefully at issues for the insurance market following the appalling attacks of 11 September 2001. Following a review the Pool Re scheme is being extended to enable insurers to offer terrorism insurance for commercial property damage and business interruption against a wider range of risks.

Community Amateur Sports Clubs

13. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many sports clubs have successfully applied for tax exemptions for Community Amateur Sports Clubs. [85260]

John Healey: As at 29 November 2002,476 clubs had applied for registration with the Inland Revenue as community amateur sports clubs.

Of those, 164 had so far been registered. A list of registered clubs is published on the Inland Revenue website, and is updated on a monthly basis.

Poverty

14. **Mr. Tom Harris:**To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the role of the Treasury in pressing for co-ordinated international action to tackle world poverty. [85261]

John Healey: In discussions with fellow finance ministers, the IMF and the World Bank, the Chancellor of the Exchequer is championing a new International Finance Facility (IFF) to finance the investment needed to tackle world poverty. The EU and US have pledged $50 billion that is needed to reach the Millennium Development Goals.

In addition, the Treasury continues to work with DfiD and No. 10 to press our international partners to follow UK's lead on:

Aid effectiveness

Additional debt relief

G8 Africa action plan

Improving contribution of aid to improvements in health and education

Voluntary Sector

16. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures he is taking to support voluntary sector organisations. [85264]

John Healey: The Government are committed to supporting the work of voluntary and community organisations. Following the cross cutting review of the role of the voluntary and community sector in service delivery, the Spending Review 2002 settlement for the Active Community Unit is £188 million and an additional £125 million has been allocated for futurebuilders. Following recent Budget changes, including the Budget 2000 Getting Britain Giving tax package, the value of tax incentives for charities are now worth around £2 billion a year. The Strategy Unit is consulting on improving the legal and regulatory framework for the sector, and the Chancellor and Home Secretary recently published a discussion document setting out how the Government intend to continue to promote a culture of giving and volunteering.

New Towns

17. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Treasury was consulted by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister before the Office's response to the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee's Report, the New Towns: Their Problems and Future. [85265]

Mr. Boateng: The response was cleared collectively across Government in the normal way.

Mapeley Steps Contactor Ltd.

18. **Mr. Chope:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he last met the director of Mapeley Steps Contactor Ltd. to discuss the maintenance of accommodation occupied by Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise. [85266]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise are responsible for the accommodation they occupy under the contract with Mapeley for serviced accommodation. The Chancellor has, therefore, not met the directors to discuss these matters.

Euro

19. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the £/euro exchange rate. [85267]

Ruth Kelly: The Government do not comment on day-to-day movements in the exchange rate.

Competitiveness

20. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he received in advance of the pre-Budget report on Government policy and UK competitiveness; and if he will make a statement. [85268]

John Healey: The Chancellor meets regularly with representatives of industry to discuss a wide range of issues, including the pre-Budget report.

PBR 2002 continues the Government's programme of microeconomic reform, targeting historic weakness in the key drivers of productivity performance:

Strengthening the competition regime through the Enterprise Act

Promoting enterprise by modernising the UK's business tax regime, and promoting an entrepreneurial culture

Supporting science and innovation through the Government's comprehensive science strategy, and announcing two complementary reviews into business innovation and university-business links

Improving UK skills through measures to support the expansion and improvement of the Modern Apprenticeship scheme, and by expanding the employer training pilots to improve work force skills

Promoting investment by reforming the planning system.

21. **Dr. Palmer**: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his discussions within the EU on reforms to the Stability and Growth Pact. [85269]

Ruth Kelly: I refer my hon. Friend to the comments made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at Treasury oral questions on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 413–16.

Mr. Brazier: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he received in advance of the pre-Budget report from members of the manufacturing industry regarding competitiveness. [85275]

John Healey: The Chancellor meets regularly with representatives of manufacturing industry to discuss a wide range of issues, including the pre-Budget report.

The pre-Budget report confirms the Government's agenda to promote productivity, growth and employment. The Government are demonstrating their support for manufacturers by:

Making enhanced investment allowances for small and medium sized firms permanent.

Providing R&D tax credits to all companies, which will overwhelmingly benefit manufacturers, who undertake most of the UK's business R&D.

Creating venture capital funds in every English region providing £270 million (including up to £8 million of Government funding) for investment in small firms with high growth potential.

Establishing the Small Business Service to ensure that the interests and concerns of small firms are properly reflected in Government policy and programmes.

Strengthening the Regional Development Agencies (RDA), whose key role is promoting business efficiency, investment and competitiveness.

Establishing regional centres of manufacturing excellence in every region of England and Wales.

Debt

22. **Ann McKechin:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the impact of the HIPC debt relief initiative in delivering a sustainable exit from debt for all eligible countries. [85270]

John Healey: The UK Government have been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and continues to press for the rapid and full implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

The Treasury closely monitors Highly Indebted Poor Countries' throughout the process of the HIPC initiative and follows their progress with International Monetary Fund (IMF) programmes.

Indeed, when the spring 2002 meetings of the IMF and the World bank highlighted the threat to debt sustainability from the global economic slowdown and weaker commodity prices, the UK argued strongly that we should be prepared to be proactive and flexible in providing additional debt relief at Completion Point—the stage at which countries have their debts irrevocably cancelled to ensure a robust exit from unsustainable debt.

In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly Special Session in May, the Chancellor called for richer countries to provide a further US $1 billion to the HIPC initiative to finance more realistic and generous debt relief. And at the recent IMF/World bank meetings in Washington, the international community agreed the need for up to $1 billion of further debt relief for Highly Indebted Poor Countries. So I am pleased to confirm that the UK, joined by 16 other donors, have so far made firm commitments totalling $850 million to the HIPC Trust Fund. And EU member states have called on the Commission to make a contribution through the European Development Fund. This will benefit 26 Highly Indebted Poor Countries.

Debt sustainability over the longer term is an issue that goes beyond the financing of the initiative though. At their summit meeting in Kananaskis in June 2002, G7 leaders asked the IMF and the World bank to prepare a comprehensive review of debt sustainability, and going forward asked them to ensure that forecasts of debt sustainability are made on the basis of prudent and cautious assumptions about growth and exports.

We are determined that the HIPC initiative should provide a robust exit from unsustainable debt. That is why we have been forcing the debate on the use of voluntary additional bilateral debt relief. Although under HIPC rules creditors are typically only required to provide 90 per cent. relief on bilateral debts, many bilateral creditors (including the G7 countries) provide additional relief to 100 per cent. on a voluntary basis.

This extra relief is currently being included in the calculations of any additional debt relief provided at Completion Point to ensure countries exit the HIPC initiative with a debt to exports ratio of 150 per cent. This means that currently G7 countries are effectively subsidising other creditors. The UK has proposed that voluntary additional debt relief should be excluded from calculations, and this would clearly define the burden sharing among all creditors, both bilateral and multilateral, in support of the HIPC initiative.

Moreover it would mean that this additional voluntary debt relief would be truly additional, and allow countries to exit the process in a more favourable position than the agreed sustainability threshold. We are currently working to build international support for this policy.

Child Poverty

23. **Kali Mountford:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made to relieve child poverty since 1997. [85272]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government have a PSA target to reduce by a quarter the number of children in low-income households by a quarter by 2004–05, as a contribution towards the broader target of halving child poverty by 2010 and eradicating it by 2020. Low-income households are defined as those with less than 60 per cent. of contemporary median income. Progress will be reported against the 1998–99 baseline figures of 3.1 children in low-income households before housing costs, and 4.2 million after housing costs.

By 2000–01 the number of children in low-income households had fallen by 300,000 after housing costs and by 400,000 before housing costs. This means that we are a third of the way to reaching the 2004 PSA target in a third of the time.

Low income is of course central to poverty. But poverty is a complex, multi-dimensional issue, affecting many other aspects of children's lives, including health, housing, the quality of their environment and opportunities to learn. In April 2002 the Government launched a consultation exercise to decide the best way to measure poverty in the long-term, to help target policies and enable the Government to be held to account over their long-term targets. Results will be published by spring 2003.

Equitable Life

24. **Mr. Baron:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on measures he has taken to end the uncertainty facing policyholders of Equitable Life. [85273]

Ruth Kelly: The future of Equitable Life is a matter for the Board of the Society and its members. Equitable Life is regulated by the Financial Services Authority which has been working to ensure that clear and appropriate information is made available to policyholders by the Society and that the management of the Society comply with regulatory requirements.

The Government announced in August last year that an independent inquiry under Lord Penrose would investigate and report on the events surrounding Equitable Life.

Economic Stability

25. **Mr. MacDougall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the impact of increases in public expenditure on the stability of the economy, with special reference to *(a)* employment and *(b)* inward investment. [85274]

Ruth Kelly: Sound management of the public finances has meant that, during a time of global economic weakness and uncertainty, fiscal policy has supported monetary policy and smoothed the economic cycle by allowing the automatic stabilisers to operate in full.

As Government spending plans have come on stream, the public sector has contributed strongly to employment and the resilience of the labour market. Increases in the number of work force jobs in public administration, education and health sectors have averaged about 30,000 a quarter over the past year.

The platform of economic stability delivered by the Government's macroeconomic framework has encouraged inward investment. The UK was ranked second in the world at attracting inward investment in 2001.

Welfare to Work

27. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the connection between his economic policy and welfare to work. [85276]

John Healey: Macroeconomic stability is a pre-requisite for delivering the Government's aim of employment opportunity for all. The Government's macroeconomic policy, based on low inflation and sound public finances, has successfully maintained stability and growth.

Against this background of stability, the Government have also introduced microeconomic reforms to improve the functioning of the labour market and ensure that employment opportunity is extended to all individuals in all parts of Britain. These include Welfare to Work policies that help the unemployed achieve a successful return to work, and extend help and support to areas and groups suffering from the greatest employment disadvantage.

This strategy has helped to deliver a dynamic and flexible labour market, with employment at record highs and both International Labour Organisation (ILO) unemployment and claimant unemployment close to their lowest levels since the 1970s. Since 1997, claimant unemployment in Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush has fallen from 7 per cent. to 3.9 per cent.

Infrastructure

29. **Mr. Beard:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to make firm financial commitment to major transport infrastructure projects once they have been started. [85278]

Mr. Boateng: Under the 10-year plan we have made a significant commitment to planning and procurement of projects that reach an appropriate stage, some of which were announced by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport in the House on Tuesday.

Where projects require public subsidy, they will be assessed and our commitment will be given to those where value for money and affordability are demonstrated throughout the life of the project.

For PFI/PPP projects our commitment over the life of the project is contractual and tied to delivery.

Investment

30. **Mr. Tyler:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the reasons for the change in investment by business in 2002. [85279]

John Healey: Business investment in 2002 has shown further faltering across the world's major economies, reflecting weaker global prospects and heightened uncertainty. A full assessment is given in Annex A of the pre-Budget Report (Cm 5664).

Manufacturing Industry

31. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further steps he is taking to help manufacturing industry in deprived areas. [85281]

John Healey: The Chancellor announced in the Pre-Budget Report the creation of 2,000 Enterprise Areas, which form the focus for Government support to businesses in disadvantaged areas. This is reflected in a number of new measures, which will benefit manufacturers in these areas. In particular:

An exemption from stamp due for all commercial property transactions, subject to state aids approval.

A special package of support from the Inland Revenue and a commitment from HM Customs and Excise to examine how their support services for businesses can be enhanced and targeted more effectively in disadvantaged areas.

New grants from the Business Incubation Fund with higher levels of funding in disadvantaged areas.

Legislation for Business Planning Zones (BPZs), which will provide a more flexible planning regime for businesses in designated areas of England.

32. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of trends in manufacturing output in the south east since January 2001. [85282]

John Healey: Manufacturing output in the UK has slowed since January 2001, clearly influenced by the synchronised global economic slowdown, the collapse in the demand for ICT related goods and the heightened uncertainty over the outlook for the world economy. The Office for National Statistics does not collect regional data on manufacturing output. However, both the Confederation of British Industry and the British Chamber of Commerce surveys for the third quarter of 2002 reported that businesses expect output to increase over the coming months, with the latter reporting the south east region with the highest balance of manufacturers expecting turnover to increase.

Defence Contingency Fund

33. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the additional contingency fund set aside in his pre-Budget statement for defence purposes. [85283]

Mr. Boateng: The £1 billion special reserve is available to cover costs of military and overseas operations this year to ensure the UK can continue to play a leading role in the global war against terror.

No decisions have been taken about any future UK military contribution in the Middle East, although prudent contingency planning is taking place. Indeed no UK contribution will be needed if Saddam complies with UNSCR 1441.

£1 billion represents a prudent allocation at this time but makes no assumption about the nature of any UK contribution to international efforts in Iraq or elsewhere.

Africa (Poverty)

34. **Jeff Ennis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on what action he is taking to combat poverty in Africa. [85284]

John Healey: This year the UK has given special attention to Africa. At the G8 summit in June, members endorsed a new partnership for Africa's development. We share with African leaders the vision that a new outlook is needed and will require a strong commitment to reform and sustained political leadership by Africa itself. In turn, developed countries must share the benefits of globalisation, ensuring Africa can benefit from the opportunities it provides. The UK is taking forward actions in all the areas covered by the G8 Africa action plan as part of our ongoing international development efforts. And the 2002 Spending Review established, for the first time, a £1 billion annual bilateral programme for Africa by 2005–06.

National Insurance

35. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what figures he estimates would be paid to the Treasury if the ceiling on national insurance contributions for employees were abolished. [85285]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government Actuary's Department estimate the full-year yields from abolishing the upper earnings limit on National Insurance Contributions to be £3.8 billion in 2002–03 and £4.3 billion in 2003–04.

These estimates are based on the November 2002 pre-Budget report.

Mortgage Rates

36. **Mr. Neil Turner:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the monthly interest payments on a standard rate mortgage of £40,000 over 25 years was in *(a)* June 1997 and *(b)* June 2002. [85286]

Ruth Kelly: The information is as follows:

	June 1997	*June 2002*
Average building society rates	6.98 per cent.	5.02 per cent.
Monthly interest payments	£232.67	£167.33
Annual repayments	£2,792	£2,008

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the proportion of new mortgage lending in each of the last 12 months has been at *(a)* variable and *(b)* fixed rates; and if he will make a statement. [86988]

Mr. McNulty: I have been asked to reply.

The percentage of new mortgage lending in each of the past 12 months where the initial rate of interest has been *(a)* variable and *(b)* fixed as follows:

	New mortgages for house purchase	
Month	*Variable*	*Fixed*
November 2001	68.1	31.9
December 2001	83.6	16.4
January 2002	67.4	32.6
February 2002	70.2	29.8

Month	New mortgages for house purchase Variable	Fixed
March 2002	71.5	28.5
April 2002	73.9	26.1
May 2002	76.9	23.1
June 2002	79.1	20.9
July 2002	81.8	18.2
August 2002	82.6	17.4
September 2002	80.7	19.3
October 2002	77.3	22.7

Source:
ODPM Survey of Mortgage Lenders

It should be noted that most mortgages taken out at an initial fixed rate of interest will revert to a variable rate of interest after a fixed period of time, unless of course the borrower then chooses to remortgage at another fixed rate of interest.

The figures in the table are based on a variable sample of new mortgages ranging from 15,000 to 30,000 per month.

Bermuda

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer why his Department omitted Bermuda from its list of Caribbean overseas territories submitted to the December meeting of ECOFIN in the document Savings-Report from the United Kingdom. [87201]

Dawn Primarolo: In accordance with the conclusions of the European Council of Santa Maria da Feira in June 2000, before the savings directive can be adopted, the UK is required to give sufficient reassurances that its associated or dependent territories listed in the conclusions would adopt the same measures as EU member states. These territories are the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man, and the Caribbean Overseas Territories. Bermuda is not included in the list of dependent or associated territories agreed at the Feira European Council.

Cayman Islands

Mr. Graham Brady: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely implications for movement of capital into and out of Cayman Islands financial institutions as a result of compliance with the EU Draft Savings Directive if Switzerland *(a)* agrees and *(b)* does not agree to be bound by the directive. [83395]

Dawn Primarolo: The European Council meeting in Santa Maria de Feira on 20 June 2000 agreed that adoption of the EU draft Directive on Taxation of Savings was dependent on the EU receiving sufficient reassurances that relevant dependent or associated territories will adopt the same measures as EU Member States, and that six named third countries will adopt equivalent measures. The list of third countries includes Switzerland. The UK has sought the necessary reassurances from the dependent and associated territories only on the basis that equivalent measures are agreed with the named third countries.

The impact of the Directive on any jurisdiction will depend on a range of factors, including the volume of undeclared savings income that EU residents hold in the jurisdiction concerned.

Charities

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will reduce the level of VAT levied on works to buildings owned by charities. [85263]

John Healey: There is no VAT on the construction or purchase of new buildings that charities intend to use for residential or non-business purposes or as village halls. Long-standing formal agreements with our European partners do not enable us to introduce any new zero rates or a reduced rate of VAT for other works to existing non-residential buildings.

Government Borrowing

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of Government borrowing on commercial borrowing rates. [86673]

Mr. Boateng: There is some evidence to suggest that Government borrowing affects their cost relative to wholesale commercial borrowing rates (as measured by swap spreads). However, there is no clear-cut evidence of a significant impact of Government borrowing on commercial borrowing rates.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he forecasts will be raised *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Scotland from the landfill tax in each financial year from 2002–03 to 2006–07. [86758]

John Healey: Projected landfill tax receipts for the UK in 2002–03 and 2003–04 are shown in Table B12 of pre-Budget report 2002 (Cm 5664), and are £0.5 billion and £0.7 billion, respectively. For the financial years 2004–05 and 2006–07 projected landfill tax receipts for the UK are included in "other taxes and royalties" in Table B11, and are not recorded separately.

Projected landfill tax receipts for Scotland are not available separately.

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been raised *(a)* in the UK and *(b)* in Scotland by the landfill tax in each financial year since 1997–98. [86759]

John Healey: Cash receipts from the landfill tax are shown in the Office for National Statistics publication "Financial Statistics". Landfill tax was introduced on 1 October 1996. Since 1 April 1997 the annual yield from landfill tax in the UK is as follows:

	Cash receipts (£ million)
1997–98	361
1998–99	333
1999–2000	430
2000–01	461
2001–02	505

Separate data on the amount of landfill tax revenue raised in Scotland are not available.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much central Government funding was given to local government in each year since 1997 *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each local authority. [86668]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The amount of central Government funding that was given to local government in total in each year since 1997 is set out in the following table.

£ billion

	Revenue grants[1]	*Capital grants*[2]
1997–98	35.9	1.3
1998–99	37.8	1.2
1999–2000	40.0	1.2
2000–01	43.1	1.3
2001–02	45.2	2.0
2002–03	48.0	2.5

[1] 1997–98 to 2000–01 are outturn figures. 2001–02 and 2002–03 are budgeted figures.
[2] 1997–98 to 2000–01 are outturn figures. 2001–02 and 2002–03 are provisional figures.
Source:
1997–98 to 2000–01 RO and COR forms, 2001–02 and 2002–03 RA forms, 2001–02 CPR4 form and 2002–03 CER form.

The figures for individual local authorities have been placed in the Library of the House.

Revenue funding consists of Revenue Support Grant, redistributed Non-Domestic Rates, Principal Formula Police Grant, SSA Reduction Grant, Central Support Protection Grant, GLA General Grant and Specific Grants within Aggregate external finance. Capital funding consists of Central Government Grant. Funding to the housing revenue account is not included.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer *[pursuant to his answer of 28 November 2002, Official Report, columns 466–67W]*, on the post office card account, what alternative arrangements will be available in April 2003 for child tax credit recipients who will not be able to use the PIN number associated with a post office card account. [86989]

Dawn Primarolo: Customers receiving direct payment of child tax credit will be able to choose from a range of account options. For some people the post office card account may not be the most suitable option and they may prefer to use an account with a cheque book or pass book.

Customers who would like a post office card account will, in April 2003, initially be paid by girocheque for the reasons given by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in his answer of 3 December. When the card account comes into use for tax credits, those customers who are unable to use a PIN and card will be able to nominate someone else to collect their money for them. In these cases, a second card will be issued. Alternatively they may nominate someone to deal with all their tax credit affairs.

It has always been recognised that there may be a small number of people who are unable to operate any kind of bank account. In these circumstances, tax credits claimants will receive their direct payments of tax credits by girocheque.

Recycling

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much will be ring fenced for recycling programmes in *(a)* Scotland and *(b)* the UK in each year from 2002–03 to 2006–07; [86760]

(2) how much will be allocated to the budget for the Scottish Executive to encourage recycling in Scotland in each year from 2002–03 to 2006–07. [86761]

John Healey: Responsibility for environment policy is a devolved matter. Decisions about expenditure on recycling in the Devolved Administrations are a matter for the respective administrations. In England, ring-fenced funds for recycling total £50 million in 2002–03 and £90 million in 2003–04.

As announced in the pre-Budget report, final decisions on additional public expenditure on waste for the 2002 Spending Review period will be made as part of the Budget process. The Devolved Administrations, including the Scottish Executive, will be responsible for their respective expenditure allocations.

Tax Credits

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further action he intends to take to promote the take up of new tax credits in April 2003. [85277]

Dawn Primarolo: The publicity campaign for the two new tax credits—Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit began in September. An 'announcement' TV advertisement designed to set the scene generally was followed by a second wave of TV adverts aimed at existing tax credits claimants. The current, third, phase of the campaign takes a number of families that together represent the broad range of people entitled to the new tax credits. This phase includes TV, radio, press and online advertising.

A further phase of advertising will begin mid January and run until the end of the month. This will remind claimants of the changes taking place in April, and in particular of the way support for children will be redirected from the pay packet, to the person in the family mainly responsible for the children.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue has completed its study of the 3,250 tax credit cases identified by the NAO to assess the level of fraud; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [86714]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 19 September 2002 to the hon. Member for Hertsmere, *Official Report*, column 207W.

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the Inland Revenue has completed its analysis of the take-up of tax credits using the Family Resources Survey; and if he will place a copy in the Library. [86715]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer my hon. Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1191W.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people have applied for the higher children's tax credit paid to families in the year of a child's birth. [86740]

Dawn Primarolo: Claim forms for children's tax credit have been included in "bounty packs" given to new mothers around the time of their baby's birth. To 5 December the Inland Revenue has received 85,000 applications for children's tax credit for babies born on or after 6 april 2002.

Taxation and Savings (Draft Directive)

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the EU draft directive on taxation and savings on UK overseas territories. [83216]

Dawn Primarolo: The EU draft directive on taxation of savings seeks to combat cross-border tax evasion on savings income by EU residents. The adoption of this Directive is conditional on the EU receiving sufficient reassurances that relevant dependent or associated territories will adopt the same measures. The impact of adopting such measures will depend on a range of factors, including the volume of underclared savings income that EU residents hold in these jurisdictions.

Mr. Nigel Evans: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) which overseas territories will have to comply with the EU draft directive on taxation and savings; [83230]

(2) what reasons underlay the decision not to include Bermuda in the EU draft directive on taxation and savings. [83215]

Dawn Primarolo: The dependent and associated territories listed in the conclusions of the European Council of Santa Maria da Feira in June 2000 are the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man and EU Member States' dependent or associated territories in the Caribbean. These were the dependent and associated territories, together with six named third countries, that EU Ministers decided sufficient reassurances should be obtained from before deciding on the adoption of the Directive. EU Ministers also agreed in the same conclusions that "exchange of information, on as wide a basis as possible, shall be the ultimate objective of the EU in line with international developments."

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of recipients of the working families tax credit who are paid below the minimum wage; and what recent work his Department has undertaken to prosecute firms paying below the minimum wage. [86914]

Dawn Primarolo: The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 contains a number of provisions empowering enforcement officers to take civil action against non-paying employers and the Inland Revenue always uses these in the first instance.

Since the national minimum wage was introduced in April 1999 the Inland Revenue has issued around 450 enforcement notices requiring employers to start paying the minimum wage and make good any arrears, and identified over £11 million in arrears. A minority of disputed cases have been considered by employment tribunals. To date there have been no criminal prosecutions in relation to underpayment of the minimum wage.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Drug Action Team

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what independent audit is made of statistics compiled by the Drug Action Team. [86698]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Drug Action Teams (DATs) use information gathered from a variety of sources including statutory agencies such as the police, central Government (e.g. census surveys) and local service providers. The information is then used to inform the DAT's planning and reporting processes.

DAT plans are analysed by regional teams consisting of Home Office officials, National Treatment Agency representatives and representatives of other Government Departments who sit in the Government office. They give careful scrutiny to all the information provided. Any quantitative information is rigorously checked to ensure its accuracy. If there is any doubt, the DAT—and the agency that provided it—is asked to verify that information.

DAT annual returns are monitored in the same way, except that the information is scrutinised at central Government level. At the same time, Home Office representatives in the regions are able to provide an independent view of the DAT's report.

Animal Experiments

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what progress he has made in implementing the Government's commitment to reduction, refinement and replacement of animals in experiments. [86752]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The Home Office has developed and put in place a strategy to ensure that policy on the use of animals in scientific procedures is reviewed continuously as scientific and ethical considerations evolve, checking that the costs to animals are minimised and remain outweighed by the potential benefits of the work.

We are continuing to work to ensure that the highest possible standards of welfare are applied to animals used in scientific procedures and that they are used only where it is fully justified—where the benefits outweigh the costs and where there are no suitable alternatives. To this end we are promoting the fullest application of the 3Rs—the replacement of procedures with others which do not use animals, the reduction of the number of animals used and the refinement of procedures to minimise pain and suffering.

The use of animals in regulated procedures is prohibited by the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in cases where a scientifically valid non-animal alternative is available. In deciding whether to grant a licence for any regulated procedure, the 1986 Act requires that the likely benefits of the programme are weighed against the likely adverse effects on the animals concerned (the cost/benefit assessment) and that there are no alternatives which either replace animal use entirely, reduce the number of animals needed or refine the procedures to minimise suffering (the 3Rs). We must also be satisfied that the procedures are likely to achieve the stated objectives. There are usually negotiations between the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate and the applicant to ensure that the 3Rs are rigorously applied in every case.

The Government advocates the 3Rs strategy believing that the most immediate prospects are for reducing the number of animals used through better science and better experimental design, and refining procedures so that the suffering of any animals necessarily used is minimised. The long-term hope of eliminating the need for live animal experiments altogether lies in the proper development, validation and acceptance of replacement alternative methods.

In addition to the rigorous application of the 3Rs we have gained the endorsement of Government Departments of the principle of data sharing and agreement that UK regulatory agencies should encourage industry to extend the scope for sharing animal test data in the field of regulatory safety testing. An inter-Departmental concordat has therefore been developed as a first step in this process and should enable Government Departments to help eliminate the risk of duplication of tests on animals.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to introduce an administrative centre to check that the commitment to reduction, refinement and replacement in experimentation is being adhered to; [86802]

(2) what plans he has to legislate to update scientific procedures using animals. [86753]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: These matters are the subject of recommendations in the report published on 24 July 2002 by the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures. The report contained a total of seven conclusions and 31 recommendations, including the proposal to establish a Centre for the Three Rs. All of the recommendations are being carefully and thoroughly considered. The Government has six months to respond to the report, and there will then be a debate in the House of Lords. It would meanwhile be inappropriate for Ministers to offer detailed comment.

Anti-Racism

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what resources he has made available, and at what cost, for the preparation of a national plan against racism in line with undertakings given at the United Nations World Conference Against Racism in September 2001; and which departmental staff, and at what grade, have been assigned to this task. [86016]

Beverley Hughes: We have funded an extensive consultation of non-governmental organisations on the development of the national action plan. This included a series of seminars in September and October 2002 and a national conference in Manchester on 20 November 2002. I have made £27,800 available for this consultation process.

The national action plan is being developed by the Race Equality Unit of the Home Office, in consultation with other Government Departments, the devolved Administrations and a wide range of non-governmental organisations. Within the Race Equality Unit, this work has been taken forward by a grade 7, senior executive officer, executive officer, and administrative officer.

Ball-Bearing Guns

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will include ball-bearing guns within his proposed new regulations for air guns. [86260]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Ball-bearing guns (more accurately known as airsoft guns) are very low powered, and not subject to the same controls as air weapons. We are, however, considering how to improve controls on the possession of airguns and imitation firearms in a public place. Our consideration of this covers airsoft guns.

Children (Workplace Protection)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what legislation he proposes to bring forward to provide better protection for children in the workplace; and if he will make a statement. [83218]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I have been asked to reply as the Minister responsible for health and safety at work.

The Government take the health and safety of children very seriously and the United Kingdom has therefore fully implemented rigorous EU requirements to protect the health, safety and welfare of all employed young people below 18 years, including those on work experience. Employers also have duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 towards those who are not working but may be affected by the work activity. The Department has no plans to bring forward further general health and safety legislation concerning children in the workplace.

Children's Rights

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Government plans to ratify the Optional Protocol on the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. [85955]

Hilary Benn: The United Kingdom signed the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography in September 2000 and intends to ratify it at the earliest opportunity. We need to introduce a range of new offences to ensure that we are

fully compliant with the instrument before we can ratify it, several of which, relating to trafficking for the purposes of sexual exploitation and the sexual exploitation of children for gain, will be included in the forthcoming Sexual Offences Bill.

The Optional Protocol also, however, requires the criminalisation of behaviour which does not fall within the scope of the Sexual Offences Bill, such as trafficking people for the sake of:

exploiting their labour;

transfer of organs; and

illegal adoptions.

These measures are being pursued separately and will also require primary legislation to allow us to ratify the instrument. It is not therefore possible to say precisely when we will be in a position to ratify the instrument.

Correspondence

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to give a substantive response to the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford's letters of 1 July and 22 October relating to constituent Bright Omokaro (ref 0170340). [86117]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 11 December 2002.

Corruption

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK nationals have been prosecuted for foreign corruption activities under the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001; and if he will make a statement. [83196]

Mr. Blunkett: These provisions came into force on 14 February 2002. They do not have retrospective effect and therefore apply only to acts committed after that date. The prosecution authorities have informed us that there have been no prosecutions to date but given the lack of retrospectivity this is unsurprising.

In the 25 years since 1977, the United States of America has prosecuted only about 60 cases under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act and related legislation.

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how frequently the Government policy on domestic violence has been changed since 1997; and when it is next scheduled to be updated. [85314]

Mr. Denham: The Government have developed their policy on domestic violence over the period from 1997, and continue to do so. As we have already announced, we will be publishing a consultation paper on domestic violence by the spring.

Fuel Tax Evasion

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests were made for evading fuel taxes during the last year for which figures are available, broken down by constabulary. [85995]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The information is not collected centrally at the level required.

Homeless People (Drug Addicts)

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the proportion of homeless people who are drug addicts. [85709]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* An assessment of the link is made regularly with updated research conducted through various sources. The Government's Rough Sleepers Unit has succeeded in reducing the numbers sleeping rough on any one night by two-thirds. This has however resulted in the percentage of those who are hardest to help—drug-using homeless people—rising, due to drug-using homeless being left on the streets whilst others can be more easily accommodated.

By July 2002, research by the charity Crisis, supported by the Home Office, found that 83 per cent of single homeless people were drug users. Other studies confirm that among those remaining single rough sleepers, drug misuse problems are of this level of magnitude—between 50 and 80 per cent.

In awareness of this linkage, much work has been done to improve the delivery of drug services to homeless people. On 4 December 2002 the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister jointly published new guidance entitled "Drug Services for Homeless People: a good practice handbook" (published on the Government website www.drugs.gov.uk) which is aimed at addressing these figures through mainstream and specialised drug services.

Immigration and Nationality Directorate

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports have been lost at the Immigration and Nationality Directorate in each of the last five years for which figures are available; and what steps he has taken to ensure passports are not lost. [85758]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested by the hon. Member is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost; however the Immigration and Nationality Directorate issue letters to the members of the public where the document cannot be traced. In the year 2000, 97 such letters were issued; and 103 letters in 2001. As at 29 November 2002 a total of 314 letters have been issued in the year to date.

We are constantly looking for ways of improving the service we provide to the public and we are currently considering a number of initiatives which have the potential to achieve this.

Iraqi Kurds

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi Kurds have been refused asylum in the past year. [86551]

Beverley Hughes: The tables show asylum initial decisions and appeal outcomes made on asylum applications from Iraqi nationals for each of the last 12 months. Appeal outcomes in any given time period do not necessarily relate to initial decisions made in the same period.

It is not possible to say how many of the applicants are of Kurdish origin. Data on the ethnic origin of asylum seekers are not collated centrally and could be produced by examination of individual case-files only at disproportionate cost.

Information on asylum applications is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period October to December 2002, and will be available from 28 February 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1.html.

Table 1: initial decisions[1,2] on applications received for asylum in the United Kingdom from nationals of Iraq, excluding dependants, October 2001 to September 2002

Principal applicants

	Total initial decisions	*Grants of asylum*	*Grants of ELR*	*Refusals*
2001				
October	635	65	210	360
November	505	70	165	265
December	530	50	195	285
2002				
January	910	85	435	390
February	765	65	405	290
March	860	65	585	210
April	980	75	705	200
May	890	65	625	200
June	675	55	445	175
July	1,065	65	785	215
August	885	45	660	175
September	1,120	40	815	265
Total	9,820	755	6,030	3,035

[1] Figures have been rounded to the nearest five, and are provisional.
[2] Information is of initial determination decisions, excluding the outcome of appeals or other subsequent decisions.

Table 2: outcome of asylum appeals brought by nationals of Iraq, determined by adjudicators of the immigration appellate authority (IAA), October 2001 to September 2002 by month[1]

Principal appellants

	Total	*Allowed*	*Dismissed*	*Withdrawn*[2]
2001				
October	255	60	175	25
November	280	60	185	35
December	230	40	165	25
2002				
January	325	65	220	40
February	390	105	255	25
March	430	105	285	40
April	495	135	320	40
May	470	130	300	40
June	320	80	210	30
July	380	65	280	35
August	420	90	280	45
September	395	100	255	40
Total	4,390	1,035	2,940	420

[1] Provisional figures rounded to the nearest five. Appeals do not necessarily relate to initial Home Office decisions in the same month.
[2] Figures include cases withdrawn by the Home Office as well as the appellant.

Marsham Street Redevelopment

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the contract with Annes Gate Property plc to supply timber for the building work at 2 Marsham Street. [83928]

Beverley Hughes: A copy of the relevant sections of the contract between the Home Office and Annes Gate Property plc has been placed in the Library.

Registered Charities

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the proposal in the Cabinet Office report, "Private Action, Public Benefit", that charities with an annual income of under £10,000 would no longer be able to call themselves registered charities. [86290]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Cabinet Office report, "Private Action, Public Benefit", was published on 25 September 2002. Its 61 recommendations set out a package of measures which aim to modernise the law and enable a wide range of organisations to be more effective and innovative.

One of the recommendations is that the threshold for compulsory regulation with the Charity Commission should be raised from those organisations with an annual income of £1,000 to those with an annual income of £10,000. Currently, active monitoring by the Commission applies only to those charities with an annual income of £10,000 or more.

The report recommends that the threshold for registration and the threshold where active monitoring kicks in should logically be one and the same. This would result in two-thirds of charities being released from the bureaucratic burden of registration, and is entirely in line with this Government's, emphasis on deregulation.

I can understand the concern that being unable to describe an organisation as a registered charity may have an effect on public confidence. In fact, the report recognises this, and a further recommendation is that all charities below the new registration threshold should have the status of 'Small Charities'. This would also allow tax repayment claims to the Inland Revenue to continue, and for funders to treat 'Small Charities' in the same way as registered charities.

Of course, at the moment these are only proposals. The report is out for consultation until 31 December 2002, and we shall consider the responses to this, and all the other matters addressed in the report, very carefully.

Sex Offenders

Ms Shipley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to revise the notification requirements for Schedule One offenders. [85414]

Hilary Benn: The Government's intention to bring forward a Sexual Offences Bill during this session was announced in the Queen's Speech on 19 November; we published a command paper, 'Protecting the Public', setting out our proposals. In relation to the notification requirements on sex offenders, these include:

registered offenders will be required to confirm annually and in person at their local police station that the information held about them is still up to date;

a new order to make those convicted of sex offences overseas register their details when they come to the UK;

a reduction in the period of time an offender can spend at an address other than his main home before he is required to notify the police of the address. This will be reduced from 14 days to seven days;

a reduction in the period within which a sex offender must notify the police of change of name or address from 14 days to three days; and

a new requirement on offenders to provide their national insurance details when registering. This will make it easier to identify and find those offenders who try to evade the registration requirements.

'Schedule One offender' is a categorisation generally used in respect of offenders who have committed an offence against a child listed in Schedule One to the Children and Young Persons Act 1933. That list includes sexual offences, offences of violence, of cruelty and neglect and any other offence resulting in the bodily injury of a child under the age of 18. The list of offences under Schedule One is used, sometimes in conjunction with other indicators of risk, to determine whether an individual might be unsuitable to work with, care for or have unsupervised contact with children. It is important to note that not all Schedule One offenders are sex offenders. There are no notification requirements on Schedule One offenders.

Drugs Strategy

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if all drug treatment programmes supported by the updated drug strategy have the aim of ending the use of *(a)* illegal drugs and *(b)* prescription methadone and diamorphine where prescribed, by individuals undergoing treatment. [86537]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The clear message from the updated drug strategy is that drug misuse is illegal and will remain so. All controlled drugs are dangerous and nobody should take them. The focus of the updated drug strategy remains to reduce and end the use of illegal drugs.

The primary goal of all treatment should be abstinence while recognising that some drug misusers may require longer term support to achieve this. Prescribing methadone or diamorphine as a substitute for illicit opiates has proven benefits for certain individuals and for society, particularly in terms of stabilising the individual, reducing injecting behaviour and criminal activity.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the additional number of places on *(a)* diamorphine and *(b)* methadone schemes that will be made available as a result of the Updated Drug Strategy. [86538]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Since 1997 the number of treatment services in England has increased by a third. There are now 235 drug specialist community prescribing services and 300 general practitioner prescribing services in England. Under the Updated Drug Strategy, the National Treatment Agency will continue to work on increasing the number and capacity of all treatment services.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what targets he has set for the reduction of waiting times for admission to drug rehabilitation programmes as a result of the Updated Drug Strategy; [86542]

(2) what estimates he has for the likely reduction of waiting times for admission to drug rehabilitation programmes as a result of the Updated Drug Strategy. [86535]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The National Treatment Agency (NTA) has already made significant progress on reducing waiting times locally. They have published national targets to reduce the time between someone being referred to treatment and receiving that treatment.

With additional funding from the 2002 Spending Review, we will invest in an expansion of quality provision to ensure that treatment is readily available to all those who need it. The NTAs targets are that by 2004, maximum waiting times from referral to receipt of treatment should be no more than two weeks for in-patient detoxification and GP prescribing and three weeks for all other forms of treatment.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Police Recruits

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many Police Service of Northern Ireland recruits have dropped out of training since the formation of the PSNI; how many such recruits have dropped out of training owing to intimidation; and if he will make a statement. [86579]

Jane Kennedy: Since the commencement of the PSNI's Foundation Course in autumn 2001, nine recruits have left voluntarily. In the same period, three recruits to the PSNI have also been dismissed.

None of these resignations has been due to intimidation. Extremists from both sides of the community have, at times, sought to intimidate police officers and their families, and it is a remarkable reflection of the commitment shown by police trainees to date that none of them have resigned as a result.

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many PSNI recruits have been asked to leave training in order to balance those from a different perceived communal background who have left training; and if he will make a statement. [86580]

Jane Kennedy: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to question reference number 84606.

Police Service (Chief Inspector)

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is the Government's policy to require resignations or redundancies from over-represented sections in the event of a resignation by a trainee police officer in order to maintain the 50/50 recruitment quota for Catholics/non-Catholics in the Police Service of Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [84606]

Jane Kennedy: The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 requires the Chief Constable to appoint police trainees on a 50 per cent. Catholic, 50 per cent. non-Catholic basis. This requirement applies only to the appointments process; it ceases to apply after police trainees have taken their place on the training course.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Abandoned Vehicles

Margaret Moran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether he intends to introduce measures to enable local authorities to remove abandoned vehicles from private land. [86426]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

Local authorities are already under a duty (Section 3(1) of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978) to remove a vehicle which is abandoned in their area on any land in the open air or on any other land forming part of a highway.

For vehicles abandoned on private land, the local authority enters onto the land using their powers under section 8(1) of the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978. They then serve on the landowner or the occupier a 15 day notice requiring them to remove the vehicle. If no representations are received then the local authority can remove the vehicle following the expiry of the 15 day period. Objections to the notice must be made by the landowner or occupier to the Chief Officer at the local authority within the 15 day period and the landowner or occupier must outline their reasons why they consider that the vehicle is not abandoned. If the local authority accepts the representations then the vehicle can remain on the land. If the local authority rejects the representations they will then remove the vehicle.

We intend to consult in the New Year on reducing the statutory notice periods for vehicles abandoned on private land.

Area Cost Adjustment

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2003–04, what earnings figure was used to calculate the area cost adjustment for each local authority and for each category as listed in Annex H, page 84. [87019]

Mr. Leslie: The Area Cost Adjustment uses data drawn from the New Earnings Surveys for 1999, 2000 and 2001. A full methodology guide to how this data is used, with the results for each area of the country, has been published on the office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website *www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0304/acatech.pdf)*. A copy has also been placed in the Library of the House.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the area cost adjustments for *(a)* local education authority education, *(b)* police, *(c)* general local government and *(d)* other local services are calculated on the same basis; and if he will place in the Library the formula for calculating area cost adjustment weightings and the weightings derived from the formula for (i) each local authority area receiving area cost adjustment, (ii) the City of York and (iii) North Yorkshire county council. [87159]

Mr. Leslie: The method for calculating the labour and business rate elements of the area cost adjustment is the same for all local government services. What varies between services is the proportion of total costs assumed to relate to labour and business rates respectively. A full methodology guide has been placed in the Library of the House. The resulting area costs factors for all authorities are published in annex H of the draft Local Government Finance Report, which was placed in the Vote Office and the Library of the House on 5 December 2002. The City of York and North Yorkshire county council do not receive an area cost top-up.

Cabinet Office (Spring Supplementary Estimate)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the uses of the additions to net provisions for the Cabinet Office under the RfR1—heading in the Cabinet Office Spring Supplementary Estimate, February 2002 (Cm 5354); and if he will make a statement. [86280]

Mr. Alexander: I have been asked to reply.

The change in net provision in RfR1-A arises from a number of transactions including: machinery of government transfers between Cabinet Office and the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport; other transfers between Cabinet Office and other Departments, for example, for fast steam recruitment; the draw down of resource from the DEL reserve; and intra-departmental adjustments. Details of the uses of the additions to sub head A1 are shown in the introduction to the Spring Supplementary Estimate.

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to give councils greater powers compulsorily to purchase houses that remain empty for long periods; and if he will make a statement. [86713]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to give local authorities greater powers to enable them to compulsorily purchase houses that remain empty for long periods. However, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is considering proposals to enable them to take over the management of long-term empty residential properties. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will make a statement in due course.

Fire Dispute

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 2 December, ref 84214, what proportion of a pay offer to the firefighters in excess of 4 per cent.will be met by local authorities; and who will pay transitional costs. [86660]

Mr. Raynsford: As made clear in my answer to the hon. Member on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 629W. any pay award, not affordable within existing public expenditure, must be paid for by modernisation. The Position Paper by the Independent Review of the Fire Service set out a clear programme of reform and modernisation in the Fire Service, which would lead to significant extra resources being freed up, which could lead to increases in firefighters' pay.

The first step is for the employers and the Fire Brigades Union to agree how those savings can be generated, and over what timescale. There is no point speculating about transitional costs at this stage.

Housing

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Government will meet the costs currently borne by those tenants not eligible for housing benefit through rent pooling following its introduction of Supporting People *(a)* for all tenants and *(b)* for those in sheltered accommodation. [86812]

Mr. McNulty: The Government is making additional funds available to meet a proportion of the costs of support that have identified as a result of the un-pooling of support costs from housing revenue accounts. After the introduction of Supporting People tenants who currently pay their own support costs, including those in sheltered accommodation will continue to do so. Any transitional relief for tenants not eligible for housing benefit will be met from the Housing Revenue Account, where an authority decides to provide such relief.

Mr. Drew: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's recent announcement of maintenance and management allowances for council housing, with specific reference to the outcome for Stroud District Council. [86813]

Mr. McNulty: Stroud District Council's management and maintenance (M&M) allowances have for many years been higher than their long term M&M targets.

Authorities in this position have had their allowances reduced gradually over a number of years to bring them towards their targets without imposing sudden very large drops in allowances. For 2003–04, we are proposing that Stroud's management allowance will be set at £309.08, or 98 per cent. of last year's allowance, so that they will be 2 per cent. over their 2003–04 management target of £301.77. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister proposes an increase of 4.7 per cent. in their maintenance allowance to £533.33, so that their allowance will be just below their new maintenance target of £533.37. In aggregate this represents an increase in their allowances of some 2.15 per cent.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has announced national average real increases of 6 per cent. for both management and maintenance allowances for 2004–05 and 2005–06. Together with changes to take account of rent restructuring, this is equivalent to an average cash increase of £268 per dwelling by the second year.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently reviewing the allocation of management and maintenance allowances to ensure this new money is shared out as fairly as possible between authorities, while avoiding unnecessary complexity. It is therefore not possible to say what the outcome for any individual authority will be insubsequent years.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will publish the Survey of English Housing 2001–02. [86820]

Mr. McNulty: Some of the key findings from the 2001–02 survey were published on 20 August in "Housing Statistics Summary No. 13" a copy of which was placed in the libraries of the House. Since then tables have been produced for individual users on request. It is planned to publish a large batch of tables on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website on 20 December 2002. A printed report will be published later in 2003, when the results have been updated to take account of population figures from the 2001 Census. (Results produced so far have been provisional in that the household figures used to gross the survey data have been estimates based to some extent on the 1991 Census.)

Local Authorities

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if it is his policy that local community and strategic partnerships should be subject to Local Authorities (Admission to Assets) legislation. [86854]

Mr. Leslie: Local Strategic Partnerships are non-statutory bodies, entirely separate from local authorities. LSPs which register as companies limited by guarantee will be subject to the rules and procedures that apply to such companies.

Malicious Fires

Paul Holmes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many malicious fires were recorded in *(a)* Derbyshire and *(b)* Chesterfield in each year since 1992, broken down by (i) categories of dwellings, (ii) other buildings, (iii) road vehicles and (iv) other locations. [86849]

Mr. Leslie: The following table contains information on the number of malicious fires attended by local authority fire brigades in Derbyshire in each year between 1992 and 2000 (the latest year for which data are available). Malicious fires are those where malicious or deliberate ignition was proved or suspected (this includes fires which were recorded by the brigade as "doubtful"). Incident data are not available below brigade area level.

Malicious fires [1,2] in Derbyshire by location, 1992–2000 [P]

Dwellings/Fires[3]

		Total	*Single occupancy*	*Multiple occupancy*	*Other or unspecified*	*Other buildings*	*Road vehicles*	*Other*
1992	786	63	34	16	13	162	487	74
1993	819	60	23	20	17	172	496	91
1994	954	114	38	19	58	315	459	67
1995	885	89	44	22	23	248	458	91
1996	940	107	59	30	18	211	496	126
1997	949	123	51	41	31	205	507	114
1998	1,003	120	75	31	14	204	567	112
1999	1,244	120	63	46	11	216	805	103
2000 [P]	1,225	117	65	37	15	193	802	113

[1] Including late call heat and smoke damage incidents (not recorded prior to 1994).
[2] From 1994 onwards figures are based on sampled data weighted to true brigade totals.
[3] Figures are rounded and the components do not necessarily sum to the independently rounded totals.
[4] A small number of late call heat and smoke damage incidents were not recorded in 1995.
[P] Provisional

Planning

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether an environmental impact assessment is required for applications to amend planning permissions where such an assessment *(a)* was required and *(b)* would have been required had it not predated the introduction of environmental impact assessments. [86872]

Mr. McNulty: Applications to vary a condition attached to a planning permission are subject to the same requirements as other planning applications for the purposes of environmental impact assessment (EIA). For certain types of project EIA is mandatory. For others, EIA is required if the project meets prescribed criteria and the planning authority considers that it is likely to have significant effects on the environment. This applies to applications to vary a permission regardless of whether EIA was required for the original permission or whether that permission predated the introduction of EIA.

PPG3

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if the research being conducted by Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners to assess the implementation of PPG3 was commissioned through open tender; what the cost is of this research; and what assessment of possible conflicts of interest was made. [86919]

Mr. McNulty: The tendering exercise and award process were carried out in accordance with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's procurement guidelines. The intention to carry out the work was advertised in the Planning Research Newsletter. Six companies from those submitting a formal expression of interest were invited to tender and three were interviewed. Nathaniel Litchfield and Partners Limited were awarded the contract on a tender price of £59,895 because of team composition, experience, cost and overall value for money. No conflicts of interest were identified.

Regional Assemblies

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his proposed direction to the Boundary Committee on the timetable of reviews of local government structure in areas which give a positive reaction to holding a referendum on regional assemblies. [86711]

Mr. Leslie: The Government launched a consultation on draft guidance to the Boundary Committee for England on 2 December 2002. Should the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill become law, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister would then decide in which region or regions there should be a local government review. A review is likely to take around nine to 12 months to complete.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many letters he has had *(a)* in support of and *(b)* in opposition to the establishment of a regional assembly in (i) Yorkshire and the Humber, (ii) the South East, (iii) the South West, (iv) the East of England, (v) the West Midlands, (vi) the East Midlands and (vii) the North West; what his estimate is of the cost of a referendum on regional government in each of those regions; what research he has commissioned into the likely outcome of a referendum on regional government in each of those regions; and what his estimate is of the cost of local government reorganisation in each region should regional government be established. [85341]

Mr. Leslie: The White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" was not a consultation exercise, except on the issue of stakeholder involvement with elected regional assemblies, and therefore did not invite views either for or against the principle of establishing assemblies. However, between the dates of 9 May 2002, when the White Paper was published, and 30 November 2002, we recorded 1,200 written and e-mailed pieces of correspondence on the subject of elected regional assemblies. Of those which can be identified by region, responses were identified as follows:

16 in favour, 33 opposed and 27 either undecided or expressing mixed views in Yorkshire and the Humber;

18 in favour, 142 opposed and 56 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the South East;

26 in favour, 123 opposed and 124 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the South West;

11 in favour, 35 opposed and 23 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the East of England;

16 in favour, 165 opposed and 19 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the West Midlands;

7 in favour, 27 opposed and 14 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the East Midlands; and

29 in favour, 45 opposed and 34 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the North West.

There were also 30 responses in favour, 10 opposed and 18 either undecided or expressing mixed views in the North East.

The remaining 152 responses either came from elsewhere, or were e-mailed responses for which no region of origin could be identified.

In addition, we have received 2,333 cut-out coupons as part of a campaign organised by Conservative MEPs in the South East opposing an elected regional assembly in the region, and 1,595 postcards as part of a campaign organised by the Cornish Constitutional convention in support of a referendum for a Cornish Assembly.

Based on the cost of local authority mayoral referendums using all-postal ballots, the cost of a referendum may range from about £2 million in the North East to about £6 million in the South East.

No research has been commissioned into the likely outcome of a referendum on regional government in each region. But the Government launched a soundings exercise on 2 December to find out the level of interest in each English region in holding a referendum on establishing an elected regional assembly. Views, information and evidence have been requested by 3 March 2003 and will inform the Secretary of State's consideration of the level of interest in each region in holding a referendum.

It is not possible, at this stage, to make an estimate of the cost of local government reorganisation in each region, as much will depend on the precise details of the structure and boundary changes proposed by the Boundary Committee following the local government reviews.

Right to Buy

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to change the Right to Buy system; and if he will make a statement. [86712]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to end the Right to Buy scheme, but sees difficulties with some aspects of the way in which the scheme is operating. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is looking at what can be done to tackle abuses and at the effects of the scheme in areas of high demand for housing.

Wind Farms

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty on wind farms in areas of outstanding natural beauty. [86871]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is aware that the Association of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty has recently published a position statement on wind farms in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister welcomes the interest shown by all parties including the Association in the land use planning issues involved in the siting of any development, including wind farms, in Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

HEALTH

Acute Hospitals

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many acute hospitals in England and Wales serve a population of less than 500,000. [85793]

Mr. Hutton: All United Kingdom residents are entitled to national health service treatment. In the year 2001–02 there were 187 acute trusts in England, each of which may include more than one hospital. The population of England was some 49 million people, giving an average population of 260,000 per acute trust.

Alcohol and Drug Rehabilitation

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people were on alcohol and drug rehabilitation schemes on the NHS in Leeds Strategic Health Authority area; how many were waiting for places; and how many were given places, in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [83489]

Jacqui Smith: Information relating to alcohol and drug rehabilitation schemes for the five primary care trusts serving the Leeds area is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of people accessing treatment*
1998–99	1,930
1999–2000	2,498
2000–01	2,366

Notes:
Neither the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System NDTMS or Drugs Misuse Database (DMD) holds, or is designed to hold, data on the number of places available for drug and alcohol treatment on the NHS.

Source:
West Yorkshire Strategic Health Authority

Information relating to the number of national health service alcohol and drug rehabilitation places is not available.

Arson

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of arson against NHS properties there were; and what the cost of the damage was in each county in each year since 1992. [83136]

Mr. Lammy: Our records show that a total of 2,496 fires have been started deliberately on national health

service premises since 1995, resulting in damage costing an estimated £18.3 million.

Figures are not available in the format requested. Figures by strategic health authority are shown in the table.

Strategic health authority	*Estimated total cost of damage (£)*	*Number of deliberate fires 1995 to 2002*
Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire	56,695	142
Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire	137,150	29
Birmingham and the Black Country	10,312,959	121
Cheshire and Merseyside	335,493	116
County Durham and Tees Valley	72,965	59
Coventry, Warwickshire and Herefordshire	66,062	17
Cumbria and Lancashire	291,143	159
Dorset and Somerset	44,563	54
Essex	86,535	31
Greater Manchester	1,474,292	210
Hampshire and Isle of Wight	155,749	67
Kent	282,596	51
Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Rutland	126,856	87
Norfolk, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire	20,030	79
North and East Yorkshire and Northern Lincolnshire	28,091	66
North Central London	29,439	77
North East London	722,743	63
North West London	116,300	22
Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	462,611	222
Shropshire and Staffordshire	109,860	46
South East London	60,639	47
South West London	31,801	56
South West Peninsular	43,677	86
South Yorkshire	122,873	58
Surrey and Sussex	1,493,921	109
Thames Valley	30,297	59
Trent	61,155	122
West Yorkshire	1,551,772	237
Grand total	18,328,268	2,492

Care Homes

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 975W, on care home registrations, for what reasons information on the *(a)* average length of time and *(b)* number of care home applications to be registered and processed by the NCSC is not available; and when he expects this information to be available. [86922]

Jacqui Smith: The National Care Standards Commission (NCSC) does not currently have the full information requested. This is because it requires inspections of services to have been carried out and recorded on the NCSC database. Not all services have yet been inspected and so are not included on the database.

We expect the NCSC to be able to provide full information by the end of March 2003, when it will have finished its inspection programme.

Carers' Rights Day

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of Carers' Rights Day; and if he will make a statement. [86996]

Jacqui Smith: Carers' Rights Day is a one-day take-up campaign initiated and organised by Carers UK and questions concerning evaluation of the effectiveness of the day should be addressed to them directly. The Government supports the work done by Carers UK in promoting carers' issues and providing information and advice.

Computer Viruses

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of damage to patient records by computer viruses there have been in each of the past five years. [85778]

Mr. Lammy: There are currently no reported instances of damage by computer viruses to national health service electronic patient records in any of the past five years.

Consultants

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultants have accepted national health service posts as international fellows as a result of the initiative whereby Sir Magdi Yacoub was appointed as the Government's Special Envoy for the national health service; and in which specialities. [86751]

Mr. Hutton: 36 offers of appointment for the National Health Service International Fellowship Scheme have been made and accepted. Further offers of appointment are expected following recent and planned interviews.

Correspondence

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when his Department will reply to the letter of 24 June from the hon. Member for Witney about the buildings of the Burford Hospital and their proposed sale . [80813]

Mr. Lammy: A reply was sent on 9 December, which sets out a proposed way forward.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his Answer of 3rd December, Official Report, column 754W, on CRB checks, what assessment he has made of the effect on running costs of *(a)* children's homes, *(b)* residential care homes and *(c)* nursing homes of (i) delays to and (ii) postponement of Criminal Records Bureau checks. [86921]

Jacqui Smith: The postponement of criminal records checks for staff who were in post immediately before 1 April 2002 makes no change to the rigorous pre-employment checks which were already in place to ensure their suitability to work with children and vulnerable adults. As such we do not anticipate these postponements affecting care home running costs. For children's homes, there have been no changes or postponements to the checks required.

We do not anticipate care homes incurring significant costs due to delays at the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) in processing applications for checks on new staff, or, in the case of children's homes, in processing applications for checks on all staff. The National Care Standards Commission has issued guidance to providers about the response to delays at the CRB in processing checks on new members of staff. The intention of the guidance is to enable providers to employ new members of staff in care homes, and all staff in children's homes, pending the completion of CRB checks while also ensuring the safety of residents.

Frictional Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 965W, on frictional discharges, what his definition is of minimal levels of delayed transfers by 2006; and if he has set a target to achieve this level. [86920]

Jacqui Smith: The Department has not set a central target for 2006. It is our judgment that the financial incentives we are putting in place will ensure that the health and social care system delivers minimal delayed transfers by then.

Health Records

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's policy is on the disclosure of health records by NHS trusts to third parties. [86756]

Mr. Lammy: Patient information is generally held by national health service trusts under legal and ethical obligations of confidentiality. Information in health records should not be released to others without the consent of the patient concerned where the disclosure will identify the patient. The exceptions are where the information is effectively anonymised, is required by statute or the courts or if it is judged that there is a strong public interest justification in disclosure which overrides the duty of confidence to the patient. For example such circumstances would include the protection of the public and prevention of serious crime. Additionally there must not be a statutory prohibition against the release of the information and NHS trusts must have the vires to release information for the purpose in question. Any disclosure of patient information must satisfy these and any other data protection requirements.

Hospital Admissions

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the admissions to NHS hospitals where place of residence is not known in *(a)* December 1999 to January 2000 and *(b)* December 2000 to January 2001, broken down by NHS (i) region and (ii) trust. [86026]

Mr. Hutton: Data on the number of admissions to national heath service hospitals where place of residence is not known from December 1999 to January 2000, and from December 2000 to January 2001, broken down by NHS region and trust, have been placed in the Library.

Medical Vacancies

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical and nursing vacancies there are within the NHS; and what measures are being taken by his Department to fill them. [81933]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service vacancy survey is carried out annually on 30 March. As at 30 March 2002 there were 1,310 vacancies, posts that had been vacant for three months or more, for medical and dental staff and 8,390 vacancies for qualified nurses.

Additional nurses and doctors are being employed as a result of increased throughput from training, improved recruitment and retention and international recruitment. Since 1997 the number of nurses working in the NHS has increased by an estimated 39,500 and the number of consultants by 4,980.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of mental health service money will be allocated to *(a)* joint working between adult and children mental health services, *(b)* mental health professionals supporting other professionals working with children and *(c)* supporting youth offending teams between adult and children mental health services in each of the next three years. [86252]

Jacqui Smith: Guidance to health and local authorities on the further development of child and adolescent mental health services and the use of additional central funding over the period 2003–04 to 2005–06 is expected to be issued shortly. Within the terms of this guidance it will be for the local agencies to decide how their budgets are allocated.

Mental Health Services (Children)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent since 1997 on mental health services for children, broken down into budget headings. [86461]

Jacqui Smith: This information is not collected centrally. However, our estimate for likely expenditure on mental health services for children in 2001–02 is in the table.

We recognise that much still needs to be done to improve child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS). On 16 October, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced that CAMHS would receive an additional £140 million over the next three years through increased grants to local authorities. This will help build capacity, improve access and, together with new national health service investment, help deliver a comprehensive CAMHS for every area.

CAMHS

	£ million
HCHS	289
PSS	269
Total	558

Notes:
1. Hospital and community health services (HCHS) costs exclude the costs of primary care and drugs.
2. Personal social services (PSS) costs include children's social services (CSS) costs where appropriate.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of local social services departments have agreed a joint strategy for allocating mental health grants with local child and adolescent mental health services; and if he will make a statement. [86469]

Jacqui Smith: Our information is that all health authorities and local authority social services departments have complied with the statutory requirement (notified in a Department of Health circular of May 1999) to work together to produce joint three-year development strategies to deliver the child and adolescent mental health services objectives set out in national priorities guidance 1999–2002. Targeted central funding of £85 million was provided to help support these developments, including £35 million in the form of grants to local authorities.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of the budget for child and adolescent mental health services in the financial years 2000–02 was spent on mental health services for children. [86471]

Jacqui Smith: Budgetary information on local child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is not collected centrally.

Targeted funding for health and local authorities provided centrally to help support their joint CAMHS development strategies is expected to be spent for the purpose for which it is allocated.

Neurological Conditions

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of people in the UK with a neurological condition. [86882]

Jacqui Smith: We have made no estimate of the number of people in the United Kingdom with a neurological condition. The recent neurological alliance publication, Levelling Up, estimates that around 2,850,000 people have a neurological condition of one kind or another, with another 8,000,000 suffering from migraine.

In February 2001, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions, that will have a particular focus on the needs of people with neurological conditions and brain and spinal injury. Current plans are to publish the NSF in 2004 with a 10-year implementation period from 2005.

NHSU

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what year he expects NHSU to obtain its Royal Charter. [84035]

Mr. Hutton: The National Health Service University (NHSU) aims to become an awarding and accrediting institution in its own right, by meeting the standards required to become a university.

On 21 November 2002, NHSU launched its development plan entitled Learning for Everyone. This document sets out the vision for the university and is the basis for an extensive three month consultation exercise with the NHS and its partners. The responses and issues raised will be taken into account when drawing up the NHSU strategic and business plan in April 2003.

To achieve university status, NHSU will need to meet the rigorous standards which apply to the granting of such a status. It will work towards those standards as it develops and will only be able to submit the necessary application when it is confident that they are met.

NHSU have obtained agreement in principle with the Higher Education Funding Council to set up a working group, with members drawn from Higher Education Funding Council, NHSU, the Department for Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Quality Assurance Agency. This group will look at the appropriate processes and mechanisms for achieving status, to offer advice and to draw up an action plan by November 2003 setting out the step to be taken.

Patient Records

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to tackle the threat of computer viruses to patient records. [85777]

Mr. Lammy: National health service organisations are required to implement and maintain adequate local anti-virus protection as a condition of their connection to the NHS network. In addition, relevant guidance for the selection, deployment and management of anti-virus products has been provided to NHS organisations and is regularly refreshed to take account of new threats.

Personal Social Services

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will set out the *(a)* efficiency gains and *(b)* other value for money gains of personal social services expenditure that have been achieved, broken down by region, in each of the last three years. [86880]

Jacqui Smith: Information provided by councils during in-year monitoring suggests that, for social services in England, the estimated efficiency and value for money gain was 2.1 per cent. for 1999–2000, 2.3 per cent. for 2000–01 and 2.5 per cent. for 2001–02.

Taken over these three years, the total estimated efficiency and value for money gain was 7.1 per cent., virtually meeting the cumulative three year target of 7.2 per cent, for those years. The table shows these figures broken down using the current regional boundaries. The target is national and does not apply to individual regions or councils. Efficiency gains and value for money gains are not separately identified. Information for 2001–02 is not yet available.

Estimated efficiency and value for money gains in personal social services

Percentages

	Estimated efficiency and value for money gains			
Region	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*Total for three years*
England	2.1	2.3	2.5	7.1
North West	2.2	3.0	3.3	8.8
North East	2.3	2.6	2.4	7.4
Yorkshire and Humber	1.8	2.0	2.4	6.3
East Midlands	1.9	2.4	2.8	7.3
West Midlands	2.1	2.1	2.1	6.4
East England	1.8	2.4	2.8	7.2
London	2.0	2.0	2.2	6.3
South East	2.4	2.0	2.3	6.8
South West	2.0	2.7	2.5	7.4

Note:
Some councils are excluded where they did not provide data of sufficient quality.

Specialised Services (Commissioning)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the process and timetable is for completion of the review into commissioning specialised services; and when he plans to announce the outcome of the review. [86240]

Mr. Hutton: A summary of the responses will be placed in the Library in December and guidance will be issued in the new year.

Student Nurses

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many student nurses have failed to complete their studies since 1997, broken down by nation of the UK. [84602]

Mr. Hutton: Information for England on the number of student nurses who have not completed their course is given in the table below. Information for Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved Administrations. For Northern Ireland, although the Administration is devolved, responsibility rests with the Minister in the Northern Ireland office.

Student nurses (England)

Year	*Started*	*Leavers*	*Interrupted*	*Active*
1996–97	15,700	3,200	667	283
1997–98	18,106	3,650	996	658
1998–99	18,147	3,299	1,206	7,765
1999–2000	20,186	2,712	1,015	16,258
2000–01	19,932	1,238	460	18,232

Note:
This data is based on a snapshot in time of a particular cohort*(s)* and therefore each year there will still be students who have yet to complete their course.

Glossary of terms:
Leavers—students who have withdrawn completely from the course.
Interrupted—students who have temporarily withdrawn but who intend to return.
Active—students who have still to complete their studies.

Terrorism (Mass Contamination)

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many primary care trusts have fully developed plans to deal with *(a)* chemical, *(b)* biological, *(c)* radioactive and *(d)* nuclear emergencies; [82163]

(2) how many PCTs have fully developed plans to deal with CBRN emergencies. [82580]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answers 21 November and 25 November]:* The main health response to a chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear (CBRN) emergency will involve the ambulance services and hospital sector where there has been an overt deliberate release.

Primary care trusts (PCTs) took on overall emergency planning responsibilities from 1 October 2002. All PCTs are required to prepare major incident plans. The Department will shortly be reviewing their progress.

A programme of work is underway to support PCTs in developing their major incident plans and response arrangements. This is led by the regional directors of public health (RDsPH) and regional health emergency planning advisers. RDsPH have been tasked to ensure that PCTs have an all hazards approach in place for dealing with major incidents. This will draw upon the expertise of the relevant agencies such as the regional chemical incident provider units, the Public Health Laboratory Service, the communicable disease surveillance centre, consultants in communicable disease control and the National Radiological Protection Board.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Invalid Care Allowance

Mr. Oliver Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will commission research into the levels of take-up of invalid care allowance. [86995]

Maria Eagle: We have no plans to do so at present. Awards of invalid care allowance are steadily increasing, although subject to seasonal fluctuations. Information about financial and practical help for carers is readily available from a range of sources. We expect that the publicity surrounding the recent changes to ICA (allowing access to older carers, and extending entitlement after the death of the disabled person), will also serve to increase awareness of all the benefits available to carers.

Benefit Uprating

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list each *(a)* social security benefit and *(b)* revenue and capital disregard that has not been uprated since (i) 1997, (ii) 1992 and (iii) 1990. [86312]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is as follows:

Benefits and income/capital disregards not uprated since 1990:

Christmas Bonus;

Retirement Pension addition at age 80;

Income related benefits capital limits except the lower and upper limits for people in long-term care which were increased in 1996 and the lower and upper limits for over 60s which were increased in April 2001;

Income related benefits earnings disregards except the higher earnings disregard which was last increased in April 2001[1];

Income related benefits disregard for war disablement pension and war widow's pension;

Income related benefits disregard of income from a boarder.

[1] £25 earnings disregard for lone parents in housing benefits and council tax benefit was not increased in April 2001.

Notes:

Income related benefits are income support, housing benefit, council tax benefit and jobseeker's allowance (introduced in 1996).

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much his Department spent on *(a)* buildings maintenance and *(b)* accommodation capital projects in each of the past three years. [87001]

Mr. McCartney: The information requested is in the table.

£

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Buildings maintenance	16,747,403	16,342,368	19,190,951
Accommodation capital	13,935,877	7,956,305	18,695,526

The increase in buildings maintenance costs is due to the requirements to refurbish, to corporate standard, the pathfinder offices for Jobcentre Plus.

Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what targets for the reduction of benefit fraud have been set since 2000; and what performance has been against each target. [86997]

Malcolm Wicks: We set a Public Service Agreement target in March 1999 to achieve a reduction in the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance by 10 per cent. by March 2002. In April 2001 two further targets were added: a 25 per cent. reduction by March 2004 and a 50 per cent. reduction by March 2006. In July this year we announced an increase in the target for working age customers to a 33 per cent. reduction by 2004 while maintaining our longer-term commitment to the 50 per cent. reduction by 2006. We have also announced a new target of a 25 per cent. reduction in fraud and error in housing benefit by 2006.

In income support and jobseeker's allowance the latest results show that, by March 2002, we had achieved a 24 per cent. reduction, more than double the target of 10 per cent.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the investigation of monthly random samples of cases in each benefit agency area has shown the level of fraud and error to be in *(a)* income support and *(b)* job seeker's allowance, in each of the past six months for which figures are available. [86998]

Malcolm Wicks: We have made very good progress in reducing the level of fraud and error in income support and jobseeker's allowance. Latest national figures show that by March 2002 we had achieved a reduction of 24 per cent., more than double the target of 10 per cent. A full report giving the regional figures will be published early next year.

The latest published regional figures are for the period April 2000 to March 2001 and are in The Results of the Area Benefit Review and the Quality Support Team from April 2000 to March 2001: Fraud and Error in Claims for Income Support and Jobseeker's Allowance, a copy of which is in the Library. The information is not available on a monthly basis.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were employed in the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002; and how many are employed there. [86999]

Malcolm Wicks: The overall aim of the Department's anti-fraud strategy is to have a benefit system which is secure from first claim to final payment. The implementation of this strategy means than an anti-fraud focus is integral to the work of all staff in the Department, as is dealing with the wider agenda of error and incorrectness in benefit payments.

The information currently available suggests that, throughout the period, around 5,000 staff have been employed by the Department and its agencies in work to investigate suspicions of fraud. This figures includes staff employed within the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service. However, taking account of changes in data collection measures over time and the integration of investigators more fully with front-line staff, it is clear that we need to improve the validity and reliability of year- on-year comparisons, and we have asked officials to undertake further work on this. We have concluded that it is not possible to make valid comparisons between figures year-on-year.

We will therefore undertake a review to improve the consistency of centrally collected information for the future.

Pension Credit

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimates he has made of the *(a)* number and *(b)* percentage of pensioner households in receipt of housing benefit but not minimum income guarantee who will be entitled to the pension credit; and what efforts he is making to ensure they claim the pension credit. [86885]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However it is estimated that around a third (half a million pensioner benefit units) of those who become newly entitled to pension credit when it is introduced in October 2003 will already be eligible for housing benefit.

To ensure maximum take up of pension credit all existing minimum income guarantee (MIG) recipients will be automatically transferred to pension credit. We

will contact all pensioners not receiving MIG, giving them information about pension credit and encouraging them to apply. pension credit will also be advertised through the press and television.

Pensions

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cumulative percentage increase in the state pension for *(a)* a married couple and *(b)* a single person since 1996. [85495]

Mr. McCartney: Since April 1996 the maximum rate payable of the Basic State Pension has increased by around 7 per cent. in real terms.

Pensions Law

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average length of time is which his Department allows for consultation with pensioners' practitioners about proposed changes to pensions law. [87004]

Mr. McCartney: Legislation provides that, except in certain specified circumstances, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State should usually consult on draft private pensions regulations. The Department normally allows at least 12 weeks when undertaking a written consultation with pensioner practitioners on changes to pensions law.

Poverty

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people over retirement age lived below the poverty line in *(a)* Lancashire, *(b)* the North West of England, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* the UK, in each of the last five years. [85331]

Mr. McCartney: Poverty is a complex, multi-dimensional issue, affecting many aspects of pensioners' lives—including income, health, housing and the quality of their environment. Consequently, there is no single measure of pensioner poverty; providing a decent income is key. At present, no pensioner has to get by on less than £98.15 a week under the minimum income guarantee (£149.80 for couples). These rates will increase in April 2003 to £102.10 for single pensioners and £155.80 for couples.

From April 2002, the Government is spending an extra £6 billion a year in real terms on pensioners as a result of policies introduced since 1997. This includes £2½ billion more on the poorest third of pensioners.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the number of companies under the regulations introduced on 8 October 2001 that *(a)* are obliged to provide and *(b)* have so far failed to offer, access to a stakeholder scheme; and what plans he has to ensure that employers who have not complied with the requirement to offer a stakeholder scheme, do so. [84620]

Mr. McCartney: It is broadly estimated that around 350,000 firms are required to provide their employees with access to a stakeholder pension scheme. Latest data from the Association of British Insurers reveals that 335,719 employers had designated a stakeholder pension scheme by the end of September 2002. This suggests a compliance rate of over 90 per cent.

The Occupational Pensions Regulatory Authority (Opra) is the body responsible for regulating compliance with the workplace access requirements in respect of stakeholder pension schemes. Opra will continue to follow up all reports of non-compliance and will take action where compliance has not been achieved. It is also looking into ways to identify employers who have not yet complied with the requirements. It has begun writing to employers to ascertain whether or not they have any pension provision, and whether this pension provision would exempt them from offering access to a stakeholder pension scheme. Where Opra identifies non-compliant employers it will actively pursue such cases.

Surplus Properties

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many surplus properties his Department *(a)* has and *(b)* will have over the next 10 years; what their value is; and if he will make a statement. [87000]

Mr. McCartney: There are currently 44 properties that are surplus to the Department's accommodation requirements, six of these are freehold and 38 leasehold. The freeholds are valued at £1,605,000. It is difficult to place a value on the leaseholds, given the prevailing market conditions.

The Department is currently developing an estate strategy to meet our future business requirements and in particular support the implementation and rollout of Jobcentre Plus and the Pension Service. Until the strategy work is completed we cannot forecast how many properties in total will be required and consequently how many properties in total will be surplus to requirements.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what distinction is made when sending winter fuel payments between houses with numbered addresses and those with house names but no numbers; [85140]

(2) in what way his Department distinguish between single pensioner households and those with more than one pensioner when distributing winter fuel payments; [85141]

(3) how many appeals by pensioners living alone were received against incorrect awards of winter fuel payments in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [85142]

Mr. McCartney: To ensure all eligible people in a household receive the correct level of winter fuel payment, personal information from the benefit computer systems is matched to ascertain how many eligible people live at each address. No distinction is made between houses with numbered addresses and those with house names but no number when determining entitlement to winter fuel payments.

Addresses are converted to a standard format and then matched against the Royal Mail Postal Address file, including the unique alpha/numeric value for each address known as the Delivery Point Suffix.

During the data matching, various computer scans are run. Where more than one person's details are linked by the Delivery Point Suffix, each will be allocated £100; where the details are not linked to another, the person is awarded £200. A number of further scans are run to correct errors and mismatching.

The Delivery Point Suffix is identified in 98 per cent. of cases, but in cross-referencing over 12 million records, there will unfortunately be some errors. Anyone who receives £100 when they believe that they are entitled to £200 is asked to contact the address on the notification letter.

This is then investigated and where further enquiries reveal that a £200 payment was due, a top up payment is issued. For Winter 2000–01 45,332 top up payments were made, and for winter 2001–02, there were 38,853 top up payments issued.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 16 December 2002

DEFENCE

AFB 130A

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers signed an AFB130A in each year since 1997. [87254]

Dr. Moonie: An Army Form B130A (AFB130A) is completed when soldiers are to be discharged under the following Queen's Regulations 1975:

9.398—On termination of engagement
9.403—Having been convicted during Army service by a civil court of an offence committed before enlistment
9.404—Misconduct
9.405—Retention undesirable in the interests of the service
9.411—Not required for further Army service
9.413—Not required for a full Army career
9.414—Services no longer required

The overall total discharged under these paragraphs for which an AFB130A was completed in each year since 1997 is as follows:

	Number discharged
1997	1,520
1998	1,531
1999	1,270
2000	1,500
2001	1,677
2002	1,092
Total	8,590

It should however be noted that an AFB130A may have been signed in other cases in which discharge action was terminated. These figures are not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Amphibious Groups

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the state of availability is of Royal Navy amphibious groups. [84367]

Mr. Ingram: The Royal Navy is able to mount an Amphibious Task Group within the readiness requirements of Defence Planning Assumptions from high readiness units earmarked for the Joint Rapid Reaction Force.

Barracks (Right of Access)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence in what circumstances at *(a)* Deepcut and *(b)* Catterick Barracks specified areas of the camp may be declared out of bounds; and what safeguards are in place to ensure a soldier's right of access to (i) the regimental medical office, (ii) the Padre, (iii) the unit welfare officer, (iv) the local army welfare worker and (v) the Women's Royal Voluntary Service Welfare Office. [86075]

Mr. Ingram: At both Deepcut and Catterick, certain areas of the camps and surrounding areas are placed out of bounds to personnel for security, health and safety or similar reasons, on a temporary or semi-permanent basis. The offices specified in the question would only be placed out of bounds in exceptional circumstances, such as a security alert or other emergency. None of these offices are routinely out of bounds and all personnel have unrestricted access during normal opening times.

Beaufort Trench Outlet Pipe

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what environmental tests have been made in relation to the outlet pipe in the Beaufort Trench; and what assessments have been made of *(a)* human health and *(b)* the immediate area surrounding the River Dee and *(c)* contamination of (i) land and (ii) aquatic and ornithological life. [85446]

Dr. Moonie: holding reply Monday 9 December 2002: I will write to my hon Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

British Forces Broadcasting Service

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make arrangements to allow England rugby and football matches to be watched on the British Forces Broadcasting Service. [86902]

Dr. Moonie: The British Forces Broadcasting Service (BFBS) is provided through a contract let by the Ministry of Defence with the Services Sound and Vision Corporation (SSVC), which is an independent limited company with charitable status. The service provides, subject to practicality and affordability, radio and television broadcasts to most locations overseas where significant numbers of British forces are stationed, such as Germany and Cyprus, together with areas of deployed operation such as Afghanistan. There are currently two radio and two television channels, although the second TV channel, which is specifically aimed at the 18–30 age group, is at present only available to deployed operational areas, eg Balkans, Middle-East, Afghanistan.

Authority to transmit any particular television or radio programme or sporting event rests with the Rights Holder for the programme or event concerned and all broadcasters, including SSVC, must negotiate accordingly with Rights Holders for licences to broadcast.

SSVC already provides live television coverage of all England (and other Home Nation) international rugby and football matches, subject to scheduling practicalities where fixtures clash, and makes arrangements to do so with the Rights Holders through the primary broadcaster, eg the BBC, ITV etc.

SSVC and the Ministry of Defence are working to further develop the BFBS with a view to providing additional television channels including, in due course, a dedicated sports channel.

Defence Spending (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much of the defence budget was spent in Scotland in the most recent year for which figures are available *(a)* in actual terms and *(b)* as a percentage of the total defence budget; and if he will make a statement. [86394]

Mr. Ingram: The information is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Initiatives

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list his Department's initiatives which are designed to achieve best value for money. [85457]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence continuously reviews its business processes and organisation to ensure that military capability is delivered with best value for money for the taxpayer. As part of the 2002 spending review, the MOD agreed the following Public Service Agreement value for money target for 2002–03 to 2005–06:

"Increase value for money by making improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of the key processes for delivering military capability. Year on year output efficiency gains of 2.5% mil be made each year from 2002–03 to 2005–06."

A wide range of initiatives is in hand to achieve this target, and to deliver business improvement generally across defence on a continuous basis. Key improvements include the following initiatives:

By 31 March 2006, to reduce by an average of 6 per cent. the per capita cost of training a successful military recruit to the agreed standard.

Achieve 0 per cent. average annual cost growth (or better) against the Major Equipment Procurement Projects, while meeting customer requirements.

By 31 March 2006, to reduce by 20 per cent. (relative to April 2000, 14 per cent. relative to April 2002) the output costs of the Defence Logistics Organisation, while maintaining support to the Front Line.

By 31 March 2006, to reduce MOD Head Office and other management costs by 13per cent.

By 31 March 2006, to identify for disposal land and buildings with a net book value of over £300 million.

Performance against the targets will be reported annually through the Department Performance Report. Further information on the MOD's value for money Public Service Agreement target is available on the MOD website www.mod.uk.

Depleted Uranium

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans there are to substitute depleted uranium rounds with safer and equally penetrative rounds; and if he will make a statement. [86388]

Dr. Moonie: There are currently no plans to substitute DU rounds. At present no satisfactory alternative material exists to achieve the level of penetration needed to defeat the most modern battle tanks. DU ammunition therefore currently remains our most operationally effective capability and the use of non-DU ammunition would significantly threaten operational success and would potentially lead to increased United Kingdom casualties. However, I can confirm that research is continuing into more effective alternatives to DU ammunition.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major improvements have been made to the facilities for non-Vanguard submarines at Devonport dockyard; and if he will make a statement. [86709]

Mr. Ingram: A contract was placed with Devonport Management Ltd in 1997 to upgrade their existing facilities to provide the sole refitting and refuelling facilities for Vanguard and all other Royal Navy nuclear submarines.

The major improvements made to date to the specific facilities for non-Vanguard submarines, or to facilities shared by both Vanguard and non-Vanguard submarines, are as follows:

Facility	*Improvement made*
14 and 15 Docks	The construction of seismically qualified dock structures, caissons and cradles for the submarines to sit in. 14 Dock has also been adapted to accommodate the new Astute class submarines.
New Equipment and Maintenance Support Facility (NEMSFAC)	New shared facility for maintenance and storage of equipment.
Power Range Testing Berth (PRT)	Upgraded berth at which the refuelled reactors are first tested after refit.
Low Level Refuelling Facility (LLRF)	New facility used to store new and used fuel for all submarines.
Nuclear Transfer Route (NTR)	To enable access between the refuelling docks and LLRF. In place for 14 Dock, work in hand for 15 Dock.
Cranes	Seismically qualified dockside cranes fitted to 14 Dock; installation work about to commence for 15 Dock.
Electrical services to submarine berths	Ring main around dockyard upgraded.

Drug Testing

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many of the reserves tested positive for controlled substances when last tested; what the date was of the last tests; and what percentage of force strength this represents; and if he will make a statement. [86584]

Dr. Moonie: When in full time service with Regular units and formations, reservists of all three services are tested on the same random basis as their Regular counterparts. Only the Army randomly test reservists serving in reserve units. During the period 1 January 2002 to 31 October 2002,1,342 Territorial Army

personnel were tested, of whom nine tested positive (0.67 per cent. of those tested). Individual Army reservists are also tested on mobilisation when they report to the Reserves Training and Mobilisation Centre. During the same period 971 tests were conducted of which 13 tested positive (1.34 per cent. of those tested).

Executive Agencies (Scotland)

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people work for the Army Base Repair Organisation; how many are employed in Scotland; what the personnel costs of the agency are; and if he will make a statement. [86406]

Mr. Ingram: As at 1 December 2002, the total number of staff employed by ABRO, formerly known as the Army Base Repair Organisation, was 2587. Of these, 143 individuals were employed in Stirling, ABRO's sole workshop facility in Scotland.

The forecast total pay cost of ABRO staff for the current financial year of 2002–03 was, as of 1 December 2002, £57.048 million. This figure includes £3.179 million for Stirling.

Firefighters

Syd Rapson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many service personnel he estimates will lose money by standing in as firefighters during the dispute. [85411]

Mr. Ingram: The Ministry of Defence has a comprehensive pay and allowance package in place that includes various reimbursement and compensatory allowances. There should be no "losers" under this arrangement but it is possible that some individuals, as their circumstances change (e.g. different types of separation, no longer living away from home etc.) might move from one set of allowances to another— because their compensation needs are different. MOD is aware that there may be some individuals who will or may have been temporarily withdrawn from career courses and would seek to address any potential financial loss sympathetically.

General Affairs Council

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to implement the conclusion of the General Affairs Council of 19 November 2002 that, in relation to ECAP, it would be useful to continue to inform the public on this progress. [86616]

Mr. Hoon: Ministers will continue to inform the public of progress on the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP) through speeches, Ministry of Defence publications, and other means as appropriate.

Grievance Complaints

Sir Brian Mawhinney: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many formal grievances for *(a)* bullying and *(b)* harassment have been made by his Department's employees in each of the last five years; and how many of these have been upheld in favour of the complainant. [86987]

Dr. Moonie: No central records of complaints of harassment and bullying made by civilian staff are maintained by the Ministry of Defence. The MOD procedures encourage the informal resolution of harassment and bullying complaints with the assistance of line manager and personnel managers and trade union representatives. Where complaints become formal they are resolved within the alleged offender's line management chain. There is no requirement for complaints to be reported centrally, and it would be disproportionately expensive to collect the information requested.

Gulf War

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Gulf War veterans are being paid disability pensions for war-related illnesses; what those illnesses are; how many veterans are suffering from each illness; and how many Gulf War veterans have died of war-related illnesses since 1991. [87105]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Helsinki Process

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the shortfalls identified by the Helsinki Process Catalogue and the actions being undertaken to remedy them; and if he will make a statement. [86615]

Mr. Hoon: European Union members have so far met 104 of the 144 capability targets in the Helsinki Headline Catalogue. The shortfalls are:

Air to Air Refuelling
Attack Helicopter
BDA (operational level)
Carrier Based Air Power
Civil Military Co-operation
Combat Search and Rescue
Cruise Missiles and Precision Guided Munitions
Deployable Communication Modules
Early Warning and Distant Detection Strategic Level
General Cargo Aircraft
General Cargo Shipping
General Maintenance Engineering
General Support Engineering
General Support Logistics
Headquarters (OHQ, FHQ, CCHQ) and Augmentees
Light Infantry Brigade HQ and Augmentees
Light/medium Armoured Companies
Maritime Medical Evacuation Units
Medical Collective Protection Role 3
Medical Role 3
Military Intelligence Units
Military Police
Multinational Joint Logistic Centre and Augmentees

NBC
Out Sized Transport Aircraft
Press Info Group
PSYOPS
Recovery/Maintenance
RO-RO
Special Operational Forces
Strategic ISR IMINT Collection
Strategic ISR SIGINT Collection
Support Helicopters
Suppression of Enemy Air Defence
Surveillance and Target Acquisition/Unmanned Air Vehicles
Surveillance and Target Acquisition Units
Theatre Ballistic Missile Defence
Theatre Surveillance and Reconnaissance and Air Picture
Theatre Surveillance and Reconnaissance and Ground Picture
Transport Units.

Key

Acronym	*Explanation*
BDA	Battle Damage Assessment
CCHQ	Component Command Headquarters
FHQ	Force Headquarters
HQ	Headquarters
IMINT	Imagery Intelligence
ISR	Intelligence Surveillance and Reconnaissance
MN	Multinational
NBC	Nuclear Biological Chemical
OHQ	Operation Headquarters
PSYOPS	Psychological Operations
RO-RO	Roll On-Roll Off
SIGINT	Signal Intelligence

Work is under way to address the remaining targets through the European Capabilities Action Plan (ECAP). About half of these are regarded as significant. ECAP has made steady progress, with 18 multinational panels of experts so far launched, covering 21 shortfalls. The panels will report in March 2003.

Hercules C130J (Afghanistan)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Hercules C130Js are deployed in Afghanistan; and on what mission. [86901]

Mr. Ingram: There is one C130J Mark 4 aircraft currently deployed in Afghanistan, carrying out a variety of military transport tasks.

HMS Cattistock

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the repair cost will be of HMS Cattistock; when the ship will return to service; and if he will make a statement. [85694]

Mr. Ingram: Following her impact with the jetty at Portsmouth on 23 November 2002, HMS Cattistock is currently in dock at Portsmouth undergoing preparations for her repair by Fleet Support Ltd. It is estimated that the work will take about four weeks, and be completed in January 2003. Cattistock will then be available for operational tasking. The Warship Support Agency's initial estimate of the cost of repairs is £250,000.

Iraq (Hostile Fire)

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British aircraft have experienced hostile fire from Iraqi military installations during each of the last 12 months. [85821]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* Attacks by Iraqi air defence weapons on coalition aircraft conducting legitimate patrols of the No Fly Zones are not recorded against individual nations. The number of recorded confirmed attacks on coalition aircraft in the period were as follows. It is believed actual figures may be significantly higher.

	Number of attacks
December 2001	6
January 2002	21
February	15
March	2
April	8
May	32
June	50
July	57
August	68
September	88
October	24
November	65

Manning Control Reviews

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers who were subject to a manning control review and subsequently transferred to the S-type engagements, were discharged at the end of their engagements and under what Queen's Regulations they were discharged broken down by regiment, in each year since 1997. [87255]

Dr. Moonie: The number of soldiers discharged following Manning Control review, who subsequently transferred to an S-type and were discharged at the end of their engagements are listed by discharge paragraph (Queen's Regulation) as follows:

	Total
9.373—by right, having given appropriate notice (less than 12 years service)	
1997	0
1998	0
1999	1
2000	1
2001	0
2002	0
Total	2
9.387—ceasing to fulfil Army medical standards	
1997	0
1998	0
1999	0
2000	2
2001	0
2002	0
Total	2

	Total
9.389—by right, having given the appropriate notice (12 years and less than 22 years service)	
1997	2
1998	0
1999	0
2000	1
2001	0
2002	0
Total	3
9.393—on completion of engagement	
1997	4
1998	8
1999	13
2000	14
2001	9
2002	4
Total	52
9.399—at the soldier's request—on payment (12 years and less than 22 years service)	
1997	0
1998	0
1999	0
2000	0
2001	1
2002	0
Total	1
9.414—services no longer required	
1997	1
1998	0
1999	0
2000	0
2001	0
2002	0
Total	1

Due to the low numbers involved, this information is not broken down by Regiment as requested, because this could identify individuals and breach disclosure and confidentiality policy. I am therefore withholding that information under Exemption 12 (Privacy of an Individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what DASA outflow code number refers to manning control. [87256]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Analytical Services Agency outflow code which refers to discharge following Manning Control Review under Queen's Regulations 1975 9.413 'Not required for a full Army career,' is 262.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many soldiers subject to manning control are on the reserve list and could be called up for deployment; and if he will make a statement. [87257]

Dr. Moonie: There are 1,917 individuals who have been discharged following Manning Control Review who are currently on the reserve list, and who may be liable for call-out depending on their status.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Army personnel were issued with manning control warning certificates in each of the last 10 years, broken down by regiment. [87258]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 332–34, which reported the number of soldiers discharged under Queen's Regulations paragraph 9.413 "Not required for a full Army career" in each of the last 15 calendar years and by Regiment. These individuals would also have been issued with manning control warning certificates.

Naval Establishments (Unauthorised Entry)

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the incidents of unauthorised entry into *(a)* Royal Naval and *(b)* Royal Marines establishments in the UK in each of the last five years, showing (i) the numbers of intruders involved, (ii) the number of arrests made, (iii) the number of convictions secured and (iv) the number of cautions given in each case. [86482]

Mr. Ingram: Information on all incidents of incursion is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Some information is held by the MOD Police on incidents of incursion. As it will take some time to gather this data I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

NBC Training and Equipment

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding he has allocated to NBC training and equipment; whether he has plans to increase this funding; which regiments have specialist NBC training; what plans he has to extend that training; and if he will make a statement. [84853]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All armed forces personnel are given training to protect themselves in a nuclear, biological and chemical military environment, as part of their basic training. This is refreshed at regular intervals. For financial year 2002–03 the full resource cost of operating the Defence Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Centre (DNBCC) Winterborne Gunner, which is the tri-service nuclear, biological and chemical training establishment, is expected to be approximately £4 million.

The Joint Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Regiment is specifically trained to provide the UK's armed forces capability in biological weapon detection, chemical and nuclear survey and reconnaissance and personnel decontamination in a deployed military NBC environment. The cost of operating the regiment for financial year 2002–03 is planned to be approximately £24.5 million.

The level of NBC related funding and training is kept under constant review as part of the normal management process.

Operation Southern Watch

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF aircraft have been assigned to Operation

Southern Watch; how many were fully serviceable in *(a)* May 2002, *(b)* August 2002 and *(c)* November 2002; and if he will make a statement. [85373]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The number of airframes assigned to Operation Resinate—the United Kingdom contribution to Operation Southern Watch—depends on the operational task, which may change. In each of May, August and November 2002 the number varied between 15 and 17.

Serviceability varies daily, and is collated at weekly reporting points. The figures below are indicative, based on the closest flying day to the first reporting point of each month.

On 2 May 2002 three airframes were unserviceable.

On 2 August 2002 two airframes were unserviceable.

On 7 November 2002 no airframes were unserviceable.

Unserviceability is usually corrected by straightforward maintenance prior to the next mission. Through the period from May 2002 to date unserviceability has had no significant impact on our ability to meet the operational task.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major *(a)* variations and *(b)* delays there have been to the private finance initiative contract for the (i) Tidworth Water and Sewerage, (ii) RAF White Fleet, (iii) MHE Vehicles and (iv) Hazardous Stores Information System (HSIS); what the cost has been of the changes; whether the partners in the PFI were required to meet these costs; and if he will make a statement. [87132]

Mr. Ingram: As this information is not held centrally, I will write to the hon. Member once it has been collated and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what major variations and delays there have been to the Private Finance Initiative contract for *(a)* the Commercial Satellite Communication Service, *(b)* Tornado 6R4 Simulator, *(c)* Hank Simulator, *(d)* DAFS Helicopter Flying School, *(e)* Germany White Fleet and *(f)* Marine Support to Range and Aircrew Services since they were signed; what the cost has been of such changes and delays; which partners in the PFIs were required to meet these costs; and if he will make a statement. [86934]

Mr. Ingram: As this information is not held centrally, I will write to the hon. Member once it has been collated, and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

RAF Bases

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total station operating budget was for each RAF base in the United Kingdom in the last year for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement. [86384]

Mr. Ingram: The table shows the RAF operating budgets for each of the United Kingdom RAF stations for Financial Year 2002–2003. It does not include former RAF stations that have retained their name but which have been transferred to the ownership of another part of the Ministry of Defence.

Station Name	*Operating Costs (£ million)*
RAF Bentley Priory	5.6
RAF Boscombe Down (Support Unit)	6.2
RAF Boulmer	22.9
RAF Brampton/Wyton/Henlow	39.5
RAF Buchan	19.4
RAF Brize Norton	141.6
RAF Coltishall	66.0
RAF Coningsby	66.8
RAF Cosford	64.2
RAF Cottesmore	59.9
RAFC Cranwell	141.7
RAF Digby	5.7
RAF Fylingdales	14.9
RAF Halton	41.0
RAF High Wycombe	18.0
RAF Honington	71.0
RAF Innsworth	12.4
RAF Kinloss	109.4
RAF Leeming	67.7
RAF Leuchars	64.6
RAF Linton-on-Ouse	22.7
RAF Lossiemouth	100.6
RAF Lyneham	128.4
RAF Marsham	98.5
FSCTE Manston	5.1
RAF Neatishead	17.1
RAF Northolt	21.8
RAF Sealand	6.6
RAF Shawbury	63.8
RAF Spadeadam	7.8
RAF Stafford	33.1
RAF St. Mawgan	49.1
RAF St. Athan	3.6
RAF Uxbridge	12.0
RAF Valley	40.5
RAF Waddington	75.2
RAF Waddington	75.2
RAF Wittering	52.4
AWRTain, Pembrey Sands, Holbeach, Donn a Nook, Wainfleet	3.0

Note:

The figures given in the table include the budget for any minor unit for which the station is responsible.

Salaries

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the defence budget salaries represent what the total sum was for *(a)* uniformed services and *(b)* MOD civilian employees; and the percentage paid out in (i) Scotland and (ii) overseas. [86010]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Information on the defence budget, salaries as a proportion thereof and the breakdown of salary costs between military and civilian personnel for financial year 2001–02 is provided in the Ministry of Defence Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts for that year.

Information on the defence budget and salaries as a proportion thereof for the current financial year is provided in "The Government's Expenditure Plans 2002–03 to 2003–04—Ministry of Defence". The breakdown between military and civilian personnel is estimated to be broadly similar to that in 2001–02.

Copies of the above documents are available in the Library of the House.

The percentage of salaries for service and civilian personnel paid in Scotland and overseas is in the table:

Percentage

	Service personnel	*Civilian personnel*
Scotland	7.0	8.4
Overseas	19.6	3.1

Sea Harrier

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the purpose was of the exercise held in Poland earlier this year involving FA2 Sea Harriers from 801 Naval Air Squadron; how the FA2 performed against MiG29 aircraft; and if he will make a statement. [86443]

Mr. Ingram: The purpose of exercise Lone Kestrel was to promote understanding between two nations with emerging military links as part of the NATO exchange programme. This programme seeks to enhance interoperability between NATO units in order to enhance the combat effectiveness of the Alliance.

The Sea Harrier FA2 flew a variety of missions with Polish aircraft. Its performance was commensurate with the high standards of operations expected from the United Kingdom Forces and 801 Squadron gained valuable training from the exercise.

I cannot go into specific details on how the Sea Harrier FA2 performed against the MiG 29 aircraft during Exercise Lone Kestrel and am withholding this information under Exemptions 1a and 1b of the Code of Practice on Access to Government information which relates to defence.

Sergeant Major Andrew Gavaghan

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will set out the *(a)* service career and *(b)* postings of Sergeant Major Andrew Gavaghan who served at Deepcut Barracks in 1995–96. [86079]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is personal data protected by the Data Protection Act 1998, and cannot be released without the individual's consent. The information is also withheld in accordance with Exemption 12, privacy of an individual, of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Type 23 Frigate

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the respects in which there has been an increase in the availability of Type 23 frigates since the completion of the 1998 Strategic Defence Review, referred to in the letter from the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to the hon. Member for Aldershot of 2 December. [86484]

Mr. Ingram: The Type 23 Frigate was designed with the expectation of spending a high proportion of its operational time in the demanding and stressing environment of the North Atlantic. The nature of the threat has evolved with resultant changes to operational priorities and deployments, the consequence of which is that these ships spend less time in the North Atlantic. An opportunity has therefore arisen to extend the interval between major maintenance periods. Improved processes for the specification and management of equipment maintenance are also being introduced. The collective effect of these developments will be to increase the availability of Type 23 Frigate capability for operations.

University Air Squadrons

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many students flew at least one hour with the university air squadrons in the last year for which records are available. [86979]

Dr. Moonie: 720 students are known to have flown at least one hour with the university air squadrons last year. This figure consists of 640 student pilots and 80 student navigators.

The university air squadrons also contain engineer, medical and dental students—a total of 300—who are being sponsored through university by the Royal Air Force to meet other specialist requirements. These branch members will have been offered occasional flights, but these could be less than an hour in length.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of students who flew with the university air squadrons subsequently joined the RAF in each of the last five years. [86980]

Dr. Moonie: The 15 university air squadrons recruit up to 300 potential pilots every year in order to achieve their annual target of training, up to Elementary Flying Training Standard, the 80 to 90 graduate pilots required by the first stage of the Flying Training System.

The recruited figure may seem high, but is necessary to meet the Royal Air Force's needs. Predictably, a number will drop out at an early stage, as they find they do not have the aptitude, do not enjoy the experience, fail the initial medical, or have difficulty meeting the concurrent demands of a difficult degree course and membership of a university air squadron.

For those that remain, a commitment to join the Royal Air Force is nurtured and Squadron Commanders have instructions as to how to proceed, should they form the view that a student does not intend to apply to join the Royal Air Force.

Specifically at the end of the student's second year, the Squadron Commander will release him or her, should it become apparent that the student has no intention of applying to join.

The following statistics are available for the past three years—the Royal Air Force did not operate such a comprehensive recording system before financial year 2000.

2000–01

The number of students that started the final year of university air squadron training totalled 125. Of these 90 went on to join the Royal Air Force.

2001–02

The number of students that started the final year of university air squadron training was 113. Of these 91 went on to join the Royal Air Force.

2002–03

The number of students now in their final university air squadron year total 120, of these 90 have so far joined the Royal Air Force.

This reply is limited to those university air squadron members that are potential pilots and have undertaken formal flying training. It does not cover members who may have received limited air experience flights, such as potential engineers or medics, or potential navigators who receive a limited amount of flying training.

Wind Farms

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations from hon. Members of the European Parliament or the devolved administrations his Department has received about objections by his Department to wind farm planning applications. [86634]

Dr. Moonie: Our records show that, in the last 12 months, the Ministry of Defence has received twenty letters from Members of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly and none from hon. Members of the European Parliament.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with *(a)* the British Wind Energy Association and *(b)* British business about radar interference and wind farms. [86635]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence are members of a Steering Group on Wind Energy chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry. The other members of the Group are the Civil Aviation Authority and the British Wind Energy Association and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The Group discusses the issues relating to aviation safety that wind turbines can present and has produced an Interim Guidelines document "Wind Energy and Aviation Interests55 to assist all those involved in the wind energy industry.

The MOD devotes significant resources to the consideration of wind farm proposals prior to formal planning. Between July 1996 and November 2002, ourexperts considered some 1,900 proposals from developers for wind farms across the United Kingdom and consequently have had many meetings with Wind Energy developers about concerns regarding specific proposals including radar
interference.

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what further action he is taking to identify possible *(a)* onshore and *(b)* offshore wind farm sites about which his Department would have concerns to do with interference with radar. [86636]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is working towards a number of improvements in the way it processes proposals. We aim to increase engagement with the wind industry, for example, where minor adjustments to the siting of turbines may result in an objection being withdrawn. We will also provide more central guidance to those reviewing applications and publicise a help line for the industry. MOD is ready to engage with Regional Chambers as the latter move towards considering optimum sites for the siting of wind farms in the longer term when drawing up their regional energy strategies.

MOD has also reviewed recently the scope for giving developers a clearer picture of the specific areas of the country where onshore windfarm proposals may cause problems. There remains an unavoidable requirement to examine all applications in some detail before decisions can be made on any likely detriment to defence interests.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what budget his Department has for conducting research into the impact wind farms have in terms of radar interference. [86637]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence are members of a Steering Group on Wind Energy chaired by the Department of Trade and Industry. The Steering Group discussions led the DTI to commission research by QinetiQ into the effect of wind turbines on radar and MOD are giving assistance whenever required. The department has no specific budget for conducting research into the impact wind farms have on radar.

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with other NATO countries about the impact wind farms have in terms of interference with radar. [86638]

Dr. Moonie: No formal discussions dedicated to wind farms have taken place with other NATO countries.

PRIME MINISTER

Boundary Committee

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he has written recently to the Boundary Committee concerning its recommendations. [86724]

The Prime Minister: I have not written recently to the Boundary Committee.

Civil Service

David Burnside: To ask the Prime Minister if he will merge the Northern Ireland civil service with the home civil service. [87273]

The Prime Minister: There are no plans to do so.

Foreign Regimes

Mr. Dalyell: To ask the Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 906–07, what other states he has assessed as possessing appalling, brutal and terrible regimes. [87308]

The Prime Minister: It is clear from the evidence in the Iraq human rights dossier that Iraq merits special attention. Iraq is the only state to have used weapons of mass destruction against its own people and its neighbours.

We have serious concerns about a range of other countries. These are set out in the FCO's Annual Report on Human Rights 2002, as laid before Parliament on 26 September 2002.

Iraq

Lilly Smith: To ask the Prime Minister which Department is investigating the report submitted by Iraq to UNMOVIC in respect of its weapons programmes and military infrastructure; which United Kingdom experts have been given responsibility to undertake the assessment; what expertise they have in each case; and if he will make a statement on the Iraqi documentary declaration. [87585]

The Prime Minister: Iraq's declaration is being studied by analysts at the Ministry of Defence. The principal experts involved in this work have studied Iraq's weapons programmes for a number of years.

Maritime Safety

Mr. Alan Reid: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on departmental responsibility for the safety of *(a)* passengers, *(b)* employees of the operators of the pier and *(c)* employees of the operators of the ship while (i) embarking on and (ii) disembarking from a ship at a port in Scotland. [87513]

The Prime Minister: Health and safety and maritime matters are reserved to the UK Government. Ship operations are regulated by the Maritime and Coastguard Agency, an Executive Agency of the Department for Transport. Dock operations, which include the embarkation and disembarkation of passenger and crew, are regulated by the Health and Safety Executive, which is sponsored by the Department for Work and Pensions.

Ministerial Code

Mr. Brady: To ask the Prime Minister what the minimum size of property portfolio is which is covered by the Ministerial Code. [87227]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the Secretary of the Cabinet's letter of 11 December 2002 to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), a copy of which has been placed in the Library of the House.

Poland

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his recent meeting with the Prime Minister of Poland. [87011]

The Prime Minister: I discussed a wide range of issues, including the EU enlargement negotiations, when I met Leszek Miller in London on 26 November 2002. After our meeting, I announced that Polish nationals will be eligible to enter the UK as au pairs. The Government have since announced that we will extend to citizens of Poland, and the other EU member states, from their accession on 1 May 2004, the full rights to work in the UK as enjoyed by existing EU citizens, a subject that Leszek Miller raised with me.

Scottish Fishing Industry

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Prime Minister if he will raise the state of the Scottish fishing industry at the Copenhagen summit. [87130]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I gave in the House today.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Football Training Facilities

15. **Mr. Pike:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Football Association on its involvement in the provision of football training facilities. [85584]

Mr. Caborn: I have regular meetings with the Football Association to discuss the provision of grass roots training facilities through the Football Foundation. The Foundation benefits from Lottery funding from Sport England and the New Opportunities Fund. The provision of training facilities for professional players is the responsibility of the football authorities and individual clubs.

Museums

16. **Brian White:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support her Department gives to small local and regional museums. [85585]

Tessa Jowell: We will be providing £70 million for regional museums from this year until 2005–06.

Extra funding will also be made available to the national museums to enable them to work in partnership with regional museums. Additionally, there will be funds from the Department for Education and Skills to support museums' education.

27. **Mr. Kelvin Hopkins:** If she will take steps to increase funding of regional museums. [85596]

Tessa Jowell: We will be providing £70 million for regional museums fro this year until 2005–06.

Extra funding will also be made available to the national museums to enable them to work in partnership with regional museums. Additionally there will be funds from the Department for Education and Skills to support museums' education.

Olympic Games

17. **Mike Gapes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will support the London bid for the 2012 Olympics. [85586]

Tessa Jowell: The Government's decision on whether to support a bid to host the 2012 Olympic Games in London will be made early next year.

25. **Mr. Love:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received regarding the possibility of bidding to hold the Olympic Games in London in 2012. [85594]

Tessa Jowell: Officials from my Department have held regular meetings during this year with the Greater London Authority, London Development Agency, the British Olympic Association, UK Sport and Sport England to discuss the implications of London bidding to host the 2012 Olympic Games. In addition, the relevant Government Departments have been involved in assessing the ARUP report on the Costs and Benefits of a 2012 London Olympic Bid.

I have met the Mayor of London and will continue to meet the British Olympic Association and other non-Government stakeholders to discuss the practicalities of such a bid.

Licensing Bill

18. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the costs to be incurred by churches in applying for licences to host live music performances at their venues as a result of the provisions in the Licensing Bill. [85587]

Dr. Howells: Costs incurred by churches under the licensing regime proposed in the Licensing Bill would depend on the licensable activities, if any, which are undertaken and their frequency. The Regulatory Impact Assessment, published at the same time as the Licensing Bill and placed in the Libraries of both Houses, estimates that an application for a premises licence under the new regime will cost between £100 and £500, with an annual charge of between £50 and £150.

21. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on her plans to reform the public entertainment licence since the publication of the Licensing Bill. [85590]

Dr. Howells: My Department has received a number of representations from hon. and right hon. Members, members of the public, including musicians and Morris dancers, and from companies and organisations.

In addition, a large number of correspondents have written in support of the hon. Member's Early Day Motion 1182, the aims of which will be implemented by the Licensing Bill which is currently before Parliament.

23. **Andrew Selous:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the costs that will be incurred by live music venues if they wish to continue hosting live music performances at their venues as a result of the provisions in the Licensing Bill. [85592]

Dr. Howells: Under the proposed new regime, the cost of a premises licence would remain the same whether it solely covered the sale of alcohol or included any number of additional licensable activities, such as the provision of live music. The estimated fees in the Regulatory Impact Assessment, published with the Licensing Bill, were between £100 and £500 for an application for a premises licence with a subsequent annual charge of between £50 and £150. Fees would be set centrally by the Secretary of State in secondary legislation.

BBC3

19. **Mark Tami:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department will take to ensure that BBC3 does not dilute the quality of programmes on BBC1 and BBC2. [85588]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend's approval for BBC3 includes strong and wide-ranging conditions to ensure that the channel is distinctive and innovative. These include specific requirements that delivery of the BBC3 schedule must not be at the expense of programmes on BBC1 and 2 for the same age group, and that new programmes commissioned for BBC3 will be made available to enhance programming on BBC1 and BBC2.

Tourist Authorities

22. **Mr. Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with relevant regional and sub-national organisations regarding the reorganisation of the tourist authorities for England. [85591]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met Regional Development Agency Chairs on 27 June 2002 to discuss their new strategic role in tourism. We both met RDA and Regional Tourist Board representatives and the Local Government Tourism Executive at Tourism Fora in November 2001 and April 2002, and at the Hartwell House seminars in October 2001 and July 2002, in which reorganisation was discussed.

Communications Bill

24. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the changes she has made to the draft Communications Bill as a consequence of pre-legislative scrutiny. [85593]

Tessa Jowell: As I explained at the Second Reading of the Communications Bill on 3 December 2002, "we accepted more than 120 of [the] 148 recommendations of the Joint Committee on the draft Communications Bill". For the detail of the changes made to the Bill as a result, I refer the hon. Member to Appendix 4 of the explanatory notes that were published alongside the Bill, as well as our response to the Committee.

Entertainment Licences

26. **Dr. Brian Iddon:** If she will reduce the cost of entertainment licences for pubs and clubs. [85595]

Dr. Howells: Under the current public entertainment licensing system, local authorities have set charges that can vary by thousands of percent from area to area, even for similar activities carried out at similar premises. It would not be uncommon, for example, for one authority to charge £150 for a licence and another to charge £20,000 or more for the same permission.

Under the proposed new regime, however, the cost of a premises licence would remain the same whether it solely covered the sale of alcohol or included any number of additional licensable activities, such as the provision of live music. The estimated fees in the Regulatory Impact Assessment published with the Licensing Bill were between £100 and £500 for an application for a premises licence with a subsequent annual charge of between £50 and £150. Fees would be set centrally by the Secretary of State in secondary legislation. The assessment estimates that the hospitality and leisure industry would save £1.97 billion over the first ten years that the new regime is in operation.

Advisory Bodies (Membership)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the membership is of the *(a)* Advisory Committee on the Government Art Collection, *(b)* Advisory Council on Libraries, *(c)* Architectural Heritage Fund, *(d)* Arts Council of England, *(e)* British Film Institute, *(f)* British Library Board, *(g)* British Tourist Authority, *(h)* Crafts Council, *(i)* the Board of English Heritage, *(j)* English Tourist Board, *(k)* the Board of the Horniman Museum, *(l)* Independent Television Commission, *(m)* Library and Information Commission, *(n)* the Board of the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, *(o)* National Film and Television School, *(p)* National Lottery Charities Board, *(q)* National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, *(r)* Public Lending Right Advisory Committee, *(s)* Reviewing Committees on the Export of Works of Art, *(t)* Radio Authority, *(u)* Royal National Theatre, *(v)* S4C and *(w)* Treasure Valuation Committee. [87010]

Dr. Howells: The membership of bodies for which my Department is responsible is set out in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport Annual Report 2002, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House. The National Lottery Charities Board is now known as the Community Fund and the Library and Information Commission has been replaced by Resource. Additionally, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State is responsible for the membership of half of the board of the Architectural Heritage Fund. The full list of members is as follows:

Jane Sharman CBE (Chair)
Robert Clow
John Heritage Pavitt
William Cadell
Merlin Waterson
Colin Amery
Nicholas Baring
David Adams QBE
Malcolm Crowder QBE
Roy Dantzic
Fionnula Jay-O'Boyle MBE
Roger Wools

The Secretary of State is not responsible for the membership of the National Film and Television School, Royal National Theatre and Crafts Council, who make their own appointments. Members of the British Film Institute are appointed by the Film Council. Details of membership of these organisations should be available from the bodies.

Avro Vulcan XH558

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations her Department has received regarding the project to restore Avro Vulcan XH558. [86840]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: To date the Department has received 75 letters and emails regarding the Avro Vulcan.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations the Heritage Lottery Fund has received regarding the project to restore Avro Vulcan XH558. [86841]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: The Heritage Lottery Fund received three letters from interested parties and two letters from hon. Members while the application was being assessed. In addition, 128 hon. Members signed an Early Day Motion in the House of Commons, which was noted during the assessment process. Following the Trustees' decision not to support the project, the Heritage Lottery Fund has to date received 732 emails and letters of support for the project.

Digital Services

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the rules regarding advertising digital services on the BBC. [85571]

Tessa Jowell: The BBC does not broadcast advertisements but it does broadcast information about its public services, including, of course, its digital services. This activity is carried out subject to the provisions of the BBC's commercial policy guidelines.

First Flight Commemoration

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what lottery money has been earmarked for *(a)* events and *(b)* causes commemorating the centenary of the first manned flight; and if she will make a statement. [86844]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: The Heritage Lottery Fund has not earmarked funds to commemorate the centenary of the first manned flights. However, it would welcome applications for projects which meet its priorities as set out in its application packs.

Free Television Licences

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of providing free television licences to those aged over 75 years in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years was. [87333]

Dr. Howells: Free television licences for people aged 75 and over first became available in November 2000. The cost of free licences issued in Northern Ireland was £6.5 million in 2000–01 and £8.3 million in 2001–02.

Heritage Lottery Fund

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what account the Heritage Lottery Fund takes of correspondence from the public in reaching its decisions; and if she will make a statement. [86842]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The Heritage Lottery Fund looks for evidence that the project is supported by the local community in which it is situated. It will also look at letters of support it receives for the project from the public, or further evidence which applicants are able to give it about the level of public support for their proposals. It also will take into account views of interested parties, particularly those who may be closely affected by a funding decision. However, this does not alter the consideration it must n give to each request for funding against the stated criteria, and against the specific issues outlined in the application pack. Letters of support received after a decision is reached are noted, but cannot affect a decision retrospectively.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how often the Heritage Lottery Fund has reversed a decision not to award lottery funding to a cause; what reasons were given; and if she will make a statement. [86843]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The Heritage Lottery Fund has an independent Reviews and Complains Committee Organisations which feel that their application for a grant has not been considered fairly or properly can ask for the Committee to review it. The Committee has reviewed 33 cases over the last five years, and asked the Board (or the Heritage Lottery Fund Committee that took the original decision) to look again at its decision on four occasions. On two occasions a decision was reversed. In the first instance, after careful reflection, the Board concluded that the application comprised a number of unique features of heritage merit which, in combination, warranted support. In the other case, the Committee drew attention to a misunderstanding of project costs and partnership funding which altered the level of grant requested by the applicant. This resulted in the then Committee for the English Regions concluding that the application now offered value for money and awarded a grant.

Independent Radio

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to promote independent radio production; and if she will make a statement. [85582]

Tessa Jowell: The BBC has voluntarily committed itself to a 10 per cent. quota for independent production on its network sources. I welcome the following statement in which the BBC re-affirms its commitment to independent producers, and demonstrates that the BBC is giving further consideration to the scope of the services included in the quota, and the arrangements for reporting against it. The Government shall keep the position under review as the radio market develops.

BBC Radio and Independent Production

"The BBC acknowledges the significant contribution independent producers have made to network radio output over the past 11 years. We remain fully committed to our voluntary pledge that 10 per cent. of eligible hours on our national analogue networks will be made by independents. We also wish publicly to emphasise that we will continue to view this 10 per cent. commitment as a floor not a ceiling. We believe that our behaviour over the past five years highlights this attitude and we will work to open up commissions, where appropriate to independent producers in order to develop the UK production sector.

In the past our 10 per cent. voluntary commitment has not applied to our national English language analogue radio services for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. We are lookir.g at how we could develop a similar voluntary commitment to that which already exists for our analogue network services. We believe that we would be able to commit publicly to an appropriate level of commissioning from the independent sector across the English language services in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In doing so we must take account of the existing market conditions in order to determine a realistic and sustainable level at which to set such a commitment. We also need to consider how we balance most effectively our ambition to support the development of the independent production sector in the nations in the context of our wider commitment to production in the Nations.

Given current levels of take-up of digital radio across the country we do not yet feel able to extend a commitment for a particular level of independent commissioning for our new digital services. However, it is our hope that as take-up of digital radio grows and these services mature, we will be able to invite independent producers to provide content for these services where appropriate.

We intend to report fully on both the hours we commission from independent producers and our spend on independent production across our analogue radio networks in our annual review.

We hope that these commitments will act to strengthen the positive and constructive relationship with independent producers which we already enjoy."

Licensing

Mr. Gordon Marsden: What representations she has received from churches on the potential impact of the proposed new licensing arrangements for live performances. [85581]

Dr. Kim Howells: I have received one letter form the Archbishop's Council of the Church of England and a number of other letters and e-mails from churches about the effects of the Licensing Bill on their provision of live music which is not associated with religious worship.

Lottery Funding (Cumbria)

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much lottery funding has been received in the last three years in *(a)* the Workington constituency and *(b)* Cumbria; and what the average amount of lottery money received in each constituency was in that period. [86918]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* According to the information supplied to us by the distributing bodies for the national lottery awards database, the Workington constituency has been awarded 5,042,599 and Cumbria has been awarded 42,150,64 in Lottery funding between 11/12/99 and 10/12/02. The average amount awarded to each UK constituency over the same period has been £5,362,359.

Royal Palaces

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate has been made of the cost of proposed refurbishment and redecorative work at Clarence House; and how much of this is to be charged to Grant-in-Aid. [83907]

Dr. Howells: The estimated cost of the proposed refurbishment and redecorative work is £3.45 million (excluding VAT). In addition, £175,000 has been budgeted for removing, storing and reinstating the contents of the house and £356,000 for professional fees (also excluding VAT). All the above costs will be met from the current Grant-in-Aid allocation.

The Prince of Wales will personally fund costs relating to the furnishing of Clarence House.

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what changes are planned in the use of accommodation at *(a)* St. James's Palace and *(b)* Clarence House. [83908]

Dr. Howells: From August 2003, Clarence House will become the official residence for The Prince of Wales and the London home for Prince William and Prince Harry. Clarence House will also house the Private Office of The Prince of Wales. The main parts of Clarence House will be opened to the public in the summer months. The office space in St. James's Palace, vacated as a result of the move of the Private Office of The Prince of Wales, will be occupied by the Royal Collection. The future of the apartment in St. James's Palace currently occupied by The Prince of Wales is under review.

22. **Mr. Alan Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what accommodation there is at *(a)* St. James's Palace and *(b)* Clarence House. [83909]

Dr. Howells: At St. James's Palace, there is the following accommodation: state rooms, two chapels (Chapel Royal and The Queen's Chapel), office accommodation and 22 apartments (occupied by Members of the Royal Family, staff, or currently vacant, with two currently let to the Ministry of Defence). In addition, there is a picture restoration studio, guardroom and messing facility for the guard.

Clarence House comprises 16 main rooms plus office, staff and ancillary accommodation. Following refurbishment of Clarence House, this accommodation will be used by The Prince of Wales *(a)* to perform his official duties, which include meetings, receptions and other events; *(b)* as his official London residence; and *(c)* as offices for 30 of his official staff, as well as by the Princes as their London home.

School Sports

Mr. Viggers (Gosport): What recent efforts her Department has made to promote sport in schools. [85589]

Mr. Caborn: The amount of £459 million is being invested by DCMS and DfES to transform physical education, school sport and club links over the next three years. The funding will help deliver a joint DfES/DCMS Public Service Agreement target to increase the percentage of children who spend at least two hours a week on high quality PE and school sport—in and beyond school—to 75 per cent. by 2006.

Sport (National Lottery Funding)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much her Department and its predecessors has spent at 2002 prices through *(a)* Grant-in-Aid funding and *(b)* National Lottery funding on (i) sport funding bodies, (ii) elite sport support, (iii) local sport initiatives and (iv) others in each year since 1992; and if she will make a statement. [86375]

Dr. Howells: The data required are not readily available, but my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport will write to the hon. Member with detailed information as soon as possible.

Television Production (Regions)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she is taking to expand television programme production in the regions. [86566]

Dr. Howells: The Government's policy is to retain and strengthen the regional dimension to public service broadcasting to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of different communities and cultural interests. The Communications Bill contains detailed provisions designed to achieve this.

Under the Bill, Channel 3 companies will have targets for programmes produced in the regions for the regions, programmes made regionally for national audiences and investment in programme production in the regions. Channel 4 will have targets for programme production and investment in the regions. Obligations in this area will also be applied to the BBC, through the agreement with the Secretary of State.

In addition, the ITC UK programme supply review was published on 26 November 2002. The review recommended a number of changes to support regional production. We are currently considering these recommendations and will make any necessary amendments to the Communications Bill.

Television Services

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether her policy on the promotion of media literacy includes references to hearing and sight-impaired people having access to television services. [85814]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Our policy on media literacy, set out in the statement published on October 2001 and developed in the duty to be laid on OFCOM under the Communications Bill, is not focussed specifically on people with sensory impairements. It is to help everyone manage the new media environment more safely. In carrying out this duty, as indeed in their other work, OFCOM must as appropriate have regard to the needs of people with disabilities.

Other specific provisions set new, higher targets for subtitling and audio-description and require OFCOM to produce a code promoting the understanding and enjoyment of television services by those with hearing or sight impairment.

Tourism

Mr. John Smith: How many tourists visited British seaside resorts in the last five years. [85577]

Dr. Howells: The majority of trips to the British seaside are made by British people. From 1997 to 2001, the UK Tourism Survey recorded 161 million such trips.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Reinstated Clergy

37. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the rights of clergy who have been reinstated with regard to salary and pension provision. [85606]

Mr. Bell: Clergy are not reinstated as such. If they were temporarily suspended or offered leave of absence while in office, payment of stipend and accrual of pensionable service would be linked to whether the clergy concerned continued to hold the Bishop's licence.

Clergy (Employment Status)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what advice the Church Commissioners have given to the Department of Trade and Industry in its review of the employment status of members of the clergy. [85608]

Mr. Bell: The Archbishops' Council has responded on behalf of the Church of England, after consulting bishops. A copy of its response will be made available in the Library.

Public Events (Cathedrals)

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what advice is given by the Church Commissioners to the deans and chapters of English cathedrals concerning revenues from the use of their premises for public events other than worship; and if he will make a statement. [85607]

Mr. Bell: The Church Commissioners do not give advice concerning revenues from the use of cathedral premises for public events in relation to the proposed licensing Bill introduced in another place. It would rest with the cathedrals' representative body, the Association of English Cathedrals, to do so and to make whatever submission they thought appropriate in relation to the proposed Bill.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Regional Government

36. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, if he will make a statement on the Commission's policy on the use of public funds in the promotion of referendums on regional government. [85605]

Mr. Beith: If a regional referendum is announced, the Commission intends to conduct an information campaign designed to encourage voting in the referendum. The Commission also has the power to designate lead campaigning organisations for and against the referendum question. A designated organisation may receive public funds as well as a postage-free referendum address.

In the event that designated organisations are not appointed, the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, currently before the House, includes provisions for the Commission itself to provide information to the electorate explaining the arguments for and against the referendum question.

National Assembly for Wales

38. **Ian Lucas:** To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, if the Committee will review the arrangements for the system for election to the National Assembly for Wales. [85609]

Mr. Beith: No. Such a review would not fall within the statutory remit of the Speaker's Committee and the Electoral Commission has no current plans to review this area. However, I understand that the recently established Commission on the Powers and Electoral Arrangements for the National Assembly for Wales, chaired by the Noble Lord Richard QC, is looking at this issue.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many new nuclear power stations are to be built in the UK in the next 10 years; where they will be built; and how long they will be in service. [86303]

Mr. Wilson: In common with all generation options, the initiative for bringing forward proposals to construct new plant lies with the market and the generating companies. British Energy and BNFL have said they have no current plans for such proposals.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many nuclear power stations in operation in the UK will be upgraded; and how many will be decommissioned. [86304]

Mr. Wilson: Any modification to a nuclear power station is a matter for the operator subject to the relevant regulatory controls. Latest published company information on expected station closure dates is as follows.

Magnox	*Capacity MW*	*Published lifetime*
Calder Hall	194	2003
Chapelcross	196	2005
Bradwell	300	2002
Sizewell A	420	2006
Dungeness A	450	2006
Oldbury	434	2008
Wylfa	980	2010
British Energy		
Dungeness B	1,110	2008
Hartlepool	1,210	2014
Heysham 1	1,150	2014
Heysham 2	1,250	2023
Hinkley Point B	1,220	2011
Hunterston B	1,190	2011
Sizewell B	1,188	2035
Torness	1,250	2023

WTO (Sydney)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the objectives of the Government at the WTO mini-ministerial meeting in Sydney on 14 November. [83652]

Ms Hewitt: The Government's objective for the WTO mini-ministerial meeting, which took place in Sydney on 14 and 15 November, was to advance key development issues within the WTO Doha Development Agenda (DDA) including agreement on how WTO members, without sufficient manufacturing capacity in the pharmaceutical sector, can make use of compulsory licensing for essential medicines; and agreement on a package of special and differential treatment for developing countries.

The UK is represented by the European Commission in the WTO.

Agriculture and Biotechnology

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to re-appoint the Agriculture and Biotechnology Commission when its term finishes. [86570]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The existing terms of office of the Chair and Members of the AEBC expire at the end of January 2003. The AEBC is a public body and appointments and re-appointments are made under the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments' Code of Practice for Ministerial Appointments to Public Bodies. As part of this process, I am currently consulting with my Cabinet colleagues and with Ministers in the Devolved Administrations.

Bank Holidays

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to count bank holidays as statutory paid annual leave. [86952]

Alan Johnson: There are no current proposals to count bank holidays as statutory paid annual leave.

Benefit Payments (Disabled People)

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what advice disabled and infirm people will get to help to decide what method they should use to help with benefit payments in Post Offices. [86561]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

There will be a range of accounts available for people. The Department will provide customers with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to Direct Payment. Customers, including those with a disability, will then be able to consider the options available and choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances. They will be asked to provide details of their chosen account so that the Department can begin to pay their benefit or pensions by Direct Payment.

Post Office card account customers will also be able to give third party access to a nominated individual who will be able to access their account via a second card and a separate PIN.

It has always been recognised that there will be some customers who are unable to use any of the banking options or the Post Office card account. For these people we are currently exploring the options available to ensure they receive their benefit at outlets which will include the Post Office.

BNFL

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what evaluation her Department has made of reports produced by the BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue; and what the departmental representation is on the BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue. [86169]

Mr. Wilson: The aim of the BNFL Stakeholder Dialogue is to inform BNFL's decision-making process about the improvement of their environmental performance in the context of their overall development. It is therefore up to BNFL, and not my Department, to evaluate the reports that come out of this work, but it is clear that the company greatly value the Dialogue process.

The Department is a strong supporter of the Dialogue and is represented on several of the working groups, as well as the Main Group that oversees the entire process.

[illegible]ital Marketplace

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for achievement by the end of Parliament to increase to 1 million the number of SMEs wired up to the digital market place. [83596]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]*: 1. To ensure that 1.5 million micro, small and medium-sized businesses are 'connected' by 2002. (Competitiveness White Paper implementation plan)

2. To have one million SMEs trading online by 2002. (Competitiveness White Paper implementation plan)

The target of ensuring that 1.5 million SMEs are connected was achieved in 2000, as indicated by that year's International Benchmarking Study (IBS). The 2002 IBS, published on 3rd December 2002, has shown

a recent drop in the numbers of SMEs going on line, however the target continues to be achieved, with just over 1.5 million SMEs now connected.

The total level of e-commerce continues to increase as those companies that trade online do see an increasing volumes. Through UK Online for Business, we continue to help SME's make the best use of information in communication technology.

Doha Trade Round

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she made to the EU Trade Commissioner in advance of the World Trade Organisation's general council meeting about the agreements which need to be made to retain broad support from developing countries for the Doha trade round; and if she will make a statement about progress made to date on the negotiations in this round. [86948]

Ms Hewitt: Negotiations are in full flow and technical progress has been made in most areas of the negotiations.

I am in regular contact with Commissioner Lamy and have spoken to him recently. I stressed, in particular, the importance of reaching an agreement on how WTO members without sufficient manufacturing capacity in the pharmaceutical sector can make use of compulsory licensing for essential medicines; and on reaching agreement on special and differential treatment for developing countries. Looking to the future, progress on these issues and on agriculture will have to be made to ensure that development countries continue to support the Doha trade round.

Employment Tribunals

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what arrangements are made for citizens who have applied to serve as lay members of employment tribunals and have been turned down to be briefed about the reasons for their rejection. [86505]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Feedback for candidates on their application for these posts is available on request from the consultants organising this recruitment competition, Capita Ras, and has been given to those who have asked for it. It was not automatically offered to candidates because of the large numbers involved—nearly 4,500 candidates applied for some 250 posts. My Department will publish an evaluation report on this exercise in due course, which will include an assessment of feedback arrangements.

Energy Sector (Government Support)

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect Government financial support has been made available to the energy sector in each year since 1990, excluding the nuclear and renewables industries. [82802]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The table shows how much direct Government financial support has been made available to the energy sector in each year since 1990, excluding the nuclear and renewables industries.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to him today, PQ No. 82803, for further information on how the figures were assembled.

£ million

	Direct
1990–91	149.6
1991–92	465.2
1992–93	652.9
1993–94	431.7
1994–95	211.7
1995–96	8.4
1996–97	4.9
1997–98	4.9
1998–99	4.6
1999–2000	4.5
2000–01	81.3
2001–02	66.6

Note:
There was no indirect Government financial support.

Mr. Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much *(a)* direct and *(b)* indirect Government support has been given to the energy sector in each year since 1990. [82803]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave him on 16 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 918–19W and 17 December 2001, *Official Report*, column 102W. Since those figures were compiled, an error has been corrected in the 1990–91 figure for indirect Government support. In addition, there are minor increases in figures for direct Government support for years 1998–99 to 2000–01 to reflect the Research Council's more detailed investigation of their investments in sustainable energy.

The following table incorporates these amendments and includes expenditure for 2001–02.

Total support for the energy sector

£ million

Year	*Direct*	*Indirect*
1990–91	292.1	1,271.1
1991–92	579.4	809.7
1992–93	822.0	892.9
1993–94	603.5	963.1
1994–95	379.2	988.4
1995–96	245.2	793.5
1996–97	202.0	112.8
1997–98	220.4	126.5
1998–99	325.1	127.0
1999–2000	234.8	56.4
2000–01	342.1	64.9
2001–02	356.2	94.0

Notes:
1. The figures for direct support include:
(a) Direct Government funding for research and development on renewable energy through the DTI's Sustainable Energy Programme and through Research Councils via the Science Budget
(b) Support for the coal industry but excluding the impact of debt-write-offs and proceeds at the privatisation of British Coal and payments made in respect of historic liabilities retained in the public sector, such as health claims
(c) Support for nuclear based on the funding to the UKAEA details of which were included in the reply to a parliamentary question from the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 756–57W.

(d) Support for oil and gas production through Sustained Hydrocarbons Additional Recovery Programme (SHARP) and predecessor programmes, and development of new products and services and competitiveness improvement within the UK oil and gas supplies sector.

2. The figures for indirect support include:

(a) expenditure through the Non Fossil Fuel Obligation (NFFO), the Scottish Renewables Obligation and the Northern Ireland NFFO funded by the electricity consumer through the Fossil Fuel Levy in Great Britain and the variant arrangements in Northern Ireland.

(b) The premium received by Nuclear Electric plc over and above the market price for electricity in the period 1990–96 details of which were provided in the reply to the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell) on 14 November 2001, *Official Report*, columns 756–57W.

Since 1998 the Government have also worked with the oil and gas industry through the Oil and Gas Industry Task Force, now PILOT, to identify and deliver the measures necessary to ensure continued profitable activity on the UK Continental Shelf.

The Government are currently providing British Energy with a credit facility of up to £650 million in respect of the period up to 9 March 2003 and has taken security for the loan over the company's assets. The facility has been provided in respect of the company's working capital requirements and cash collateral for trading in the UK and North America. As of 28 November the company has drawn down £382 million of the facility available to them.

Fuel Poverty

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what analysis she has made of the merits of the programmes run by energy companies with the aim of helping to end fuel poverty. [86982]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has piloted a survey to monitor the impacts of company schemes aimed at tackling fuel poverty. The main objectives of the survey are to assess:

1. the number of households helped;

2. to what extent the households have benefited;

3. the extent to which they are schemes which operate under the energy supplier's mandatory Energy Efficiency Commitment (EEC—formerly EESoP); and

4. whether these schemes are an important contribution to fuel poverty alleviation and whether they harness company creativity.

The data collected via this survey are currently being finalised, but preliminary analyses suggest that about 1.5 million households have benefited from these schemes. About 0.5 million of these are from schemes that are not EEC (or EESoPs) related. A more complete analysis will be included as part of the Government's UK Fuel Poverty Strategy progress report.

Horizon System

Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the Horizon system will be used for Smart cards to be issued for benefit payment after January 2003. [86560]

Mr. Timms: I understand from Post Office Ltd that the Horizon computer system will be used for payment of benefits at the post office counter using plastic bank cards including the plastic card for accessing the card account at the Post Office.

Kyoto Protocol

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what research her Department has undertaken into public attitudes towards the UK meeting its Kyoto obligations on renewable energy and the potential change in electricity prices to the consumer; and how the cost of electricity for consumers will affect the Government's policy of promoting renewable energy sources. [85437]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The Department are carrying out a public attitude survey on renewable energy through the COI and this should be completed in the spring of next year. We also recently undertook a public consultation exercise as part of the preparatory work for the forthcoming Energy White Paper. This examined the public's priorities for energy policy, including the role of renewables and attitudes towards changes in gas and electricity prices. The finding from this exercise are published on the DTI website http://www.dti.gov.uk/energy/developep/pubcon rep.shtml.

In addition, DEFRA regularly undertakes surveys of public attitudes to the environment which include questions on people's awareness, concerns and knowledge of climate change.

Most recently, the full results of the "survey of public attitudes to quality of life and to the environment—2001" were published in October on the DEFRA website www.defra.gov.uk/environment/statistics/pubatt/index.htm.

The target under the Renewables Obligation of 10 per cent. of electricity being generated from renewable sources by 2010 will make an important contribution towards the UK meeting its Kyoto targets. Achievement of the 10 per cent. target by 2010 would represent an annual saving of 2.5 million tonnes of carbon emissions. Achieving this renewables target is expected to cost an additional 4.4 per cent. on average electricity prices in 2010 over actual 1999 prices.

Renewable Energy

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the Government's role in encouraging the manufacture of renewable energy equipment in the United Kingdom. [85105]

Mr. Wilson: The Renewables Obligation, which the Government introduced on 1 April 2002, is being backed by nearly £250 million of direct support measures to bring forward newer renewable energy technologies. In addition, in order to foster innovative research and development activity, the Government have increased provision for the New and Renewable Energy R&D programme to £19 million per year.

This provides a substantial incentive to renewable energy generation in the UK, and creates a favourable climate too, for the expansion of renewable energy equipment and services.

In March, the Government set up a new unit, Renewables UK, to maximise the UK's involvement in renewable energy projects in the UK and overseas. Renewables UK aims to encourage the UK renewable

energy sector, including equipment manufacturers and service providers, to take advantage of the opportunities created by the Renewables Obligation.

Renewables UK will be conducting a gap analysis to help define which technologies offer the best prospects for growth in UK manufacturing.

Royal Mail Group

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much net profit was made by the Royal Mail Group in each year since 1990. [86446]

Ms Hewitt: The profit after tax for Royal Mail Group for each year since financial year 1989–90 is set out in the following table.

Year	*Profit (Loss) after Tax (£ million)*
1989–90	3
1990–91	31
1991–92	152
1992–93	187
1993–94	195
1994–95	314
1995–96	270
1996–97	361
1997–98	447
1998–99	496
1999–2000	(264)
2000–01	49
2001–02	(940)

Rural Post Offices

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 518W, on the rural post office network, how much of the £450 million that will be made available for rural post offices from 2003–06 is paid out of funds derived from past profits made by the Royal Mail group and its predecessors. [86501]

Ms Hewitt: In line with my statement on 2 December, £450 million of Government money will be made available from £1.8 billion of gilts which Royal Mail group hold on behalf of Government. The gilts represent accumulated past dividends and cash generated by the business.

Unlike previous Governments we have decided to release these funds for investment, including in the post office network.

Science and Engineering Base

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress has been made towards the target set in 1998 for the period 1999–2002, to improve the overall international ranking of the science and engineering base in terms of *(a)* quality, *(b)* relevance and *(c)* cost-effectiveness. [83594]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 26 November 2002]:* The quality of the science and engineering base is currently measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of citations of published papers. Over the period 1981–2000 the UK received a 9.1 per cent. share of the citations in the international Science Citation Index which placed the UK second overall to the USA.

Relevance is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of the proportion of Higher Education Institute funding from non-governmental sources. For the latest year (1999), the UK's ranking was first among the G7 countries.

Cost effectiveness is measured by the UK's world ranking in terms of the number of papers published per £1 million of public expenditure on science. In 1990, 1993, 1996 and 2000, the most recent year in which the measurement was made, the UK was the leading country in the G7.

Sellafield

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what consideration has been given to the request for the Irish Radiological Protection Institute to be given access to the BNFL plant at Sellafield parallel to that already given to the UN International Atomic Agency. [86015]

Mr. Wilson: The regulation of activities at the Sellafield site is a matter solely for the relevant competent UK authorities acting under regulatory powers granted to them under relevant UK law. The UK would not afford a right of access to plants at Sellafield to an interested foreign organisation. The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has the right to make inspections by approved IAEA safeguards inspectors in accordance with the provisions of the UK's safeguards agreement with the European Atomic Energy Community and the IAEA.

Telephone Conversations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the *(a)* dates and *(b)* purpose of (i) meetings and (ii) telephone conversations between Ministers in her Department and (A) the chairman and (B) the chief executive of the Royal Mail group or its predecessors since 8 June 2001. [86449]

Ms Hewitt: As shareholder of Royal Mail Holdings plc, I have had numerous conversations on the telephone and in person, mainly with the chairman, Allan Leighton, during this period. We discussed a wide range of issues affecting the company, including the company's performance, the renewal plans and the finance package for the company.

Urban Reinvention

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when the list of proposed post office closures, as part of the Urban Reinvention programme, will be announced. [87175]

Mr. Timms: Post Office Ltd. do not have a predetermined list of offices which will close under their urban reinvention programme, nor is there any arithmetical formula which will determine the number of closures in any given area.

Proposals for closures under the programme will be determined by how many offices are close to each other in the area, the current and projected business volumes and whether individual sub-postmasters have indicated that they want to leave the network. Factors of high importance to customers will also be carefully considered. These include the proximity and convenience of access of other branches, public transport links, facilities for the disabled and the ability of other branches to absorb the work without detriment to service. Before any changes are made, a formal consultation process will be carried out in accordance with the Code of Practice on Post Office Closures, with local communities, interest groups, councillors and MPs. In every instance there will also be extensive consultation with the consumer body, Postwatch.

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what discussions her Department has had with the British Wind Energy Association about radar interference and wind farms; [86631]

(2) what discussions her Department has had with civilian airlines about the impact of wind farms on radar equipment. [86633]

Mr. Wilson: The Wind Energy, Defence and Civil Aviation Interest Working Group, which was set up and is chaired by the Department, provides a forum for addressing the effect of wind turbines on defence and civil aviation activities including their impact on radar functioning. The membership of the of the working group covers a wide range of stakeholders including the British Wind Energy Association, the Ministry of Defence, the Civil Aviation Authority and National Air Traffic Services. The latter two organisations have an interest in ensuring that wind farms do not compromise the safety of civil aviation operations including radar functioning.

In October the working group produced interim guidelines on wind energy and aviation interest which provide guidance to wind farm developers on a range of issuesincluding the location of turbines in the vicinity of radar installations. Copies of the document are being deposited in the Libraries of the House. The guidelines are part of the programme of work outlined in the reply to the answer given to my hon. Friend on 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 329W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Business Start-Up Strategy

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what steps have been taken to implement the new business start up strategy. [86475]

Mr. Pearson: A draft Business Birth Rate strategy is being finalised by Invest Northern Ireland and will be issued for public consultation in January 2003. On completion of this consultation process a detailed implementation plan will be put into effect.

Clean Air

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what consultation with the business sector was undertaken by the Department of the Environment in Northern Ireland with regard to the regulatory framework concerning clean air under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. [87303]

Angela Smith: The Department carried out a full consultation exercise with various interested parties, which included Northern Ireland Transport Holding Company, Translink, Freight Transport Association, Retail Motor Industry Federation and the Road Haulage Association. The consultation document was also advertised in local newspapers and published on the Departments website. No concerns were raised by the business sector.

Environment

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what controls there will be on the powers of authorised officers regarding their authority to enter residential premises under the provisions of the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. [87302]

Angela Smith: The purpose of Part II of the Order is to minimise or reduce the pollution caused by emissions from industrial installations. The powers of entry provided for by this Part will be exercisable only in respect of such installations. In practice, they are not expected to have any application to residential premises except in the unlikely event that relevant industrial activities are carried out on such premises.

Part III of the Order deals with local air quality management and makes provision for only authorised persons to enter any premises used for residential purposes. Such persons must be authorised by an enforcing authority, ie, the Department of the Environment or a district council. In addition, entry onto residential premises must be either with the consent of a person who occupies the premises or under the authority of a warrant issued by a Justice of the Peace. These provisions are similar to those in other existing Northern Ireland environmental legislation, and are necessary to fulfil the required functions in Part III of the Order.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what protection will be afforded to owners of property in lands adjacent to areas of special scientific interest under the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002. [87304]

Angela Smith: The provisions relating to Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) within the Environment (NI) Order do not impose any restrictions on land which lies adjacent to an existing ASSI. There is therefore no requirement to afford protection to the owners or occupiers of such land.

Article 43 of the Order will enable the Department to enter into an agreement with the owner or occupier of land which is adjacent to an ASSI in order to conserve or enhance its wildlife interests. Such agreements are entirely voluntary. A similar power already exists in relation to ASSIs in Article 9 of the Nature Conservation and Amenity Lands Order (NI) 1985.

Article 30 of the Environment Order enables the Department to increase the area of an ASSI. This power will be subject to similar requirements to those applying for new ASSI declarations, including arrangements for representations or objections to be made.

Giant's Causeway

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many applications have been received by the Northern Ireland Tourist Board for financial assistance to construct visitor centres at the Giant's Causeway, County Antrim; and whether the Northern Ireland Tourist Board has made a decision on the number of visitor centres it is prepared to support financially at the Giant's Causeway. [86477]

Mr. Pearson: The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has received one application for financial assistance for the construction of a visitor centre at the Giant's Causeway. The application was received on 2 May 2002 and is currently being processed. The Northern Ireland Tourist Board has not made any decision relative to the funding of any visitor centre nor has the board determined the number of visitor centres it is prepared to support.

Hospital Staff (Employment Records)

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland whether it is normal practice to destroy the employment records of staff employed by a hospital; and whose decision it is to destroy such records. [85750]

Mr. Browne: Staff in a hospital are normally employed by the health and social services trust responsible for managing the hospital. My Department has instructed trusts to retain the employment records of staff for not less than six years after the person leaves that employment or reaches the age of 70, whichever is the later.

Human Organs Inquiry

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost was of the Human Organs Inquiry; and if he will make a statement on the availability to the inquiry of secondary back-up data from 1965 to 1975. [85755]

Mr. Browne: The cost of the Human Organs Inquiry was £405,867.This figure includes all costs incurred by the inquiry, including the printing and launch of its report. The inquiry team had access to all available data, but acknowledged in its report the inadequacy of record keeping in the past. At the Royal Victoria hospital there was a record of each post mortem, but other records, which may have shown what happened to organs that had been removed, were incomplete or missing.

Intergovernmental Councils

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many meetings of *(a)* the North/South Ministerial Council and *(b)* the British/Irish Council have taken place in each year since their formation. [86618]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The numbers of meetings were as follows:

Institution/Year	*Number*
North/South Ministerial Council	
1999	1
2000	22
2001	24
2002	18
British/Irish Council	
1999	1
2000	2
2001	1
2002	4

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent in each year since their formation on the running costs of the *(a)* North/South Ministerial Council, *(b)* British/Irish Council, and *(c)* Northern Ireland Civic Forum. [86624]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The running costs to the Northern Ireland Administration were as follows:

£

Institution	*Running costs*
North/South Ministerial Council[1]	
1999–2000	94,949
2000–01	737,162
2001–02	787,609
2002–03	466,800
British/Irish Council[2]	
1999–2000	6,365
2000–01	7,420
2001–02	10,158
2002–03	17,344
Northern Ireland Civic Forum[3]	
2000–01	145,000
2001–02	450,000

[1] Expenditure by the Northern Ireland Administration includes salaries, administration and cost of meetings.

[2] Includes cost of ministerial meetings in Northern Ireland and travel and subsistence costs for ministerial meetings outside Northern Ireland.

[3] Includes cost of salaries, administration, meetings, Members expenses, printing of reports and researchers.

Invest Northern Ireland

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when a decision will be made on a future headquarters for Invest Northern Ireland. [86476]

Mr. Pearson: Consideration of this matter is at an advanced stage and it is expected that a final decision will be made in the new year.

Mallusk Landfill Site

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will honour the commitment made by the former Northern Ireland Minister of the Environment to conduct an environmental assessment into the proposed landfill site at Mallusk. [87272]

Angela Smith: In July 2002, the previous Minister advised that an addendum updating and reviewing the original environmental statement, received in respect of this planning application would be required before a decision would issue. I can confirm that this remains the current position.

Once received the addendum will be advertised to give the public an opportunity to make representations on the statement as amended.

Northern Ireland Civic Forum

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much has been spent on expenses claimed by members of the Northern Ireland Civic Forum in each year since its formation. [86623]

Mr. Paul Murphy: The total expenses claimed by members of the Civic Forum in each financial year since the forum's inception is as follows:

	£
October 2000 to March 2001	8,033
April 2001 to March 2002	34,825
April 2002 to October 2002	13,970

Orders in Council

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what criteria were applied when assessing which Northern Ireland legislation would be brought forward by means of Order in Council. [86622]

Mr. Paul Murphy: My main concerns are to ensure that the people of Northern Ireland are not disadvantaged by the suspension of the devolved institutions and that the good work on legislation started by the Executive and the Assembly is not wasted. If the institutions are not restored in the interim, my ministerial colleagues and I will do our utmost to deliver the bulk of the Executive's legislative programme at Westminster in a timeframe as close as possible to that envisaged by the Assembly.

Planning Aid Service

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the time scale for the establishment of a planning aid service. [86816]

Angela Smith: Planning Aid for Northern Ireland was established by the local branch of the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and launched at the Millennium Planning Conference in Belfast on 22 June 2000. It has now been in existence for two and a half years. It is independent of Government.

Planning Aid for Northern Ireland has approached the Department of the Environment for financial assistance in further developing the role of the service. The Department's Planning Service and RTPI jointly commissioned a feasibility study in September 2002, the purpose of which is to identify funding to develop a best value Planning Aid Service in Northern Ireland. The outcome of the feasibility study is expected in the New Year.

Planning

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Consultation Paper on Third Party Planning Appeals will be issued; and if he will make a statement. [86815]

Angela Smith: I am aware of Dermot Nesbitt's commitment to publish a consultation paper before the end of 2002. However, I am also conscious of the potential implications which the introduction of a third party appeal right has for the operation of Northern Ireland's planning system and economy. I therefore wish to have a regulatory impact assessment carried out. I will wish to give this matter the most careful consideration, before I make a decision how to best deal with this important issue.

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Implementation Plan for Modernising Planning Processes will be published; and if he will make a statement. [86814]

Angela Smith: While the 2002–03 Programme for Government target for publication of the Implementation Plan was November 2002, prior to suspension of the Assembly, the Planning Service had been awaiting the Environment Committee's response to the Modernising Planning Processes Consultation Paper.

Suspension occurred before any representation was received from the Environment Committee, however over 160 responses were received to the consultation. These responses have been carefully analysed by Planning Service to inform and assist with the drafting of the Implementation Plan, publication of which is expected shortly.

Pre-School Funding

Mr Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many and what per cent. of under three-year-olds have been eligible for free pre-school education in Northern Ireland in each of the last three years. [82679]

Jane Kennedy: Pre-school places in the statutory sector are, as has been the case since the early 1970s, open to children from two years old to the lower limit of compulsory school age. In all cases, however, applications from children in their immediate pre-school year are given priority ahead of younger children. Children in their penultimate pre-school year who attend nursery schools and units are therefore occupying places that would otherwise be unfilled.

In the past three years, the number of children attending statutory nursery schools and units who had not attained the age of three by the date of the School Census was as follows.

	Number of children under three attending statutory settings	Number of children under three as percentage of children attending statutory steetings	Number of children under three as percentage of total number of children attending funded pre-school places
1999–2000	1,090	8.8	6.9
2000–01	992	7.1	5.6
2001–02	1,423	11	7

Royal Victoria Hospital

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what use is being made of the stock of tissue, organs, samples or slides held by the Royal Victoria hospital pending instructions from relatives. [85756]

Jane Kennedy: Human tissue and organs obtained at post-mortem examination and retained by the Royal Victoria Hospital fall into two categories. Material obtained since the year 2000 is being used in accordance with relatives' wishes as expressed in writing at the time of giving consent to the post-mortem examination. All other material is being stored unused, unless relatives have specifically requested that tests, e.g. for cancer genetics, be carried out. This is an interim arrangement until new legislation and associated guidance is put is place.

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will set up a system of DNA verification to ensure remains from the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast, are given to the correct families. [85757]

Mr. Browne: DNA testing is a complex, time-consuming and costly procedure. A system for its widespread use on retained organs and tissue at the Royal Victoria Hospital could be justified only if there were a significant problem with the identification of retained material. I am satisfied that no such problem exists.

School Examinations

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the system to replace the 11 plus examination in Northern Ireland. [79421]

Jane Kennedy: No decisions have been taken about new transfer arrangements. In the responses to consultation a range of suggestions were made for future post-primary arrangements and my officials will be discussing these with our education partners and representatives of parents over the coming weeks. My aim is to develop a modern and fair education system which addresses the weaknesses of our current arrangements and enables all children to fulfil their potential.

Warm Homes Plus Scheme

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when people qualifying for conversion of their home heating systems from solid fuel to oil or gas under the Warm Homes Plus scheme will have their work carried out. [86817]

Mr. Browne: The temporary partial suspension of the Warm Homes Plus scheme was introduced in the early summer following a technical report that called into question the safety of converting, to oil or gas, heating systems that use high output solid fuel back boilers or room heaters. Such appliances have been found in about half of all properties eligible for new heating systems under the scheme. Installation or conversion of heating systems in other properties is continuing as before. My prime concern is for the well-being of people who have works carried out under the Warm Homes Plus scheme, and I am aiming for the shortest possible interruption of the scheme that is consistent with their safety.

WALES

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002; [87345]

(2) to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) business men, (ii) business men in SMEs and (iii) business men in micro-businesses. [87400]

Peter Hain: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him today, by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the sustainability strategy is for his Department; and if he will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83506]

Peter Hain: My Department is small with no executive functions and, therefore, is limited in the contribution it can make to the UK's sustainable development strategy. It has no independent sustainability strategy of its own but in line with the Government's strategy, carries out its functions with the aim of integrating economic, environmental and social policies to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for future generations. This means achieving four objectives simultaneously:

Maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and employment;

Effective protection of the environment;

Prudent use of natural resources; and

Social progress that meets the needs of everyone.

The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and first views on follow-up, will be reflected in the annual report on UK progress on sustainable development for 2002.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Andrew Smith

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his Answers of 5 December 2002, Official Report, columns 954–5W and 962W what discussions his Department had with Andrew Smith; when and where these took place; who attended each meeting; and what telephone discussions officials have had with Mr.Smith. [87233]

Mr. Rammell: In addition to the meeting referred to in my previous answer (UIN 82998 and UIN 83034 of 5 December 2002), Andrew Smith has had minimal contact with the British High Commission in Sierra Leone, regarding Sierra National Airlines (SNA). Mr. Smith is a Director of West Africa Airways which, until October 2002, held the contract for managing the services of SNA. He has telephoned the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on a few occasions. These discussions were held in confidence. British officials did not at any time encourage, support or promote Mr. Smith's activities in Zimbabwe and the DRC.

I am withholding details of who was present at these meetings, and further details of what was discussed, including in telephone calls under exemption 1b of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Information which would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs) and exemption 14b (information the disclosure of which without the consent of the supplier would prejudice the future supply of such information).

Arms Exports

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what end-use monitoring agreements relating to the export of military products have been signed in the last five years with *(a)* Angola, *(b)* Cameroon, *(c)* Eritrea, *(d)* Ethiopia, *(e)* Ghana, *(f)* Kenya, *(g)* Mozambique, *(h)* Sierra Leone, *(i)* Sudan, *(j)* Tanzania, *(k)* Uganda, *(l)* Zambia, *(m)* Bolivia, *(n)* Guyana and *(o)* Republic of Yemen; and what end-use monitoring mechanisms exist in each case. [86313]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have signed no end-use monitoring agreements with these countries. If any end-use monitoring arrangements or assurances are exceptionally put in place with a country, they do not take the form of a signed agreement.

Global Crossing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to his Answer of 25th November, Official Report, column 80W, on Global Crossing, if he will place the implementation timetable in the Library; how many times there have been circuit interruptions each month since the service level agreements have been in place; and if he will make a statement. [86847]

Mr. Rammell: The formal implementation timetable forms part of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telecommunications Network (FTN) contract with Global Crossing. I am therefore withholding information about it under Exemption 13 of The Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Third Party's commercial confidences).

There have been some interruptions to FTN service, as is to be expected from a world-wide network connecting the FCO with 155 of its overseas missions. But the overall performance has been good, and has served the FCO well. Where the responsibility for bringing the network back into operational use has rested with Global Crossing, the SLA requirements have been met. Global Crossing have performed according to contract.

Hawk Jets

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received from the UN, regarding the supply of Hawk jet spare parts to the Democratic Republic of Congo; and what conclusions have been reached as a result. [87238]

Mr. Rammell: We have seen no reports from the UN on this matter. We are still in discussion with the UN about the allegations in the UN panel report on exploitation of resources in the DRC. The Security Council is considering the extension of the panel's mandate to allow discussion to continue.

Mr. John Bredenkamp

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answers of 18 November, *Official Report*, columns 9–10W, where the two meetings between Mr. John Bredenkamp and British High Commission officials in Zimbabwe took place; when the meetings took place; who was present at each of these meetings; who spoke to Mr. Bredenkamp in each of his two telephone calls; and what items were addressed in *(a)* the two meetings and *(b)* the two telephone conservations between Mr. Bredenkamp and officials. [82515]

Mr. Rammell *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The two meetings between British High Commission officials and Mr John Bredenkamp took place in the High Commission in Harare. The meetings were held on 14 November 2001 and 11 March 2002 respectively, and both at Mr Bredenkamp's request. The discussions were held in confidence, and covered a range of issues. During them, British officials neither encouraged, nor expressed support for, Mr Bredenkamp's business activities.

I am withholding details of who was present at these meetings, and further details of what was discussed, including in the telephone conversations, under exemption 1b of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Information which would harm the conduct of international relations or affairs) and exemption 14b (information the disclosure of which without the consent of the supplier would prejudice the future supply of such information).

Oil Revenues

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the total volume is of unspent oil revenues in the escrow account of the UN oil-for-food programme. [87077]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: As of 11 December US$3.3 billion of 'Oil For Food' revenue remained unallocated by Iraq in the UN escrow account.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what proportion of the oil revenues allocated for *(a)* Iraq and *(b)* Iraqi Kurdistan are allocated to (i) the UN Compensation Fund and (ii) UN administrative expenses. [87079]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Revenues from the sale of Iraqi oil under the Oil For Food (OFF) programme are deposited in a UN escrow account. 59% of this revenue is allocated to the UN humanitarian programme in Baghdad-controlled Iraq, and 13% to the programme in northern Iraq. The UN Compensation Fund receives 25% to meet claims arising from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, and 3% is allocated to the UN administration of the OFF programme.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what actions the Government is taking to enable the unspent oil revenues allocated for Iraqi Kurdistan in the escrow account of the UN oil-for food programme to be disbursed; and when she last discussed the volume of unspent oil revenues in the UN oil-for food escrow account allocated with representatives of the Office for Iraq Programme. [87080]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Officials continue to press the Office of the Iraq Programme (OIP) to ensure that the revenues in the UN escrow account allocated to the UN humanitarian programme in northern Iraq are used in full. They also discuss these issues regularly with Kurdish representatives.

September 11 Terrorist Attacks (Mr. Sheikh)

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he has received a response from the Pakistan Government for his request for information on the detention of Mr. Sheikh; and if it provides evidence of a link between Mr. Sheikh and the September 11 attacks. [86585]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Since our request for information, we have discussed the case with the Pakistani authorities, made clear our opposition to the death penalty and requested access to Omar Sheikh and confirmation of his nationality status. We understand that Omar Sheikh is currently appealing against his conviction for his involvement in the abduction and murder of Daniel Pearl, for which he has been sentenced to death. As the legal process is ongoing, it would be inappropriate to comment on possible linkages to other terrorist crimes.

Visas

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on what grounds a visa was issued to Mr. C. Pasipamire of Zimbabwe; whether Mr. Pasipamire is subject to EU sanctions; and if he will make a statement on Mr. Pasipamire's presence in the United Kingdom. [87098]

Mr. Straw: The British High Commission in Harare issued a visitor's visa to Mr C. Pasipamire. His application was assessed in accordance with the UK Immigration Rules. He satisfied the relevant criteria and he is not subject to EU sanctions. His stay in the UK will be governed by the terms of his visa.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Afghanistan

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of plans to create a national army in Afghanistan. [87070]

Clare Short: President Karzai issued a decree on 1 December 2002, setting out a plan for establishing a national army. A copy is being placed in the Libraries. We welcome the announcement as an integral part of the wider reform and reconstruction process. A professional multi ethnic military force and defence institutions accountable to appropriate civilian control and oversight will be developed, with the support of the US as lead nation, for the coordination of assistance to the Afghan national army. Detailed implementation plans will now be prepared, with support from UNAMA and donor countries. The UK has already pledged to contribute £10 million from the Global Conflict Prevention Pool to the interim payment of army salaries for the newly trained force, provided the Afghan Government fulfils certain transparency and accountability criteria that the UK has set as a precondition for these payments.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with the Government of Afghanistan on recent fighting between warlords. [87071]

Clare Short: There continues to be low level inter-factional fighting in Afghanistan. This underlines the need to provide assistance to the Afghan Administration in the building of appropriate defence and security forces that are able to improve security for the Afghan people and maintain Afghanistan's territorial integrity. The recent presidential decree on the Armed Forces and disarmament demobilisation and reintegration programme should initiate that process and facilitate the extension of the central government's authority to the regions.

Agriculture (Developing Countries)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on supporting agriculture in developing countries. [87089]

Clare Short: My Department recently published an Issues paper on agriculture: "Better Livelihoods for Poor People: The role of Agriculture", which sets out the Department's policy on supporting agriculture in developing countries. I launched this paper at a side event to the recent World Summit on Sustainable

Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. I have arranged for copies of the paper to be placed in the House of Commons Library. The paper is also available on the Department's website: www.dfid.gov.uk under Publications, Environment, Natural Resources and Land Tenure.

Corruption

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when the transparency initiative on cooperation on anti-corruption in developing countries announced at the WSSD was introduced; which countries have signed up to the initiative; which companies are formal partners to the initiative; and if she will make a statement on the results of the initiative. [87064]

Clare Short: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative was announced by the Prime Minister at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in September 2002.

At that time, Norway, Italy, Indonesia and the Central African Republic committed to developing a framework to promote transparency. Now, the G8, plus Australia, Netherlands, Belgium, South Africa, Algeria, Equatorial Guinea, Senegal and Botswana are interested and keen to engage on the substance of the initiative. We are following up with key producer countries, such as Angola, Sudan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Brazil and Venezuela. Discussions are taking place with NEPAD leaders.

Extractive companies backing the initiative in Johannesburg include: BP, Shell, Rio Tinto, BMP Billiton and Anglo-American, with others (TotalFinaElf, Talisman and Statoil) expressing interest in getting involved.

Momentum is growing behind the initiative. We are building awareness of the issues and exploring options for achieving transparency. The UK will host an international conference (involving Ministers, senior officials, industry and NGO leaders) to take the initiative forward in the run up to the G8 summit, in April 2003, at which more stakeholders will formally become partners in the initiative.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when her Department intends to host the international meeting involving all existing and prospective partners to the transparency initiative on anti-corruption in developing countries; where this meeting will take place; and at what cost. [87065]

Clare Short: The international conference (involving ministers, senior officials, international institutions, industry and NGO leaders) to build international consensus for action and, we hope, agree on a preferred mechanism to achieve transparency of payments and revenues in the extractive sector will take place in late April 2003. The conference will be hosted in London; details of the date and location will be available early in the New Year.

This will be preceded by an international multi-stakeholder workshop on 11 and 12 February 2003 to explore the best mechanisms for achieving transparency of payments and to help build the international coalition. This meeting will take place in London, at the Thistle Victoria Hotel. Invitations to this meeting will be issued before the start of the New Year.

The budget for the international workshop is £40,000, covering the venue, facilitation, catering and travel costs for participants from developing countries.

Developing Countries (Privatisation)

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what monitoring her Department is undertaking of the impact of the privatisation of basic services in developing countries on the accessibility of these services to the poorest people. [87138]

Clare Short: Public private partnerships for the delivery of basic services offer important opportunities for improving the accessibility and quality of services, and for reducing costs, for poor people. However, these benefits are not automatically secured. Our country programme staff are involved—often in the context of their policy dialogue on poverty reduction strategies—in specific cases. We provide technical assistance to make sure that poverty reduction is achieved, including through the PPIAF (Public Private Infrastructure Advisory Facility).

East Timor

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on *(a)* the state of alert declared in East Timor and *(b)* the progress East Timor has made since independence. [87090]

Clare Short: The Government of East Timor and donor partners met in Dili on 9 and 10 December to review the progress the new nation has made since independence. All parties agreed that economic and budgetary management by the Government had been excellent. Oil and gas revenues from the Timor Gap remain promising and offer the prospect of longer term economic security.

However East Timor suffers from acute shortages of qualified and experienced personnel and this has meant that essential social services have not been delivered to many communities in rural areas. The Government and the international community are working to secure the necessary expertise in order to redress the situation.

The riot in Dili on 4 December appears to have been sparked by heavy handed policing, but was exacerbated by frustration at the slow pace of development. This is directly linked to the difficulties the Government is having in delivering essential services.

The riot was brought under control in a matter of hours. The events have emphasised to the Government of East Timor the need to work harder to deliver benefits equitably to the people of East Timor, and the need for continued training and development of the police service. Two Commissions have been established, one by Parliament and the second an independent Commission initiated by the Prime Minister, to investigate the causes of the riot, and the response of the police. These are expected to report in a matter of days.

Education

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she is taking to enable quicker implementation of the World bank's initiative to fast-track new donor funds for countries demonstrating progress in improving education. [87139]

Clare Short: Improving education outcomes for poor people is not primarily about donor resources. Our approach to the Fast Track Initiative is to help partner Governments put the policies and plans in place that will enable them to accelerate the achievement of universal primary education. It is important that these plans take into account the circumstances and needs of the individual country. Seven countries have prepared proposals but these need to be rigorously reviewed by local donor groups, to ensure that they are coherent with each country's existing plans (including poverty reduction strategies and medium-term economic frameworks or their equivalent), and to confirm that countries have the capacity to absorb any additional finance.

Ethiopia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the impact which population growth is having on the ability of Ethiopia to reach the United Nations' millennium development goals. [87174]

Clare Short: Ethiopia's population of 67 million is growing at 2.7 per cent. per annum. Rapid population growth makes it harder to achieve the millennium development goals; when households have many children, investment in education or health per child tends to be lower, especially for poor people.

Population pressure on natural resources in some parts of Ethiopia is leading to environmental degradation, undermining the livelihoods of rural people. The objective of the Government of Ethiopia's national population policy is to maintain balance between the size of the population and the country's resource base. Through activities in the health sector and on female education the aim of the policy is to reduce fertility rates, increase rates of contraceptive prevalence and reduce maternal, infant and child morbidity and mortality rates.

Family Planning

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department is doing to give women in developing countries better access to family planning and sexual health services. [87087]

Clare Short: The International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) goal of universal access to reproductive health (through the primary health care system) is central to attainment of the health MDGs. The UK remains firmly committed to achievement of the ICPD Programme of Action and to the principles and rights it stands for. It is as relevant today as it was in 1994.

In 2001/02, DFID invested over £220 million bilaterally in sexual and reproductive health (including HIV/AIDS). We also made significant contributions to multilateral agencies covering sexual and reproductive health including, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Health Organisation (WHO), World Bank and the European Community (EC).

Famine (Africa)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the size of the land plots allocated to families in *(a)* Ethiopia, *(b)* Malawi and *(c)* Burundi. [87075]

Clare Short: Ethiopia underwent a major land redistribution campaign in 1975. Land was then taken into state ownership and limited rights of access were given to peasants who farmed it. Since then, increasing population has decreased the size of the individual farm holdings. DFID-funded research that was carried out in 2002 found that the average plot size was 1.41 Ha per household. In a recent comparative study of five African countries (funded by USAID) the equivalent figure quoted for Malawi was 0.99 Ha per household (National Economic Council, Malawi, 2000).

We do not have a recent assessment of the average plot size for Burundi.However, caution should be used about drawing any direct links between plot size and production.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the causes of the famine in *(a)* Southern Africa and *(b)* Ethiopia. [87076]

Clare Short: The problem in southern Africa is one of declining access to food. Poor people are becoming more and more vulnerable to food shortage, as successive harvest failures have eroded their savings and other assets and hence their ability to cope. HIV/AIDS and other disease burdens are compounding this problem. Inappropriate policies, serious governmance failures and a shortage of foreign exchange have contributed to a failure to come to grips with the poverty which lies at the root of this vulnerability. There have also been poor information flows and planning in relation to the short-term response to the humanitarian crisis.

The problem of vulnerability is also extreme in Ethiopia—one of the poorest countries in the world ranking 168 out of 173 on the Human Development Index. Vast numbers of households lack the savings or other assets to cope with even minor shocks, let alone the significant reduction in harvest caused by rain failure in 2002. Government has rural development policies in place but capacity constraints are limiting impact. The systems for short-term response to humanitarian crises are relatively well-developed and function adequately.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what role the early warning systems played in her Department's response to the famine in Ethiopia. [87085]

Clare Short: The early warning system (EWS) in Ethiopia is a combined Government of Ethiopia, UN and NGO initiative. This EWS is well developed and has played an important role in forecasting the likely humanitarian developments. We pay close attention to the information being provided from all sources to help ensure we respond in good time to help address the most urgent needs.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department is giving to *(a)* Eritrea and *(b)* Sudan to cope with their famine. [87086]

Clare Short: We have given £1.35 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) 2002 Appeal for *(a)* Eritrea, and stand ready to provide more support in response to need. Officials from my Department plan to visit Eritrea early in the new year. Support this year to *(b)* Sudan to address basic humanitarian needs, including those as a result of food shortages, consists of £2 million to the ICRC and a further £5 million through international non-government organisations and other agencies.

Focus Group Research

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what use she and her Department has made of focus group research since June 2001; if he will identify for each research project the topics covered, the person or organisation carrying out the research, and the total cost; and if she will publish the research on her Department's website. [74997]

Clare Short: DFID has not made any direct use of focus group research since 2001. However within our work to raise awareness and understanding of development issues, we have funded a project with the BBC, which involved use of focus groups in the UK to analyse public understanding of international news stories. The results of this research havebeen published and widely disseminated. The work was carried out by Opinion Leader Research at a cost of £38,247.

Also we do make frequent use of participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) in developing countries, a methodology which has challenged both traditional modes of poverty analysis and subsequent policy development. When implemented well PPAs allow policy makers a better understanding of how and why poverty occurs in particular contexts and the coping mechanisms adopted by the poor. Furthermore, PPAs provide a forum for the poor to voice their own demands for change in public service provision by reflecting on their own experiences in dealing with government services, their perspectives on the specific constraints they experience in trying to access services, and of the quality and relevance of those services.

Health Care and Education Spending

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans she has to increase the proportion of UK overseas aid spent on basic health care and education. [87137]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Laurence Robertson) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W.

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the *(a)* total volume and *(b)* proportion was of EU aid spent on HIV/AIDS in each of the last five years, in pounds sterling, broken down by region. [87068]

Clare Short: An average of £36.4 million per year has been spent by the EC on HIV/AIDS support in each of the last five years. This works out as less than 1 per cent. of the total EC development budget.

Figures are not readily available for individual member states of the EU other than the UK. For the UK, bilateral expenditure on HIV/AIDS related work in developing countries is shown in the table.

UK expenditure on HIV/AIDS related work as a percentage of total bilateral aid expenditure (£ million)

Financial year	*HIV/AIDS spend*	*Percentage of bilateral aid total*
1997–98	38	4
1998–99	45	4
1999–2000	75	6
2000–01	125	9
2001–02	200	13

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department is doing to help *(a)* children in developing countries orphaned due to AIDS and *(b)* child-run households as a result of AIDS. [87084]

Clare Short: Today, more than 14 million children under 15 years of age have lost one or both parents to AIDS; 11 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The implications are enormous—these children will grow up without parental supervision, support or care, many without an education, and alienated from society. Many will become vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and discrimination. Families, communities and NGOs are struggling to provide support.

Working at the national level, we aim to ensure that orphaned and vulnerable children's issues are at the centre of national policies and budget planning, allocation and expenditure. In Zambia we are supporting UNICEF on a nationally co-ordinated community response aiming to protect children's rights, increase their access to social services (including health and education and psychosocial support) and combating stigma. We recognise that much more needs to be done to tackle this crisis and will continue to work at the regional and international level to support greater awareness and response to the escalating situation.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the effect HIV/AIDS in developing countries will have on meeting the millennium development goals. [87069]

Clare Short: HIV/AIDS is already having a catastrophic impact on sub-Saharan Africa and in other parts of the world prevalence is expanding rapidly. The epidemic will have a serious effect on the millennium development goals:

On the poverty goal: household expenditure rises as more is spent on health care and funerals-just as incomes are falling.

On the education goal: HIV threatens teacher supply and can reduce primary enrolment (especially of girls to help with domestic tasks and care of family members).

On poverty and food security: HIV threatens agricultural productivity, can reduce household food consumption by 15–30 per cent., and could kill a quarter of the agricultural work force in worst-affected countries by 2020.

On child and maternal health: HIV is increasing mortality directly through infection, and indirectly through lack of adult carers; overburdened health systems are reducing access to health care.

DFID's response to date has seen an increase in HIV/AIDS related expenditure from £38 million in 1997–98 to over £200 million in 2000–02. We are supporting work to strengthen health systems and to develop comprehensive HIV/AIDS prevention, care and mitigation programmes. We are also supporting the development and implementation of national strategies to combat the epidemic. DFID's support is part of a collective international response and includes significant support to the global fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM).

Iraq

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is being done to facilitate better communication between the military and aid agencies in advance of potential conflict with Iraq. [87083]

Clare Short: My Department has since 1997 had an increasingly close relationship with the Ministry of Defence and consults regularly with the Ministry on a range of issues at official and ministerial level.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when she last met representatives of the UNHCR to discuss preparations for delivering aid to Iraqi refugees in the event of conflict in the region; and when she next expects to do so. [87081]

Clare Short: My Department supports UNHCR in its task of responding to humanitarian emergencies around the world, and as a part of that support, holds regular discussions with UNHCR on a range of issues.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with *(a)* Jordan, *(b)* Syria, *(c)* Turkey, *(d)* Iran, *(e)* Kuwait and *(f)* Saudi Arabia regarding their policy towards accepting refugees from Iraq. [87082]

Clare Short: None.

Ministerial Meetings (Irish Government)

Matthew Taylor: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, when Ministers in her Department have held meetings with Ministers and officials of the Irish Government since 1 June 2000; when and where each meeting took place; which Ministers were involved in each meeting; which Irish Government Department were involved in each meeting; and which Ministers and officials from the Irish Government attended each meeting. [63088]

Clare Short: Hilary Benn MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, attended the development policy forum in Belfast on 6 February 2002. He met Ms. Carmel Hanna MLA, Ministers for Employment and Learning and Chair of the All-Party Group on International Development, in the Northern Ireland Assembly. David Ford, Secretary of the Group, John Dallat MLA and The Lord Mayor of Belfast, Councillor Jim Ireland were also present.

I have also met with the development Minister on a number of occasions in the margins of international meetings.

Ivory Coast

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the fighting in the Ivory Coast, and in particular, the impact it has had on the refugee situation. [87091]

Clare Short: We are concerned at the continuing conflict in Cote d'Ivoire and continue to work with others in the international community to support regional efforts to broker a viable peace agreement. Although precise figures are difficult to determine, large numbers of people, particularly among immigrant communities, but also Ivorian citizens and refugees, have been displaced due to the fighting. Most have found shelter in host communities or are in temporary camps. Several thousand migrant workers have returned to their countries of origin or crossed into neighbouring countries. At present, the west of the country seems worst affected due to on-going fighting between Government forces and new rebel groups, and the presence of large numbers of refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, many of whom have been displaced. According to UN reports, prior to the crisis, there were a total of 72,000 refugees living in Cote d'Ivoire.

Although the situation is not currently a humanitarian crisis, there are real needs and the situation could deteriorate quickly. We are in touch with various agencies operating in Cote d'Ivoire and are considering what assistance we should provide.

Landmines (Angola)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the landmine problems in Angola; and how much money her Department has given to de-mining programmes in Angola. [87072]

Clare Short: My Department's Conflict and Humanitarian Affairs Department (CHAD) carried out an assessment mission to Angola in July to determine the extent of the humanitarian crisis there. They found that

according to mine clearance agencies, the number of mines in Angola is now considerably lower than the previously estimated 13 million. Nevertheless, Angola remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. Earlier this month, the national coordinator of Angola's Inter-sectoral Commission for De-mining and Humanitarian Assistance (CNIDAH) estimated that Angola has about four to five million unexploded landmines. As many as 70,000 Angolans are believed to have lost limbs as a result of landmine explosions. Relief agencies in Angola also state that landmines continue to restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

My Department has allocated US$ 459,000 to UNDP for a project aimed at improving the effectiveness of mine action through strengthened coordination and planning at the provincial level in Angola. We will also be contributing 19.7 per cent. of the €6 million which the EC has recently made available for mine action in Angola. This includes €5 million for a variety of mine clearance agencies.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what information displaced people of Angola are receiving to raise awareness of the problem of landmines. [87073]

Clare Short: UNICEF has a substantial programme of Mine Risk Education (MRE) in Angola. In the informal sector, UNICEF is providing support in terms of capacity building and financial subsidies to a network of six national NGOs conducting MRE in seven of the most mine-contaminated provinces in Angola: Moxico, Uige, Kuando Kubango, Bie, Huambo, Malanje and Huila. The MRE sessions have served resident, internally displaced populations (IDPs) and returning refugees alike, using drama, presentation, puppets and other ways of transmitting the message to the target groups. In 2002, UNICEF supported activities working within the informal sector reached over 230,000 beneficiaries.

In addition, UNICEF, in conjunction with the National Institute for the Removal of Explosive Articles and Ordnance (INAROEE) and national and international MRE partners, has produced a total of 616 MRE radio programmes. These have been transmitted in Portuguese and national languages; including Kimbundo, Umbundo and Chokwe.

Macedonia

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial aid the Government plans to give the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia in the next financial year. [86954]

Clare Short: The EC's planned expenditure for the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia for the 2003 calendar year is euros 38.5 million of which the DFID share will be euros 7.3 million or £4.7 million. In addition we have earmarked £2 million for bilateral technical assistance to the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia for the 2003–04 financial year.

Marie Stopes International

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her policy is towards providing funds to Marie Stopes International; and if she will make a statement. [86895]

Clare Short: My Department's funding policy to any non-profit making organisation or network, including Marie Stopes International, is based on their ability to effectively contribute to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals; and to my Department's overall objective which is the eradication of poverty.

National Democratic Institute

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the financial accountability of the money given by her Department to the National Democratic Institute in the USA. [87097]

Clare Short: When the National Democratic Institute are working for DFID their accounts are open to DFID scrutiny and DFID itself operates within a financial and accounting control framework designed to comply with the requirements of Government Accounting. Adherence to procedures, and their effectiveness, is scrutinised internally by DFID's internal audit department. Regular external scrutiny is assured through the oversight of the Department's expenditure by the National Audit Office, whose reports are scrutinised by the Public Accounts Committee and placed before Parliament.

Overseas Aid

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the OECD's figures on the proportion of UK overseas aid spent on *(a)* basic health care and *(b)* basic education; and if she will make a statement. [87009]

Clare Short: The OECD-DAC data are drawn directly from the figures which the UK reports to the organisation each year. They are compiled on the basis of the international definitions agreed by all donors. The figures are often used to compare donor performance, but can be misleading if used out of context. For our own use, DFID has developed a more sophisticated commitment and reporting system that is better able to reflect the full extent of our commitments.

OECD figures classify all expenditure according only to the primary sector intervention targets. As we move towards greater emphasis on crosscutting and multi-purpose interventions, the figures will represent an increasingly partial picture. Specifically excluded from the UK figures are:

elements of budget support that are targeting health or education;

block funding to NGOs;

emergency assistance; and

basic education or basic health expenditure of any programme whose primary sector was not basic health or basic education.

Education or health expenditure is often presented as a proportion of the total bilateral programme, but it would be more appropriate to present it as a proportion of the allocated bilateral aid.

In common with other donors, the sector statistics exclude any resources given to multilateral agencies, which frequently target the basic health or education sectors. It is also important to note that DAC basic health sector definition excludes family planning.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 15 July, *Official Report*, column 42W, on overseas aid, what plans she has to increase the percentage of UK bilateral assistance spent on low income countries. [72437]

Clare Short: As part of the 2002 Spending Review, my Department has set itself a Public Service Agreement target for increasing the proportion of DFID's bilateral programme going to low-income countries to 90 per cent. over the 2003–06 period.

Full details of my Department's progress towards this target thus far can be found on DFID's website (www.dfid.gov.uk) or in the 2002 Departmental Report, a copy of which is available in the House of Commons Library.

Peru

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the amount is of the grant entitled "Improving the Health of the Poor: A Human Rights Focus", that her Department plans to make to Peru; if the grant will be used for the provision of population control and abortion; what her response is to the request from the Peruvian Health Minister that the grant should be made through the Peruvian Department of Health; and what account her Department takes of national legislation prohibiting abortion when making overseas aid grants. [87025]

Clare Short: The proposed health project in Peru "Improving the Health of the Poor: A Rights-Based Approach" is budgeted at £7.5 million, over five years. The project would support the work of the Ministry of Health, the Ombudsman's office and civil society and has a number of components, one of which relates to reproductive health.

The reproductive health component would include support for poor people's rights to access family planning services, education and, if appropriate, post abortion care but not abortion.

We have received no formal request that the entire grant be made through the Peruvian Ministry of Health.

My Department only considers support for activities to improve the quality, safety and accessibility of abortion services where this is legal in the country concerned, and where it is available as a matter of uncoerced individual choice. In all situations, DFID will consider support for measures to improve access to effective and high quality post-abortion care to deal with the complication of spontaneous or induced abortion.

I discussed the project with the President of Peru during his recent visit to London and he was strongly supportive.

Reproductive Health Services

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much she gave in each of the last five years to *(a)* Marie Stopes International, *(b)* International Planned Parenthood Federation, *(c)* British Pregnancy Advisory Service, *(d)* Pregnancy Advisory Service, *(e)* United Nations Population Fund and *(f)* Family Planning Association (UK) for the purposes of (i) abortion, (ii) family planning and (iii) other reproductive health services; and what the total grant was that she gave to each organisation in each of the last five years. [86894]

Clare Short: Data is not held centrally in the format requested and to collate it would incur disproportionate costs. However, my Department supports a number of international sexual and reproductive health organisations that share our aim of eliminating poverty, including United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). All DFID funding in these areas is in support of the International Conference on Population and Development goal of universal access to reproductive health and is central to attainment of the millennium development goals (MDGs) specifically those related to maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and child mortality. Without access to high quality reproductive health services and care, it is most unlikely that progress will be achieved in meeting the health MDGs. We will continue to support international organisations and NGOs which make an effective contribution to these goals, and of course the efforts of governments seeking to improve people's access to reproductive health services.

DFID funding to the organisations referred to is as follows:

£000

Organisation	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Marie Stopes International	3,103	4,235	4,945	5,132	2,554
International Planned Parenthood Federation	5,850	5,500	5,500	5,506	4,500
United Nations Population Fund	11,500	13,120	15,000	40,050	24,213

DFID has not provided financial support for British Pregnancy Advisory Service, Pregnancy Advisory Service or to Family Planning Association (UK).

Sanitation

Mrs. Caroline Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what additional work her Department has undertaken to improve sanitation in developing countries, subsequent to the new target agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [87066]

Clare Short: My Department promoted the target of reducing by half the proportion of people without access to hygienic sanitation facilities by 2015 in the run up to the Johannesburg Summit and adopted it in our Target Strategy Paper 'Addressing the Water Crisis', produced in March 2001. We worked hard to win international agreement to this target at the World Summit on

Sustainable Development and will continue to emphasise sustainable and pro-poor sanitation and hygiene programmes.

The challenge today is being able to build-upon models of best practice to expand sanitation coverage, access to clean water and hygiene education. DFID is advocating an integrated approach to sanitation, water supply, and hygiene to improve health and combat poverty.

Through our commitment to multi-lateral initiatives and bi-lateral agreements weare prioritising support to national governments and civil society organisations toaccelerate work in sanitation and hygiene promotion in the countries of greatest need. In particular, we currently support several major multilateral initiatives including:

The Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), a multi-donor programme administered by the World Bank. Its mission is to reduce poverty by helping the poor gain sustained access to improved water and sanitation services.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), a concerted multi-donor organisation designed to raise awareness and the political profile of sanitation, hygiene and safe water.

The EU water initiative, which is aimed at creating strategic partnerships to achieve the world summit on sustainable development (WSSD) goals on clean water and sanitation. It will also improve the efficiency of existing financing mechanisms for water infrastructure through better donor coordination.

In addition to multilateral co-operation, our commitment to achieve the 2005 water management and 2,015 water and sanitation targets includes bilateral programmes in many countries in the developing world including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India, South Africa, Uganda, and Nigeria. My Department also funds Resource Centres dedicated to enhancing communication, knowledge transfer and co-operation between DFID, its partners and other organisations in the fields of environmental health, water supply and sanitation. We also continue to push for the inclusion of sanitation, water supply and hygiene into individual country poverty reduction strategies papers (PRSPs).

Southern Africa

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what volume of food was delivered *(a)* by her Department and *(b)* by the European Union, to Southern Africa in 2002; and what the total volume of food pledged (i) by her Department and (ii) by the European Union, to Southern Africa is for 2003. [87480]

Clare Short: My Department does not provide food aid directly, but funds the provision of food through operational partners such as the World Food Programme (WFP) and non-governmental organisations (NGOs). The WFP plans to deliver 993,000 tonnes of food during the period September 2002 to March 2003 for the humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa. The UK has so far provided WFP with funding for 65,231 tonnes (6.57 per cent. of the total confirmed contributions of 662,945 tonnes).

The European Community (EC) has committed 272,000 tonnes of food (of which 153,000 tonnes was through the WFP) for this humanitarian crisis since the beginning of 2002. The UK provides approximately 19 per cent. of funding for EC operations.

Statutory Instruments

Mr. Bercow: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, how many statutory instruments have been *(a)* introduced, *(b)* removed and *(c)* amended by her Department since 1 January; and what the (i) cost and (ii) saving has been in each case. [64634]

Clare Short: *(a)* Four statutory instruments have been introduced by my Department in 2002. They are the International Development Act 2002 (Commencement) Order 2002; the African Development Fund (Additional Subscriptions) Order 2002; the Caribbean Development Bank (Further Payments) Order 2002; and the International Development Association (Thirteenth Replenishment) Order 2002. No statutory instruments have been *(b)* removed or *(c)* amended. The combined cost of printing was less than £500. There were no savings.

Sudan (Education)

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the new opportunities created by her Department for the support of education work in Sudan. [87235]

Clare Short: My Department has continued to build on the relationships with key agencies working on education in Sudan, following a successful seminar in London in June. The support for the UNICEF education project in the Nuba Mountains is moving ahead well, some 600 schools will receive additional books and materials by February next year. As I explained in my answer to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 32W, my Senior Education Adviser reviewed progress in the sector during a visit to Sudan in October. I hope to announce significant additional support for primary schools in the north and south in line with progress at the peace talks resuming early in the New Year.

Sustainable Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what has been done to integrate sustainable development into her Department's policies since the Earth Summit in Johannesburg; and how many country strategy papers her Department has revised to include a greater focus on sustainable development to take account of the conclusions of the Earth Summit. [87067]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave her on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 651W. My Department's overall goal is the elimination of poverty and the achievement of the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of the staff of her Department are women; and what the percentage was in June 1997. [66907]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 5 July, *Official Report*, column 622W.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of her Department's funds allocated to improving sexual and reproductive health in developing countries have been administered by NGOs in each of the last five years. [66181]

Clare Short: My Department funds many sexual and reproductive health NGOs. Information on this is not held centrally and to collate it would incur disproportionate costs. DFID expenditure through UK NGOs (including sexual and reproductive health NGOs is listed in Statistics on International Development (table 14). A copy is available in the Library of the House.

CDC Capital Partners

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list CDC Capital Partners executives' proportional *(a)* salary and *(b)* remuneration increases since 1997. [67356]

Clare Short: Remuneration structures in CDC have been and continue to be revised in order to respond to the need for different skills and expertise, and to bring levels of pay and incentivisation more in line with the private sector:

(a) Base salary increases as approved by the Board were as follows:

	Approved percentage increase
April 1997	3.0
April 1998	4.0
April 1999	4.0
January 2000	3.6
January 2001	3.5
January 2002	3.4

Information on remuneration for CDC executives is available only at disproportionate cost. Details of remuneration for CDC Directors were published in annual reports for 1999, 2000 and 2001 copies of which were placed in the Library of the House.

(b) Percentage increases (decreases) on actual total cash remunerations costs since 1997 are as follows.

	Approved percentage increase (decrease)
1997	—
1998	20.3
1999	10.98
2000	3.78
2001	(1.47)

The total cash remuneration of executives is principally made up of their salary, a short-term bonus programme introduced in 1999 and a long term incentive programme introduced in 2000.

Promotion of Good Governance

Mr. Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent representations she has received regarding the promotion of democratic governance. [68545]

Clare Short: The promotion of good governance is intrinsic to DFID's work and is discussed regularly with our partners in developing countries and the wider international community.

SCOTLAND

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland to which bodies her Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87396]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander).

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by her or her predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in her Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87349]

Mrs. Liddell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander).

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

A-level Texts

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance he has issued on the use of texts for A-level which contain explicit sexual language. [82565]

Mr. Miliband: It is for the GCE awarding bodies, not the Government, to decide which texts are included in A Level specifications, and for individual schools to decide which specification they wish to follow.

Adult Learning

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what targets the Learning and Skills Councils have for *(a)* the 16 to 18 age group, *(b)* the post-19 age group and *(c)* lifelong learning. [83564]

Margaret Hodge: The Df ES has agreed a set of new Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets with the Treasury. The ones directly relevant to the Learning and Skills Council are:

(a) By 2004, increase by 3 percentage points the number of 19-year-olds achieving a Level 2 qualification, compared with 2002; with a further increase of 3 percentage points by 2006;

(b) By 2004, at least 28 per cent. of young people to start a Modern Apprenticeship by age 22. And by 2010 90 per cent. of young people by age 22 will have participated in a full-time programme fitting them for entry into higher education or skilled employment; and

We would also expect the LSC to help support progress towards 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds entering higher education by 2010.

(c) Improve the basic skill levels of 1.5 million adults and young people between the launch of Skills for Life 2001 and 2007, with a target of 750,000 by 2004;

Reduce by at least 40 per cent. the number of adults who lack a Level 2 qualification by 2010. Working towards this, 1 million adults already in the workforce to achieve Level 2 between 2003 and 2006.

We are committed to an investment and reform programme to raise standards, increase participation and improve outcomes for learners and employers. FE colleges and other providers will be set challenging targets for minimum performance and value for money.

The LSC will be publishing a supplement to its Corporate Plan in 2003 that will reflect its contribution to the PSA targets.

Class Sizes

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the optimal *(a)* pupil to teacher ratio and *(b)* class sizes in primary schools. [85559]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The Institute of Education in the University of London was commissioned by the Department to investigate the impact of class size and pupil-adult ratios on educational attainment at Key Stage 1. The findings showed that there was a significant effect of class size on children's educational progress in reception for both literacy and maths. However, there was no clear statistical evidence of an effect of class size on progress in literacy and maths in Year 1 or Year 2.

The Department has now commissioned the Institute of Education to continue this research up to Key Stage 2. The findings of this project are expected in 2004.Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) findings have also indicated that small class sizes are of benefit in the early years of primary education, when children are learning the basics.

In September 2002 the number of five, six and seven year olds in infant classes of 31 or more stood at 10,600, in September 1998 the figure was 354,000. This means that under 1 per cent. of infants are in classes of over 30.

Degrees

Mr. George Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what definition of a degree he uses. [84142]

Margaret Hodge: A degree is defined in section 214 of the Education Reform Act as an award at Master, Bachelor or Doctorate level granted or to be granted by a university, college or other body which is authorised by Royal Charter or Act of Parliament to grant degrees. The qualifications framework issued by the Quality Assurance Agency indicates that the term 'degree' should only be used for qualifications which meet the expectations laid down in its qualification descriptors. If a private UK organisation without the necessary powers offers its own degrees, it would be in contravention of section 214 of the Education Reform Act 1988. Such organisations can be investigated and prosecuted by the local Trading Standards Department.

Employer Pensions Contributions

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when formal notification will be given to local education authorities about the proposed increase in employer pensions contributions for teaching staff. [86941]

Mr. Miliband: Authorities were informed on 10 December in a letter to all LEA Chief Education Officers that the teachers pension scheme employer contribution from 1 April 2003 would be 13.5 per cent.

Examination Performances

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the schools in the top tenth percentile by examination performance at *(a)* A-level, *(b)* GCSE and *(c)* SATs results, which have applied unsuccessfully for Beacon School status. [87194]

Mr. Miliband: This information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member early in the New Year and place a copy of the reply in the Library of the House.

FE Staff

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what incentives there are to encourage more ethnic minority and other specialist training providers to enter further education as staff. [86886]

Margaret Hodge: We have introduced a range of initiatives to enable further education (FE) colleges to recruit and retain good staff. Eligible candidates can now benefit from golden hellos, the repayment of teachers' loans and training bursaries. FE colleges are now covered by the provisions of various equal opportunities related legislation, including the Race Relations Act. Their recruitment practices must meet legislative requirements and colleges should be working to ensure that their workforces are more representative of the communities they serve.

We will be working with the Learning and Skills Council and key partners from the FE sector to ensure that the recommendations of a report published by the Commission for Black Staff in Further Education relating to the recruitment, selection, retention and progression of black staff are implemented and evaluated by 2004.

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has for assessments of further education best practice in teaching and training; and what the timescale is for these assessments. [86887]

Margaret Hodge: Our strategy for reforming further education and training 'Success for All,' published on 19 November 2002, sets out our plans for developing best practice in post-16 teaching, training and learning. We will make a substantial investment amounting to over £100 million by 2005–06. We will set up a new Standards Unit within DfES which will start work in January 2003. The unit will be responsible for identifying, developing and disseminating good practice. We envisage a gradual build-up, developing new approaches in up to four specified curriculum areas in 2003–04, with the help of expert practitioners.

GCSE Grades

Mr. Gibb: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of state school pupils achieved at least GCSE grades A*-C in *(a)* maths, *(b)* science and *(c)* English in 2002. [82142]

Mr. Miliband: Early statistics for England for 2002 show that the proportions of 15-year-old pupils in state schools achieving at least GCSE grade A*-C in *(a)* maths, *(b)* science and *(c)* English are 46.6 per cent. 45.4 per cent. and 53.1 per cent. respectively.

Higher Education

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what his estimate is of the cost of raising the proportion of 18 year olds admitted to higher education *(a)* from its 1997 level to its current level and *(b)* from its current level to 50 per cent.of 18 year olds. [86855]

Margaret Hodge: The target of 50 per cent. participation relates to people aged between 18 and 30, having the opportunity to benefit from higher education by the end of the decade. It does not mean that 50 per cent. of 18 year olds will enter higher education at that age.

The cost of higher education per student varies according to the subject, type and length of their course. The overall costs of increasing student numbers will therefore depend on their pattern of study.

Higher Education, West Cumbria

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what work is being done to improve higher education provision in West Cumbria. [85464]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England is currently reviewing higher education provision in Cumbria. 1,200 additional student places have already been funded by HEFCE since 1999 for local providers. The review will evaluate progress and project local demand and supply.

Learning and Skills Council

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what discussions his Department has had with the Learning and Skills Council to enable local councils to take advantage of full end-year flexibility in respect of the Local Initiative Fund and other programme budgets. [87031]

Margaret Hodge: The discussions that my Department has had with the LSC resulted in the grant letter to the LSC dated 5 December 2002, a copy of which has been placed in the House of Commons Library. The LSC will be able from 2003–04 to carry forward unspent funds on each of its budgets, except in exceptional and clearly defined circumstances. I expect that this flexibility will be passed on to local LSCs.

There is no separate Local Initiative Fund (LIF) from 2003–04. Any activity previously funded by LIF will be covered by the new Local Investment and Development Fund. This provides the LSC with a powerful mechanism for raising quality and increasing the capacity and effectiveness of learning providers.

Local Government Settlement

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to the statement by the Minister for Local Government and the Regions, 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 1065–1084, what *(a)* the total spending on schools and *(b)* the total Government support for spending on schools is from all sources for the Isle of Wight Council in (i) 2001–02, (ii) 2003–03 and (iii) 2003–04. [86961]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The information requested on school spending is not yet available as the Department is in the process of collecting the data for 2001–02. I will write to the hon. Member when the information becomes available. The Department is not due to collect data for 2002–03 until September 2003, and for 2003–04 in September 2004. The majority of government support for spending on schools takes the form of unhypothecated revenue support grant, so it is not possible to give totals for government support.

Maintenance Allowance Pilots

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what evaluation his Department has made of the education maintenance allowance pilots; and if he will publish the findings. [87196]

Margaret Hodge: We are now into the fourth year of operating the EMA pilot scheme. An independent evaluation of the EMA pilot commenced in September 1999 in 15 pilot areas and 11 control areas. This evaluation is being undertaken by a consortium of four organisations, headed up by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) at Loughborough University.

The findings so far are highly encouraging, indicating that EMA has had a positive effect on participation and retention among the target group, as well as on student behaviour. It is for this reason that we have announced that the scheme will be extended nationally from September 2004. The evaluation will help inform the development of the national scheme by offering evidence of different impacts from the different variants being tested in the pilot.

Qualitative, quantitative and implementation findings from the first and second year of the evaluation have been published on the DfES website, including via the EMA website.

Pay Scales

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to harmonise pay scales between teachers in schools and further education colleges. [85463]

Mr. Miliband: Unlike schools, colleges in the further education (FE) sector are independent corporations with their own pay arrangements. Colleges agree annual pay rises and conditions of employment with their staff in the context of local priorities and the overall resources available to them. Pay arrangements in the sector are diverse, reflecting colleges' local flexibility. Government have no plans to change this arrangement.

On 19 November the Secretary of State announced that the total funding for FE is set to rise by £1.2 billion between 2002–03 and 2005–06, a real terms increase of 19 per cent. From next year, colleges which have demonstrated their effectiveness will have three year funding deals allowing them to plan on a longer-term basis, with increases linked to performance. We will also consolidate the funds provided for the Teaching Pay Initiative into core funding. These measures should enable colleges to address structural pay issues and to use the additional resources to narrow substantially the pay gap with schools by 2005–06.

Post-Graduate Students (Non-EU Countries)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many postgraduate students from non-EU countries were in the UK in each of the last 10 years. [85717]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The latest information is shown in the table.

Postgraduate students[1] from non-EU countries studying in the UK

Academic year	*Numbers*
1991–92	29,800
1992–93	33,500
1993–94	36,900
1994–95	42,300
1995–96	47,000
1996–97	46,600
1997–98	45,700
1998–99	47,200
1999–2000	51,500
2000–01	57,000
2001–02	65,900

[1] Full-time and part-time students.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many schools have been constructed since 1990 under PFI in each local education authority; and what the average length of time from tendering to handover of the finished education facility was. [87225]

Mr. Miliband: There are now 49 project contracts signed since 1997, covering 558 schools that the Department has supported with PFI credits of approximately 1.3 billion. The private sector partners in more than 30 projects have begun to deliver high quality services to the schools covered by the contracts. This includes more than 30 brand new or replacement schools. Information is not held centrally on the time taken from the commencement of the tendering process to the handover of the facility to the Local Education Authority.

Russell Group Universities

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to encourage children from deprived areas to attend Russell Group universities; and if he will make a statement. [86835]

Margaret Hodge: We are committed to encouraging young people from deprived backgrounds to aim higher, including entry to our top universities where they demonstrate the ability and potential. We want universities to hunt out the brightest students and to seek better and fairer ways of identifying talent. We have committed over £190 million for three years to the Excellence Challenge programme, which will raise the aspirations and attainment of young people in some of the most deprived areas of the country. All universities, including those in the Russell Group, are engaged with this programme and local excellence challenge partnerships all have links with at least one institution with demanding entry requirements. Through the Excellence Challenge, we have provided additional funding to universities who recruit fewer than 80 per

cent. from the state sector, so that they reach out to more young people from deprived backgrounds. We will be publishing our 10-year vision for higher education in January. This will reflect our continued commitment to widening participation and excellence.

School Budgets

Mr. Curry: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the total amount of balances held by schools was in each local authority in England in the latest year for which figures are available, expressed as *(a)* an aggregate sum and *(b)* a proportion of aggregate school budgets. [86273]

Mr. Miliband: The table, which contains provisional figures derived from Table 2 of the outturn statements provided by local education authorities under section 52 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998, sets out the aggregate balances held by each local education authority's schools at the end of the financial year 2000–01, and expresses these as a percentage of the schools' planned budget shares for the year. Comprehensive figures for 2001–02 are not yet available.

Local education authority	*Balances carried forward*	*Balances as percentage of planned budget shares*
Barking and Dagenham	3,436,380	5
Barnet	6,444,351	5
Barnsley	5,019,782	7
Bath and North East Somerset	3,362,999	6
Bedfordshire	7,590,476	6
Bexley	3,742,329	4
Birmingham	29,094,966	7
Blackburn with Darwen	5,174,240	9
Blackpool	3,699,156	9
Bolton	5,043,511	5
Bournemouth	4,248,403	9
Bracknell Forest	1,342,137	4
Bradford	10,141,662	6
Brent	4,777,187	5
Brighton and Hove	3,140,236	5
Bromley	5,678,998	6
Buckinghamshire	5,003,369	3
Bury	1,688,683	3
Calderdale	4,534,942	6
Cambridgeshire	10,407,613	7
Camden	5,483,105	8
Cheshire	14,286,508	6
City of Bristol	5,470,381	5
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	5,566,582	6
City of London	6,876	1
Cornwall	14,288,728	10
Coventry	8,870,777	8
Croydon	10,265,469	9
Cumbria	9,618,848	6
Darlington	1,592,555	5
Derby	3,762,223	5
Derbyshire	11,273,384	5
Devon	6,946,710	4
Doncaster	9,380,934	8
Dorset	4,378,124	4
Dudley	8,303,924	8
Durham	12,689,818	8
Ealing	3,688,149	4
East Riding of Yorkshire	7,308,958	7
East Sussex	5,769,985	4
Enfield	8,259,404	7
Essex	37,102,051	8
Gateshead	3,970,670	6
Gloucestershire	12,233,546	7
Greenwich	5,704,633	6
Hackney	3,582,023	5
Halton	4,178,939	8
Hammersmith and Fulham	3,931,932	8
Hampshire	24,803,112	7
Haringey	1,861,114	2
Harrow	4,211,335	6
Hartlepool	2,569,873	7
Havering	4,826,923	6
Herefordshire	3,851,611	8
Hertfordshire	30,315,945	8
Hillingdon	4,586,135	5
Hounslow	4,820,783	5
Isle of Wight	2,027,599	5
Isles of Scilly	187,015	20
Islington	4,496,175	7
Kensington and Chelsea	1,897,247	5
Kent	28,004,265	6
Kingston upon Thames	2,882,024	6
Kirklees	5,496,015	4
Knowsley	2,731,541	4
Lambeth	5,713,734	7
Lancashire	33,663,492	9
Leeds	9,595,270	4
Leicester	6,312,408	6
Leicestershire	6,008,241	3
Lewisham	4,502,863	5
Lincolnshire	10,142,725	5
Liverpool	15,682,928	8
Luton	5,475,535	8
Manchester	13,863,255	9
Medway	7,875,247	8
Merton	4,626,303	9
Middlesbrough	2,908,501	5
Milton Keynes	4,808,743	7
Newcastle upon Tyne	6,423,775	7
Newham	4,060,654	4
Norfolk	11,939,052	5
North East Lincolnshire	3,921,671	7
North Lincolnshire	3,032,590	6
North Somerset	2,992,817	5
North Tyneside	283,683	0
North Yorkshire	15,983,754	8
Northamptonshire	17,727,886	8
Northumberland	3,065,654	3
Nottingham City	7,037,076	8
Nottinghamshire	13,456,266	5
Oldham	6,371,753	7
Oxfordshire	11,956,922	7
Peterborough	5,234,178	8
Plymouth	5,323,500	6
Poole	4,076,005	9
Portsmouth	3,848,555	6
Reading	2,110,644	6
Redbridge	6,091,934	6
Redcar and Cleveland	3,699,118	7
Richmond upon Thames	2,402,104	5
Rochdale	1,942,990	3
Rotherham	2,768,439	3
Rutland	325,195	3
Salford	2,212,989	3
Sandwell	3,786,462	3
Sefton	9,120,868	8
Sheffield	6,961,264	5
Shropshire	3,170,796	4
Slough	3,493,501	8
Solihull	3,724,726	5
Somerset	10,089,247	7
South Gloucestershire	5,111,360	6
South Tyneside	2,880,605	5
Southampton	2,872,067	4
Southend	7,104,028	11
Southwark	7,478,215	8
St. Helens	4,903,904	8
Staffordshire	15,942,730	6
Stockport	3,313,994	4
Stockton-on-Tees	4,326,662	6
Stoke on Trent	5,279,274	7
Suffolk	15,533,102	7
Sunderland	4,914,434	5
Surrey	20,746,439	7
Sutton	2,999,959	4
Swindon	10,831,810	18
Tameside	4,977,506	6
Telford and Wrekin	2,681,119	5

Local education authority	Balances carried forward	Balances as percentage of planned budget shares
Thurrock	5,791,773	12
Torbay	2,187,521	5
Tower Hamlets	8,074,064	7
Trafford	5,942,165	8
Wakefield	2,249,644	2
Walsall	7,998,314	8
Waltham Forest	5,464,149	6
Wandsworth	5,428,156	7
Warrington	4,461,936	7
Warwickshire	9,806,597	6
West Berkshire	3,911,164	7
West Sussex	7,068,871	3
Westminster	2,301,967	4
Wigan	6,068,858	5
Wiltshire	8,283,674	6
Windsor and Maidenhead	2,300,152	5
Wirral	6,038,200	5
Wokingham	2,342,292	
Wolverhampton	5,802,012	6
Worcestershire	11,621,346	7
York	4,416,065	9

School Buildings

Mr. Phil Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many and what percentage of schools in England and Wales were built during the 1960s and 1970s, broken down by *(a)* local education authority, *(b)* the total amount of outstanding maintenance for each school and *(c)* the perceived lifetime of each of these schools at the time of construction. [87226]

Mr. Miliband: The data that have been collected from authorities in connection with asset management plan appraisal do not show these age bands. Many schools have estates comprising numbers of blocks of different ages. Maintenance costs in the data cover both the backlog and requirements over a five year period from the date of assessment. Most of these maintenance assessments were carried out two to three years ago and do not reflect the effect of subsequent revenue and capital spending in reducing maintenance requirements. The DfES does not hold information on the perceived lifetime of each of the schools at the time of construction.

School Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, pursuant to his oral answer to the hon. Member for Ashford on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 28, whether all schools will be fully funded in respect of the cost of payments to teachers on the upper spine of performance related pay. [87200]

Mr. Miliband: Threshold payments constitute point 1 of the upper pay scale and the threshold is fully funded. £90 million has been ring-fenced this year for performance pay, including the progression from upper pay scale 1 to upper pay scale 2. Sixty per cent. of the cost of a performance point grant for heads, deputies and assistant heads will be funded through a dedicated performance pay grant. Next year, at least £150 million will be ring-fenced for performance pay. Schools can also use their general budgets to award performance pay if they wish to. Education standard spending has increased by £1.3 billion this year, and is continuing to increase over the next three years.

School Laboratories

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what programmes are in place between school science and design technology departments and local industry to obtain hardware for school laboratories and workshops. [85409]

Margaret Hodge: Nationally, through Science Year, we have secured over £4 million worth of science equipment and resources for schools from partners such as Intel, Pfizer, the Gatsby Charitable Foundation and the Association for Science Education. Highlights include an Intel Digital Microscope for every maintained primary and secondary school and an electronic whiteboard to every school with a science advanced skills teacher.

At local level, through education and business partnerships, we encourage schools and firms to work together in ways which best meet their joint needs. This can range from scientists and engineers helping with out of school clubs, to providing other resources, including hardware, where local manufacturers of the specialist equipment needed for science and design and technology are able and willing to do so.

From April 2001, the LSC assumed responsibility, for ensuring the provision of education/business link activity, including KS4 work experience and professional development placements (formerly teacher placements), in each of the 47 LSC areas.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he has taken to monitor the effectiveness of the School Laboratories for the 21st Century scheme. [85675]

Margaret Hodge: The £60 million capital funding for the School Laboratories for the 21st Century scheme was spread over two years, with construction works needing to be completed by 31 August 2002. Over the next 12 months an evaluation report will be prepared covering a sample of the 149 participating local education authorities. This will provide details of how the funding has been invested, including what the balance is between newly constructed and refurbished laboratories, and an early indication of what impact this has had on educational standards.

School Transport

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of school budgets was spent on school transport in each local education authority area in the last 12 months. [87207]

Mr. Miliband: The following table provides the latest available information. It shows expenditure on school transport as a percentage of the local education authority's gross expenditure.

LEA Section 52 Outturn Statement 2000–01—home to school/college transport as a percentage of gross expenditure before recharges—as reported by LEAs

LEA name	*Pre-primary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Special*	*All schools*
Barking and Dagenham	0.0	1.3	0.8	19.0	2.4
Barnet	0.0	0.3	0.6	16.6	1.7
Barnsley	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bath and North East Somerset	0.0	1.2	2.6	14.5	2.8
Bedfordshire	0.0	1.0	3.4	17.2	3.8
Bexley	0.0	0.7	0.2	18.3	1.9
Birmingham	0.0	0.5	0.4	16.5	1.9
Blackburn	0.0	0.4	1.5	10.8	1.8
Blackpool	0.0	0.1	0.1	9.1	1.0
Bolton	0.0	0.2	0.3	7.4	0.6
Bournemouth	0.0	0.3	0.2	13.3	1.4
Bracknell Forest	0.0	0.2	2.6	21.4	3.4
Bradford	0.0	1.1	1.6	14.3	1.9
Brent	0.0	0.7	0.9	15.6	2.1
Brighton and Hove	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Bromley	0.7	0.9	0.5	14.6	1.9
Buckinghamshire	0.7	2.2	6.5	13.0	5.3
Bury	0.0	0.6	0.7	13.8	1.8
Calderdale	0.0	0.4	1.5	20.4	1.9
Cambridgeshire	2.0	1.8	4.5	16.9	4.2
Camden	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Cheshire	0.0	1.4	3.6	18.6	3.5
City of Bristol	0.5	0.1	0.6	4.9	0.8
City of Kingston-upon-Hull	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
City of London	26.6	0.0	20.3	21.0	4.1
Cornwall	1.5	1.3	3.9	23.1	3.2
Coventry	1.5	0.2	0.5	7.3	1.0
Croydon	0.0	0.0	0.0	12.3	1.7
Cumbria	0.5	2.2	4.0	21.5	3.6
Darlington	0.1	0.4	2.4	12.3	2.2
Derby	0.0	0.9	0.4	17.9	1.8
Derbyshire	0.0	0.7	2.6	15.4	2.3
Devon	0.0	2.5	6.2	14.2	4.9
Doncaster	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Dorset	0.2	2.4	4.4	16.3	4.7
Dudley	0.0	0.3	0.2	14.7	1.3
Durham	0.8	0.9	4.6	13.6	3.5
Ealing	0.0	0.6	0.5	19.2	2.6
East Riding of Yorkshire	0.0	1.7	4.3	17.5	4.1
East Sussex	0.0	0.4	2.5	12.8	2.6
Enfield	0.0	0.6	0.8	19.1	2.2
Essex	0.0	1.9	2.9	20.2	3.5
Gateshead	0.0	0.2	0.2	11.6	1.2
Gloucestershire	1.2	1.2	2.8	13.7	2.8
Greenwich	0.0	0.0	0.0	15.4	1.7
Hackney	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Halton	0.0	0.0	0.7	20.8	2.2
Hammersmith and Fulham	0.0	0.1	0.6	16.8	2.4
Hampshire	0.0	1.0	2.1	14.7	2.5
Haringey	0.0	0.5	0.6	12.0	1.7
Harrow	0.0	0.1	0.1	0.0	0.1
Hartlepool	0.0	0.1	0.9	10.9	1.4
Havering	0.0	0.1	0.5	16.4	0.9
Herefordshire	0.0	4.2	6.7	28.7	6.6
Hertfordshire	0.0	1.0	2.0	15.6	2.6
Hillingdon	0.1	0.7	0.5	16.4	2.2
Hounslow	0.0	0.7	0.2	15.9	1.7
Isle of Wight Council	0.0	0.4	2.8	4.8	2.1
Isles of Scilly	0.0	2.1	1.3	0.0	1.6
Islington	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.3	0.0
Kensington and Chelsea	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.3
Kent	0.0	1.4	4.1	10.9	3.4
Kingston upon Thames	0.0	0.2	0.3	19.8	2.2
Kirklees	0.0	0.6	0.4	16.7	1.5
Knowsley	0.0	0.0	0.6	11.2	1.7
Lambeth	0.0	0.4	0.7	15.7	2.2
Lancashire	0.0	0.5	2.9	17.0	3.0
Leeds	0.0	0.1	0.0	26.8	1.4
Leicester	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Leicestershire	0.0	0.7	3.1	26.7	3.4
Lewisham	0.6	0.1	0.1	15.2	1.8
Lincolnshire	0.0	2.0	4.3	18.9	4.5
Liverpool	0.0	0.0	0.5	15.0	1.5
Luton	2.9	0.2	0.1	15.1	1.3

LEA Section 52 Outturn Statement 2000–01—home to school/college transport as a percentage of gross expenditure before recharges—as reported by LEAs

LEA name	*Pre-primary*	*Primary*	*Secondary*	*Special*	*All schools*
Manchester	0.0	0.0	0.2	19.5	2.7
Merton	0.0	0.0	0.0	10.4	1.5
Middlesbrough	10.4	0.5	0.6	6.8	1.2
Milton Keynes	1.2	0.9	1.6	10.8	2.0
Newcastle upon Tyne	0.0	0.0	0.0	9.2	0.7
Newham	0.0	1.1	0.7	13.3	1.3
Norfolk	0.0	1.8	5.7	19.3	4.6
North East Lincolnshire	0.0	0.4	0.8	20.6	1.5
North Lincolnshire	0.0	1.5	3.3	28.0	3.4
North Somerset	0.0	1.8	2.9	12.3	3.0
North Tyneside	0.0	0.2	0.1	13.4	1.3
North Yorkshire	8.1	2.9	4.3	13.5	4.4
Northamptonshire	0.0	1.8	1.4	17.6	2.5
Northumberland	0.0	3.9	1.1	30.8	4.7
Nottingham City	0.0	0.2	0.6	18.3	1.5
Nottinghamshire	0.5	1.3	1.9	15.2	2.2
Oldham	0.7	0.2	0.2	13.8	1.3
Oxfordshire	0.0	3.1	2.6	22.7	4.1
Peterborough	0.0	0.9	1.0	18.9	2.2
Plymouth	0.0	0.6	1.5	11.9	1.9
Poole	0.0	0.5	1.9	13.1	2.3
Portsmouth	0.0	0.4	1.3	7.0	1.3
Reading	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.5	0.1
Redbridge	0.0	0.5	1.0	14.6	2.0
Redcar and Cleveland	1.4	0.2	0.3	0.1	0.2
Richmond upon Thames	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Rochdale	2.0	0.0	0.5	14.8	1.5
Rochester and Gillingham	0.0	2.1	1.6	14.4	2.3
Rotherham	4.7	0.2	0.4	11.8	1.2
Rutland	0.0	2.8	6.4	17.6	5.5
Salford	0.0	0.2	0.2	10.3	1.2
Sandwell	0.0	0.4	0.7	11.5	1.4
Sefton	0.0	0.2	0.4	15.9	1.6
Sheffield	0.0	0.0	0.0	16.3	1.2
Shropshire	0.0	3.7	3.9	22.9	5.0
Slough	0.0	0.9	0.7	15.2	2.1
Solihull	0.0	1.1	1.3	10.0	1.7
Somerset	0.0	3.4	3.5	2.5	3.3
South Gloucestershire	0.0	2.4	1.1	7.3	2.1
South Tyneside	0.0	0.6	0.4	8.3	1.0
Southampton	1.9	0.1	0.2	9.6	1.0
Southend	0.0	0.1	0.4	16.1	1.5
Southwark	3.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.1
St. Helens	1.7	0.0	1.1	16.6	1.9
Staffordshire	0.0	0.4	2.8	14.3	2.6
Stockport	0.0	0.0	0.2	22.0	1.6
Stockton-on-Tees	0.1	0.9	1.0	8.8	1.6
Stoke on Trent	0.0	0.8	0.6	10.1	1.5
Stockport	0.0	0.0	0.2	22.0	1.6
Suffolk	0.0	4.9	2.2	2.1	3.2
Sunderland	0.0	0.0	0.1	15.2	1.2
Surrey	1.4	1.5	3.4	17.7	3.8
Sutton	0.0	0.6	0.3	14.0	1.5
Swindon	0.0	1.0	1.2	14.7	2.5
Tameside	0.0	0.2	0.5	9.0	1.2
The Wrekin	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Thurrock	0.0	0.5	1.9	13.9	1.7
Torbay	0.0	0.6	2.0	12.0	2.2
Tower Hamlets	0.0	0.0	0.2	17.4	1.6
Trafford	0.0	0.5	0.7	13.9	1.9
Wakefield	0.0	0.3	0.6	8.2	1.0
Walsall	0.0	0.2	0.3	9.6	1.0
Waltham Forest	0.0	2.7	1.0	0.8	1.7
Wandsworth	0.0	0.1	0.6	11.3	1.9
Warrington	0.0	0.5	1.6	14.3	1.9
Warwickshire	0.1	3.0	4.3	15.9	4.5
West Berkshire	0.0	1.1	2.3	24.1	3.6
West Sussex	0.0	0.3	2.2	15.8	2.5
Westminster	0.0	0.1	0.0	28.5	2.9
Wigan	0.0	0.0	0.5	15.9	1.3
Wiltshire	0.0	1.3	4.0	0.0	2.4
Windsor and Maidenhead	0.0	0.5	1.5	25.6	3.1
Wirral	0.0	0.5	0.9	9.2	1.5
Wokingham	0.0	0.2	2.2	14.9	2.7

LEA Section 52 Outturn Statement 2000–01—home to school/college transport as a percentage of gross expenditure before recharges—as reported by LEAs

LEA name	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	Special	All schools
Wolverhampton	0.0	0.5	0.5	15.8	1.6
Worcestershire	0.0	1.4	3.3	20.2	3.8
York	0.0	0.3	2.3	14.1	2.4

Source:
LEA Section 52 (Outturn) Statement 2000–01 and is expressed in percentage terms of the total LEA (gross) expenditure.

Sickness Absence

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many days *(a)* primary school teachers and *(b)* secondary school teachers took as sickness absence in 2002 in (i) the Portsmouth South constituency and (ii) the United Kingdom, broken down by (A) full-time and (B) part-time teachers; and if he will make a statement; [86932]

(2) how many *(a)* primary school teachers and *(b)* secondary school teachers took sickness absence in 2002 in (i) the Portsmouth South constituency and (ii) the United Kingdom, broken down by (A) full-time and (B) part-time teachers; and if he will make a statement. [86933]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not available in the form requested. The table shows data on sickness absence[1] taken by full-time and part-time teachers in Portsmouth Local Education Authority and in the English maintained schools sector. The data cannot be broken down by phase or Parliamentary constituency and are provisional.

	Full time		Part time	
	Teachers	Days absence	Teachers	Days absence
Portsmouth LEA	780	8,220	130	1,040
England	246,300	2,461,000	37,300	338,900

[1] Sickness absence on working days, whether paid absence or not, of teachers with permanent contracts or contracts of over one month, including teachers without QTS. The numbers of teachers taking sick leave includes an individual teacher only once however many periods of sickness absence they have had.
Source:
2001 data were taken from the Sickness Absence Statistical First Release. Final 2001 data will be published in the teachers statistical volume in January 2003.

Star Ratings

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many local authorities' provisional star ratings in the education comprehensive performance assessment have been adjusted after the Audit Commission had signed off the data on performance indicators this year; and which of these authorities' ratings were adjusted *(a)* upwards and *(b)* downwards. [86750]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The Audit Commission signed off the data related to comprehensive performance assessment on 9 December 2002, and there have been no further changes to local authorities' star ratings after that time.

Student Funding

Mr. Rendel: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his Answer of 2 December, ref 83011, if he will estimate the level of funding required if student maintenance grants had been maintained at their final level in *(a)* real terms 1995–96 prices and *(b)* actual terms in (i) 1998–99, (ii) 1999–2000, (iii) 2000–01, (iv) 2001–02 and (v) 2002–03, in (A) England and (B) Wales. [85812]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Under the "Mandatory Awards" scheme in operation up to academic year 1997–98 eligible students received a grant from LEAs towards their living costs. In 1997–98 this comprised a means tested basic grant of up to £1,755 (other than in London) plus extra allowances the student could claim depending on his/her circumstances, for example for those with disabilities or dependants. The grant was means tested against the student's own income and that of their parents (if the student was under 25 or not otherwise regarded as independent) or their spouse.

Tables 1 and 2 show the estimated funding required for LEA expenditure on maintenance grants (i.e. the basic grant excluding allowances) in real and cash terms for each of the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03, assuming that the grants available in 1997–98 had continued thereafter.

Table 1: Estimated maintenance grant funding in real[1] terms

£ million

	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03
England	663	670	670	684	696
Wales	41	41	42	43	44
England and Wales	704	711	713	728	740

Notes:
1. Figures have been converted to 1995–96 price levels using the November 2002 GDP deflators.
2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
3. Includes medical and dental students and allied professionals, grant funding for whom under the new student arrangements, has been transferred to the Department of Health.

Table 2: Estimated grant funding in cash terms

£ million

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
England	725	750	767	800	834
Wales	44	46	48	51	53
England and Wales	769	795	815	850	887

Notes:
1. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
2. Includes medical and dental students and allied health professionals, grant funding for whom under the new student support arrangements, has been transferred to the Department of Health.

These are approximate estimates derived by applying the grant arrangements in 1997–98 to numbers of English and Welsh students for the academic years 1998–99 to 2002–03. Costs for English and Welsh students have been pro-rated on the basis of numbers of students from each country.

In addition, students also received a subsidised loan towards living costs. The maintenance grant comprised approximately 50 per cent. of the total package available to students for their living costs.

Tables 3 and 4 show actual payments for maintenance grants (excluding allowances) made by LEAs in real and cash terms under the "Mandatory Awards" scheme for each of the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03.

Table 3: Outturn maintenance grant pavements in real[1] terms

£ million

	1998–99 outturn	*1999–2000 outturn*	*2000–01 outturn*	*2001–02 projected outturn*	*2002–03 projected outturn*
England	508	300	129	37	6
Wales [5]	31	18	8	2	*
England and Wales	539	319	137	39	6

Notes:
1. Figures have been converted to 1995–96 price levels using the November 2002 GDP deflators
2. Figures may not sum due to rounding
3. Figures for England and Wales have been estimated
4. 2000–01 outturn is provisional
5. Projected outturn less than £0.5 million in 2002–03
6. Includes the Department's funding for dental and medical students and allied health professionals

Table 4: Outturn maintenance grant payments (cash terms)

£ million

	1998–99 outturn	*1999–2000 outturn*	*2000–01 outturn*	*2001–02 projected outturn*	*2002–03 projected outturn*
England	556	336	148	43	7
Wales	34	21	9	3	*
England and Wales	590	357	157	45	7

Notes:
1. Figures may not sum due to rounding
2. Figures for England and Wales have been estimated
3. 2000–01 outturn is provisional
4. Projected outturn less than £0.5 million in 2002–03
5. Includes the Department's funding for dental and medical students and allied health professionals

Cost for English and Welsh students have been pro-rated on the basis of numbers of students from each country.

Notes:

1. Costs have been estimated by academic year and then converted to a financial year basis. Financial year costs have been estimated on the assumption that 2/3 of the cost will arise from the current Academic Year and 1/3 from the previous Academic Year.

2. Maintenance grant costs for tables 1 and 2 have been estimated for 1998–99 to 2002–03 by multiplying the number of students by the estimated average maintenance award.

3. Average maintenance award per student has been estimated for 1998–99 to 2002–03 by uprating the average assessed maintenance award in 1997–98 by increase in grant rates for each year 1998–99 to 2002–03. The estimates also allow for changes in the proportions of students entitled to the Home, London and elsewhere rates of grant.

4. Outturn data used in tables 3 and 4 has been derived from LEA returns for 1998–99 to 2000–01.

5. The estimates are based on actual student numbers for 1998–99 to 1999–2000 and projected student numbers for 2000–01 to 2002–03.

6. Costs by country of domicile have been estimated using proportions of students in England and Wales from:

(a) 1998–99 LEA assessment data for 1998–99 and 1999–2000, and

(b) 2000–01 SLC data for 2000–01 to 2002–03.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether he plans to amend the conditions of service of supply teachers. [86492]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* My right hon. Friend has no current plans to re-examine supply teachers' conditions of service. Local education authorities pay supply teachers in accordance with the statutory arrangements for teachers, laid down in the School Teachers' Pay and Conditions Document. Private supply teacher agencies agree pay rates and terms of service with the teachers they supply. However, we have introduced a range of measures designed to lever up standards of supply teaching and the recruitment and management practices of agencies.

Support Grants

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was granted from each source of support within his Department to *(a)* Westminster city council and *(b)* the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, outside revenue support grant settlements in each year since 1997. [85830]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables show the Department's allocated grants to Westminster and Kensington and Chelsea local education authorities for the financial years 1997–98 to 2002–03. 2002–03 figures are to date and provisional.

Westminster local education authority

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Standards Fund (departmental contribution)	522,203	844,387	3,656,354	5,363,083	7,036,287	8,800,474
School Standards Grant	0	0	0	687,000	1,468,500	1,539,800
School Budget Support Grant	0	0	0	127,900	0	0
Nursery Education Grant[1]	1,208,802	506,879	739,880	1,358,423	2,050,488	1,171,716
Childcare Grant[2]	0	55,000	172,000	240,880	595,249	557,597
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	0	0	0	532,338	874,748	566,437
Education Action Zone (Departmental Core Grant)[3]	0	0	0	493,000	589,000	432,000
Capital[4]	1,741,000	2,161,000	1,627,000	4,454,000	4,104,000	6,108,433

[1] Reductions in 1998–99 and 1999–2000 are due to the transfer of nursery education grant for four year olds to education standard spending.
[2] Westminster Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) has been additionally allocated £1,055,181 funding in 2001–04 for the neighbourhood nurseries initiative for Westminster. It will be up to the EYDCP to decide the breakdown between years.
[3] Funding made directly to the Education Action Zone in Westminster.
[4] Funding includes Basic Need (ACG), Standards Fund Grant (departmental contribution), Voluntary Aided School Grant, Schools Access Initiative, Supplementary Credit Approvals, New Deal for Schools, Nursery Education Grant and Childcare Grant.

Kensington and Chelsea local education authority

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Standards Fund (departmental contribution)	364,865	330,902	2,112,362	2,975,947	4,378,402	6,767,151
School Standards Grant	0	0	0	430,000	944,500	976,500
School Budget Support Grant	0	0	0	69,800	0	0
Post 16 Budget Support Grant	0	0	0	0	0	75,000
Nursery Education Grant[1]	805,775	251,970	208,222	603,585	825,660	891,576
Childcare Grant[2]	0	51,000	144,500	209,090	514,669	428,981
Teachers Pay Reform Grant	0	0	0	60,132	841,059	346,851
Transitional Funding/Transitional Grant Insurance	0	0	8,633	105,755	123,581	0
Capital[3]	470,000	1,277,000	1,021,000	2,695,000	3,308,000	2,646,558

[1] Reductions in 1998–99, 1999–2000 and 2000–01 are due to the transfer of Nursery Education Grant for four year olds to Education Standard Spending.
[2] Kensington and Chelsea Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership (EYDCP) has been additionally allocated £936,490 funding in 2001–04 for the Neighbourhood Nurseries Initiative for Kensington and Chelsea. It will be up to the EYDCP to decide the breakdown between years.
[3] Funding includes Basic Need (ACG), Standards Fund Grant (departmental contribution), Voluntary Aided School Grant, Schools Access Initiative, Supplementary Credit Approvals, New Deal for Schools ,Nursery Education Grant and Childcare Grant.

Teacher Pay

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether further education lecturers on Silver Book contracts are entitled to receive money from the Teacher Pay Initiative. [86958]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Further Education (FE) lecturers on Silver Book contracts are eligible to receive payments from the Teaching Pay Initiative (TPI).

General FE colleges implementing TPI have the flexibility to use their funding allocation to meet local priorities and needs, within the context of the national TPI framework and current employment legislation.

Teacher Recruitment

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent on the Fast

Track scheme for teacher recruitment and how many teachers were recruited into Fast Track in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [86234]

Mr. Miliband: The Fast Track teaching programme is an accelerated development programme for teachers, designed to recruit, retain and rapidly develop transformational school leaders of the future. In 2001–02 the Department invested £8,265,344 in developing and implementing the Fast Track programme. This included the cost of recruiting 161 highly qualified and talented individuals. As numbers on the programme grow over time the unit cost will reduce, as there are fixed costs associated with establishing the infrastructure for this new nationwide programme.

The numbers on the Fast Track teaching programme are as follows:

Fast Track teaching programme	*Number*
In teaching posts in 102 schools	110
of whom, NQTs	88
In initial Teacher Training in nine providers	117
Currently deferred for one year	22
Total on Fast Track	249

Training

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what priority learning and skills councils will place upon training aimed at adults over 19-years-old. [85500]

Margaret Hodge: The training for adults over 19 is vital to both increased productivity and improved social inclusion. The priorities for the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) were announced in the Grant Letter for 2003–04, released last Thursday 5 December. One of the four high level priorities (unchanged since the first remit letter in 2000) is "increasing demand for learning, and achievement of skills and qualifications by adults". The LSC will be assisted in meeting this priority by the generous budget increase that is included in this Grant Letter: resources will increase from £7.5 billion in 2002–03 to £8 billion in 2003–04, and rising again to £9.2 billion in 2005–06. This record level of investment will give the LSC the resources it needs to bring about radical and sustained improvements in adult skill levels.

The Grant Letter provides more detail on the priorities for adult learning, including a challenging new target of reducing by at least 40 per cent. the number of adults without a level 2 qualification by 2010, and participation by the LSC in pooled budget pilots with Regional Development Agencies. We are working closely with the LSC on the Review of Funding of Adult Learning which will set out in more detail how to meet the adult skill needs. The outcome of the Review will form part of the Skills Strategy which will be published by my Department in June.

Furthermore, the LSC's approach to adult training is set out in detail in its Workforce Development Strategy, released in November 2002. The development of the LSC strategy was co-ordinated with the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit report "In Demand (2): An Action Plan for Adult Skills in the 21st Century", and thus links into the wider Government strategy for adult skills.

University Research Funding

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of central Government funding for university research was for the current year in England per head of population. [86464]

Margaret Hodge: There are three sources of Government funding for higher education research in England: The Higher Education Funding Council for England, the Research Councils and Government Departments. The most recent year for which all these figures are available is for academic year 2000–01, when funding totalled £1.75 billion. Using the latest population estimates from the Office of National Statistics for 2001, at around 49,181,000, this is approximately £36 per head of population.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

"Living Places, Powers, Rights and Responsibilities"

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many copies of her recent consultation paper "Living Places, Powers, Rights and Responsibilities", were printed; how they were distributed; how many local authorities received them; and what steps she took to publish it. [86903]

Mr. Meacher: There were 5,000 copies printed initially, with a view that more would be printed if needed. Copies were sent to all local authorities, a wide variety of associations including trade associations, civic societies, the police, NGOs, utility companies, environmental bodies and groups, institutes, small to large businesses, including multi-national corporations, rail operators, women's groups, retailers, other Government Departments and relevant agencies, waste operators and land managers.

The cross-Government review of public space during the summer, involving most central Government Departments, identified many issues that were essential for improving the local environment. The culmination was the Living Places consultation paper, which was launched by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) at the Urban Summit in Birminham on 31 October.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many responses she has received to her recent consultation paper Living Places, Powers, Rights and Responsibilities; and if she will make a statement. [86904]

Mr. Meacher: To date we have received seven responses to our consultation. We do not expect many until nearer the closing date due to the number and complexity of the proposals.

Agircultural Waste Stakeholders Forum

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress within the Agricultural Waste Stakeholders Forum. [87126]

Mr. Meacher: The Agricultural Waste Stakeholders' Forum has met twice—on 24 Septembern and 25 November. We have set up a website on which the agenda for, the minutes of and papers discussed at, these meetings are available. The address is: http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/waste/agforum/index.htm

At its meeting on 25 November the Forum agreed to the formation of four sub-groups to address specific issues. These are Research and Development; Information Campaign; Licensing and Exemptions; and Recovery, Re-use and Recycling of Non-natural Farm Waste. The sub-groups will meet before the Forum's next meeting on 30 January 2003 and will report their progress to the Forum.

Cattle

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is on the arrangements under which a farmer may have cattle aged over 30 months slaughtered for personal consumption. [80459]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Cattle aged over 30 months may only be slaughtered for human consumption if they come from a low BSE-risk Beef Assurance Scheme herd, for which the age limit is 42 months. All such cattle must be slaughtered in a licensed abattoir, test negatively for BSE, and their meat held under Meat Hygiene Service supervision until the test result is obtained. After receipt of a negative BSE test result, the animal's vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia must be removed from the carcass, under Meat Hygiene Service supervision, at a licensed cutting plant that is separately licensed by the Food Standards Agency for this purpose. Following this, the meat may be supplied to the farmer for personal consumption or for consumption by any other person.

The only exception permitted to this would be if an over 30 month animal was slaughtered personally by its owner for his or her own consumption, with there being no supply of the beef to any other person.

Corporate Environmental Reporting

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to encourage corporate environmental reporting. [87134]

Mr. Meacher: We have have produced a series of guidelines to help companies measure and report their environmental performance, including general guidelines published last year and more specific guidance on reporting the key impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, waste and water. The general guidelines were endorsed by the CBI and sent to approximately 3,000 of their members, and to all of the leading FTSE 350 listed companies.

We have written this year to companies in the FTSE 350 asking them what they had done to respond to the Prime Minister's challenge to report on their environmental performance. A list of the results was placed in the Library of the House in July.

We have also been working with the Department for Trade and Industry on plans for some important new reporting provisions, set out in the White Paper on Modernising Company Law published this summer. These would require approximately 1,000 of the most economically significant companies to include information on environmental, social and community issues relevant to the company's business in a new Operating and Financial Review. We have supported the Department of Trade and Industry in establishing an independent group of experts to help develop guidance on how directors should assess whether an item is material to their company and would therefore have to be included in its OFR. The group met for the first time this month and will produce guidance in autumn next year.

Food Safety

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with the European Food Safety Authority regarding harmonisation of approaches to Food Safety. [81062]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The European Food Safety Authority is in the process of being set up and the future route for input by member states will be through the Authority's advisory forum. This body, which will comprise representatives of Government food agencies, will assist the Authority in its work programme as well as ensuring efficient networking and provide a mechanism for exchanging information on potential risks and for pooling knowledge. It will also encourage broad understanding and acceptance of the scientific advice of the Authority in Europe. The first formal meeting is expected next year.

Negotiations continue on various proposals in the legislative programme, set out in the Commission's January 2000 White Paper on Food Safety, which are intended to update and harmonise European Union food law and safety.

Foxhunting

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish the terms of the licence under which foxhunting occurs on Forestry Commission land. [86610]

Alun Michael: The Forestry Commission allows fox hunting only where it has traditionally taken place or where the right to hunt is reserved in the Commission's title.

The Commission has an agreement with the Masters of the Foxhounds Association whereby hunts are licensed individually for access to Commission land. The latest copy of the agreement has been placed in the Library of the House.

GM Field Trials

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish the conclusions of the GM field trials experiment; and if she will make a statement on the

timetable for decisions regarding future public policy in respect of the commercial cultivation of GM crops and the extent to which field trials will inform such decisions. [84728]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 3 December 2000]:* The results of the Farm Scale Evaluations for the three spring sown GM crops, fodder maize, beet and spring oil seed rape, are expected to be published in Summer 2003. The results for winter oil seed rape will be published early in 2004. The results will show what effect, if any, there is on the diversity and abundance of farmland wildlife associated with the farmers' management of GM herbicide tolerant crops as compared with equivalent non-GM crops. This will be one factor which will inform decisions that will be taken under Directive 2001/18/EC on the release of these particular GM crops.

In addition there are other regulatory approvals, such as those the commercial cultivation of a GM crop. The nature and timing of any decision taken by the Government will depend on the status of each particular crop within the regulatory system. The Government has a voluntary agreement with the industry that GM crops will not be grown commercially in the UK at least until the Farm Scale Evaluation programme has been completed. No GM crops will be grown commercially in the UK until we are satisfied that they do not cause damage on the environment.

Hunting

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to the oral statement on 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 755W, of the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Mr. Michael) on hunting with dogs, what evidence he assessed that led him to conclude that stag hunting should be banned. [87514]

Alun Michael: The Bill that was published last week is intended to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on the contentious issue of hunting with hounds. It seeks to prevent cruelty while recognising those activities which are necessary to countryside management such as the protection of animals or crops. All activities have to satisfy the two tests of "utility" and cruelty (least suffering). The evidence on which decisions were taken include the report of the Burns inquiry and evidence provided to that inquiry, public hearings held in Portcullis House in September and submissions from a variety of organisations and individuals.

All the evidence has been published: the Burns report and related documents in 2000; 194 letters from organisations or individual hunts in response to the consultation letter of 31 May 2002; complete verbatim transcripts of hearings on 9–11 September 2002 in Portcullis House; videotapes of these hearings are also available, and papers of evidence submitted by the witnesses at those hearings. All of these documents are in the Libraries of both Houses of Parliament.

Kyoto Obligations

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what research her Department has undertaken on public attitudes towards the UK meeting its Kyoto obligations on renewable energy and the potential change in electricity prices to the consumer; and if she will make a statement on how the cost of electricity for consumers will affect the Government's policy of promoting renewable energy sources. [85438]

Mr. Wilson: I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today, PQ No. 85437.

Marine Environment

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the second round of consultation on marine environment high risk areas will take place. [87063]

Mr. Jamieson: I have been asked to reply.

I expect that the consultation document will be issued during February 2003.

Ordnance Survey Mapping

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the accuracy is of Ordnance Survey Mapping. [86563]

Mr. McNulty: Statistical information about the accuracy of Ordnance Survey mapping is published on the Ordnance Survey web site at *http://www.ordnancesurvey.co.uk/productpages/landline/positional-background.htm.*

Projects (Sedgefield)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which projects in the Sedgefield constituency have benefited from the landfill tax credit scheme. [86607]

John Healey: I understand environmental bodies within the Sedgefield constituency have invested in around 15 ongoing or completed environmental projects as a result of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme.

Recycling (Christmas)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has of the number of *(a)* christmas cards and *(b)* christmas trees that were recycled in each year since 1990; what support she provides to local authorities with regard to the recycling of Christmas cards; and if she will make a statement. [86414]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Defra does not hold information on the recycling of Christmas cards and trees centrally, but I am aware of a scheme to collect and recycle used Christmas cards run in January 2002 by the Woodland Trust. This resulted in 34 million Christmas cards being recycled, in addition to those that were recycled by local authorities as part of their normal collection and recycling of waste paper. Further information is available from the Woodland Trust Website: http://www.woodland-trust.org.uk.

Some local authorities do report the number of Christmas trees they recycle to the environmental charity EnCams. The number of trees reported to be recycled in each year since 1997 are:

Year	*Christmas trees recycled (English local authorities)*
1997	114,427
2998	171,488
1999	413,560
2000	728,927
2001	894,720
2002	1,194,670

There is no special provision made to local authorities for the recycling of Christmas cards and trees. However, the Spending Review 2000 included an annual increase in revenue support for Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services (EPCS), which includes waste management services. By 2003–04 this support will have risen by 1.1 billion over the 2000–01 provision.

The 2002 Spending Review has also announced that EPCS spending will increase by a further £671 million by 2005–06. Consistent with the general local authority financial framework, it is for individual local authorities to decide the proportion of their budget that should be directed to waste management work.

In addition to general support to local authority revenue expenditure, Spending Review 2000 provided a £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fundand 220 million of Private Finance Initiatives (PFI) resources, for waste projects, in Spending Review 2002, the PFI provision was increased to £355 million over the next three years. In addition, the New Opportunities Fund will distribute £38.75 million to expand community sector waste reuse, recycling and composting in England.

Waste Framework Directive

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what forms of agricultural waste will be subject to the Waste Framework Directive. [87127]

Mr. Meacher: *Section 75(7)(c)* of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 excludes from our national waste management controls, "waste from premises used for agriculture within the meaning of the Agriculture Act 1947". This, exclusion is in contravention of the Waste Framework Directive and we are preparing Regulations which will have the effect of repealing it. As a result, the Waste Framework Directive will apply to all types of agricultural waste other than those excluded from the Directive's scope by Article 2. In practice, this means that all forms of agricultural waste will be subject to control under the Waste Framework Directive other than animal carcasses which are subject to controlunder the Animal Waste Directive. The Waste Framework Directive provides that "waste" is ". . . any substance or object . . . which the holder discards or intends or is required to discard."

Waste Management

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are for new landfill sites for the disposal of household waste in England. [85326]

Mr. Meacher: Waste Strategy 2000 recognises that landfill will still have a role to play in any sustainable waste management system, but that it will be a much smaller role.

Local authorities should take into account the landfill diversion targets required by the Landfill Directive, to reduce the landfilling of biodegradable waste to landfill across the United Kingdom by around two-thirds in line with the timetable set out in the directive (ie by 2016, should the UK decide not to take advantage of the final four year derogation) and the recycling and recovery targets set out in WS2000.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the proportion of household waste *(a)* buried in landfill sites, *(b)* incinerated and *(c)* recycled in each local authority in England. [85327]

Mr. Meacher: Local authorities are required to provide estimates of the proportion of household waste recycled (including composting) recovered (including incineration) and landfilled under the Best Value regime. The latest results for 2000–01 are published on the ODPM website www.bvpi.gov.uk and a copy has been placed in the Library of the House. Estimates for 2001–02 will be available shortly.

Proportion of household waste recycled (including composting) recovered (including incineration)—waste disposal and unitary authorities

Percentage

	BV82a + b recycled and composted	*BV82c incinerated*	*BV82d landfilled*
Barnsley	10.0	0.0	90.0
Bath and North East Somerset	21.3	0.0	78.7
Bedfordshire County Council	7.3	0.0	92.7
Bexley	29.0	45.7	25.3
Birmingham	13.6	45.8	38.3
Blackburn with Darwen	4.9	0.0	95.1
Blackpool	12.0	0.0	88.1
Bournemouth	28.0	0.0	72.0
Bracknell Forest	12.8	0.0	87.3
Bradford	11.6	0.0	88.4
Brighton and Hove	10.0	0.0	90.0
Bristol	11.0	0.0	89.0
Bromley	14.5	0.0	85.5
Buckinghamshire County Council	23.2	0.0	76.7
Calderdale	9.1	0.0	90.7
Cambridgeshire County Council	19.4	0.0	80.6
Cheshire County Council	14.9	0.0	85.0
Cornwall County Council	9.4	0.0	90.6
Coventry	9.1	57.8	33.1
Croydon	16.4	1.5	82.1
Cumbria County Council	8.5	0.0	91.5
Darlington	10.8	0.0	89.2
Derby	12.2	0.0	87.7
Derbyshire County Council	3.7	0.0	88.9
Devon County Council	19.8	0.0	80.2
Doncaster	3.8	0.0	96.1
Dorset County Council	22.4	0.0	72.8
Dudley	11.8	62.9	25.2
Durham County Council	4.9	0.0	95.1
East Riding of Yorkshire	11.5	0.0	86.5
East Sussex County Council	13.0	7.8	79.2
Essex County Council	21.5	0.0	78.5
Gateshead	6.8	0.0	93.2

Proportion of household waste recycled (including composting) recovered (including incineration)—waste disposal and unitary authorities

Percentage

	BV82a + b recycled and composted	*BV82c incinerated*	*BV82d landfilled*
Gloucestershire County Council	13.5	0.0	86.6
Greater Manchester WDA	4.9	3.3	86.4
Greenwich	17.2	48.8	34.0
Halton	10.1	0.0	89.9
Hampshire County Council	26.2	0.0	73.8
Hartlepool	17.2	60.4	22.4
Herefordshire	14.4	0.0	85.6
Hertfordshire County Council	16.3	6.1	76.6
Isle of Wight	26.3	13.3	60.4
Kent County Council	14.0	0.0	86.0
Kingston-upon-Hull	7.9	0.0	91.9
Kingston-upon-Thames	18.9	0.0	81.1
Kirklees	16.6	0.0	83.4
Lancashire County Council	11.7	0.0	88.6
Leeds	10.6	0.0	89.4
Leicester	13.7	0.0	86.3
Leicestershire County Council	14.8	0.0	80.0
Lewisham	4.2	87.5	8.2
Lincolnshire County Council	12.7	0.0	87.3
Luton	13.9	0.0	86.1
Medway Towns	11.0	0.0	89.0
Merton	16.3	0.0	83.7
Middlesbrough	23.8	60.6	15.6
Milton Keynes	13.4	0.0	86.6
Newcastle upon Tyne	3.3	0.0	96.7
Norfolk County Council	9.1	0.0	84.8
North East Lincolnshire	8.0	0.0	92.0
North Lincolnshire	13.2	0.0	86.8
North Somerset	11.8	0.0	88.2
North Tyneside	4.9	44.2	51.0
North Yorkshire County Council	8.8	0.0	91.1
Northamptonshire County Council	13.8	0.0	86.2
Northumberland County Council	5.4	0.0	94.6
Nottingham	4.1	41.3	54.6
Nottinghamshire County Council	13.2	11.0	74.0
Oxfordshire County Council	13.8	0.0	86.0
Peterborough	19.8	0.0	80.2
Plymouth	21.2	0.0	78.8
Poole	25.0	0.0	75.0
Portsmouth	16.9	0.0	83.1
Reading	9.0	0.0	90.2
Redcar and Cleveland	4.0	53.0	43.0
Rotherham	4.2	0.0	95.8
Rutland	18.9	0.0	81.1
Sandwell	5.4	1.6	93.0
Sheffield	5.8	37.3	57.2
Shropshire County Council	8.7	0.2	91.1
Slough	13.7	0.0	86.3
Solihuil	7.2	33.4	59.4
Somerset County Council	14.8	0.0	85.2
South Gloucestershire	7.8	0.0	92.2
South Tyneside	10.4	0.0	89.6
Southampton	10.4	0.1	89.5
Southend-on-Sea	20.7	0.0	72.0
Southwark	5.8	18.5	75.7
Staffordshire County Council	11.9	17.9	69.9
Stockton-on-Tees	34.7	58.0	7.4
Stoke-on-Trent	12.7	49.5	37.9
Suffolk County Council	17.2	0.0	82.8
Sunderland	1.7	1.6	96.7
Surrey County Council	7.6	0.0	92.4
Sutton	23.5	0.0	76.6
Swindon	13.6	0.0	86.4
Telford and Wrekin	8.4	0.0	92.0
Thurrock	16.4	0.0	83.6
Tower Hamlets	2.8	0.0	97.3
Wakefield	5.1	0.0	94.9
Walsall	10.2	3.7	86.2
Warrington	13.3	0.0	90.3
Warwickshire County Council	5.8	0.6	87.7
West Berkshire	11.4	0.0	88.6
West London WDA	11.1	0.1	88.5
West Sussex County Council	14.3	0.0	85.5
Western Riverside WDA	9.1	0.1	90.8
Westminster	10.7	55.6	33.6
Wigan	3.5	0.0	96.5
Wiltshire County Council	16.1	0.0	85.2
Windsor and Maidenhead	22.6	0.0	77.2
Wokingham	18.1	0.0	79.6
Wolverhampton	7.0	63.0	30.0
Worcestershire County Council	11.7	0.0	88.3
York	9.8	0.0	90.2

TREASURY

Credit Unions

Mr. Colman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what subsidies and grant funding were given to credit unions in *(a)* England and Wales and *(b)* the UK (i) by the UK Government and (ii) from European social funds in each year since 1997. [86976]

Ruth Kelly: This information is not readily available. However, research by Liverpool John Moores University in 1999 estimated that total public investment in credit unions in Britain could be in the range of £15-£20 million per annum.

Mr. Colman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual costs were of regulation of credit unions by *(a)* the Registrar of Friendly Societies in each year from 1997–2001 and *(b)* the Financial Services Authority in 2001–02. [86977]

Ruth Kelly: Data has not been collected in a form that details the cost of regulation, specific to credit unions.

Ethnic Minorities

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many ethnic minority members in the Wycombe constituency were in employment in *(a)* spring 2001 and *(b)* spring 2002. [87129]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Nationals Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Paul Goodman, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about employment in Wycombe constituency. (87129)

Information on the number of ethnic minority people in employment in the Wycombe parliamentary constituency will be available from the April 2001 Population Census when this is published in June 2003. Information about the employment of ethnic minorities is available each year from the Labour Force Survey, but the sample size for the Wycombe constituency is too small to provide a reliable estimate.

Insurance Policies

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received on the absence of a statutory notice period before an insurance policy is cancelled by an insurer. [86863]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers receive numerous representations on a wide range of topics. The terms and conditions of insurance policies are a matter for insurers.

Landfill

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many projects he estimates will become financially unviable following the decision to make changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Dorset, *(c)* Devon, *(d)* Cornwall, *(e)* Wiltshire, *(f)* North Somerset, *(g)* Bristol and *(h)* Bath and North East Somerset. [86939]

John Healey: The Government have made no such estimates. The recently proposed changes to the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme will ensure that around £47 million per annum will continue to be made available for spending on local community environmental projects, ensuring that the current level of support for these types of projects is maintained. In addition there will be around £100 million per annum of funding available under the new public spending programme for sustainable waste management projects.

Tax credits which have already been claimed by landfill operators, or which may be claimed until March 2003, will need to be spent under the existing LTCS arrangements. This will ensure that projects which have been allocated tax credit funding will continue to benefit until such time as they are completed.

No decisions have yet been made on the criteria or scope of the replacement spending scheme.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many environmental projects which are funded by the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme have a completion date beyond March 2003 in *(a)* Somerset, *(b)* Dorset, *(c)* Devon, *(d)* Cornwall, *(e)* Wiltshire, *(f)* North Somerset, *(g)* Bristol and *(h)* Bath and North East Somerset. [86940]

John Healey: From details provided by ENTRUST, the regulator of the Landfill Tax Credit Scheme, the following estimates have been made of the number of projects with completion dates beyond March 2003 in each of the areas listed:

Area	*Number of Projects*
Somerset	18
Dorset	2
Cornwall	11
Wiltshire	10
North Somerset	0
Bristol	26
Bath and North East Somerset	0

Low Birth Weights

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many babies were born with a low birth weight, broken down by local authority, in each of the last three years. [87153]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Chris Ruane, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many babies were born with a low birth weight, broken down by local authority, in each of the last three years. (87153)

The number of low birth weight live births that occurred in each year from 1999 to 2001, by local authorities in England and Wales, are shown in the table which has been put in the Libraries of the House.

Teenage Pregnancies

Chris Ruane: To ask theChancellor of the Exchequer how many teenage pregnancies there were in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* county in the last 12 months. [87154]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Chris Ruane, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many teenage pregnancies there were in each *(a)* constituency and *(b)* county in the last 12 months. (87154)

The latest available figures are for 2000. Teenage conception data for 2000 by local authorities were published on the ONS website on 27th February 2002 and will also be made available by ward by April 2003. To protect the confidentiality of individuals, figures for certain parliamentary constituencies cannot be released as this might reveal small number of cases in individual wards. Number of teenage conceptions by each parliamentary constituency and county for 2000 have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Alcohol

Mr. Jim Cousins: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the expenditure on alcohol *(a)* in cash, *(b)* in real terms and *(c)* as a percentage of total expenditure in each region and nation of the United Kingdom in each year since 1996. [85732]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Jim Cousins, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on estimates of expenditure on alcohol in each region and country of the United Kingdom in each year since 1996. (85732)

The ONS compiles regional individual consumption expenditure estimates, including an estimated series for alcohol (current prices only). The latest data available are for the year 1999. These data are presented in the following table.

Total expenditure on alcohol

£ million

	North East	North West	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
1996	1,299	3,728	2,517	1,874	2,411	2,140	3,449	3,762	2,102	1,267	2,618	612	27,779
1997	1,334	3,794	2,691	1,963	2,424	22,232	3,843	3,831	2,249	1,347	2,723	678	29,109
1998	1,345	3,777	2,860	1,946	2,518	2,350	4,305	3,913	2,303	1,342	2,794	695	30,147
1999	1,351	4,224	2,774	2,239	2,660	2,653	4,505	4,464	2,456	1,448	3,040	754	32,567

Alcohol as a percentage of total consumption expenditure by region

	North East	North West	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East	London	South East	South West	Wales Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	United Kingdom
1996	6.7	6.9	6.4	5.7	5.9	4.8	5.2	5.1	5.4	5.6	6.4	5.1	5.7
1997	6.6	6.6	6.5	5.6	5.6	4.7	5.3	4.9	5.4	5.7	6.3	5.4	5.6
1998	6.4	6.3	6.5	5.4	5.5	4.5	5.3	4.6	5.2	5.7	6.1	5.3	5.5
1999	6.5	6.6	6.2	5.9	5.4	4.9	5.0	4.9	5.2	6.0	6.3	5.4	5.5

We do not publish sub-national economic estimates in real terms.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87398]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 16 December
by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office.

Child Trust Funds

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions officials from his Department have had with representatives of *(a)* the banking industry, *(b)* building societies and *(c)* friendly societies regarding the provision of Child Trust Funds; what research his Department has undertaken on the provision of Child Trust Funds; and if he will publish the research. [86295]

Ruth Kelly: Proposals for the Child Trust Fund were first published in April 2001 in the consultation document entitled "Saving and Assets for All". A follow up consultation document, "Delivering Saving and Assets", was published in November 2001. A wide range of financial services providers have taken part in the consultation exercises to date. As announced in the pre-Budget report the Government will now consult with key stakeholders on the detailed implementation of the Child Trust Fund.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will introduce child trust funds. [86665]

Ruth Kelly: The Government provided an update on the child trust fund in the pre-Budget report (paragraphs 5.55–5.59).

Cigarettes

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the assumed change in revenues was in the pre-Budget report resulting from the October changes to arrangements for cross-channel purchases of cigarettes for own use for financial years 2003–04 and 2004–05; and if he will make a statement. [86865]

John Healey: The pre-Budget report public forecast for tobacco duty revenues cautiously allowed for a cost of around £100 million per year as a result of the package of measures announced in October.

Citizens Advice Bureau Service

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the publications produced by his Department that refer people to the Citizens Advice Bureau Service for advice and assistance; and whether Citizens Advice Scotland is informed of such referrals prior to publication. [84154]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Lady to the answer given to her by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Competition, Consumers and Markets on 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 684W.

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by his Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87176]

Ruth Kelly: Data on the location of civil servants are not available in the format requested, except at disproportionate cost. Information is available for the Government Office Regions of Great Britain.

For information on how many civil servants are employed by HM Treasury, Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue refer to Table D of Civil Service Statistics 2001, published in June 2001. Copies of the publication were placed in the Library of the House at the time of publication.

Information regarding how much money spent by the above Departments by local authority area is not available.

Cocaine (Death Certificates)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it Government policy to ensure that deaths caused by crack cocaine and cocaine are identified separately on death certificates. [86254]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Lynne Jones, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question about ensuring that deaths caused by crack cocaine and cocaine are identified separately on death certificates. (86254)

Deaths that may be due to drug poisoning are referred to the coroner, who has a duty to report on the cause of death on the best available evidence. As part of his investigations the coroner may order tests to be carried out to detect the presence of particular drugs or other toxins. Unfortunately, it is unlikely that these would separately identify whether the cocaine taken in the form of crack cocaine.

The Government recognises the concern that precise levels of drug-misuse deaths are not clearly identified due to a lack of available monitored information. As part of an Action Plan to Prevent Drug-related Deaths, £320,000 is being invested in better surveillance and monitoring systems which will allow increased analysis of information from coroners' reports and provide best practice guidance and training to coroners. It is hoped that this will improve the evidence provided by coroners on death certificates to better distinguish different types of drug-misuse deaths, where evidence other than toxicology is available.

Council Tax

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what local government revenue from council tax was in each year since 1997. [86667]

Mr. Boateng: Figures for council tax in England, Scotland and Wales and domestic rates in Northern Ireland, are published by the Office for National Statistics and in Budget and PBR documents for the relevant years.

Demography

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many single *(a)* women and *(b)* men will reach the age of 60 years between 20 September and 25 December. [87602]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the number of single women and single men who will reach the age of 60 years between 20 September and 25 December 2002. (87602)

It is estimated that there will be 21,000 single women and 17,000 single men in England and Wales who will reach the age of 60 during this period. Single has been defined to include single (never married), widowed and divorced.

These figures are estimates. They have been derived using interim revised national population projections produced by the Government Actuary's Department.Data from the Office for National Statistics on the pattern of births in 1942 indicates the proportion of the total number of 59-year-old men and women in June 2002 who will reach the age of 60 between 20 September and 25 December 2002. Data from national population projections by marital status produced by the Government Actuary's Department have been used to estimate the proportion who are single.

Departmental Report

Norman Lamb: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer how much it costs to produce HM Treasury's departmental report 2002; and how many copies of the report were sold at its cover price. [87231]

Mr. Boateng: The final cost of producing HM Treasury's departmental report was £4,912. 454 copies have been sold for the most recent edition (Cm 5425, published 10 June 2002). This includes copies supplied at discount by The Stationary Office Limited (TSO) to certain types of customer.

Earnings Statistics

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of average earnings in *(a)* the West Midlands region, *(b)* the West Midlands conurbation, *(c)* Birmingham, *(d)* Walsall, *(e)* Wolverhampton, *(f)* Dudley, *(g)* Solihull, *(h)* Coventry, *(i)* Sandwell, *(j)* Worcestershire, *(k)* Herefordshire, *(l)* Shropshire, *(m)* Warwickshire, *(n)* North Warwickshire, *(o)* Nuneaton and Bedworth, *(p)* Rugby, *(q)* Stratford-on-Avon and *(r)* Warwick, in the last year for which figures are available. [87029]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L Cook to Mr. M Foster, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question on average earnings for counties and unitary authorities in West Midlands. (87029)

I have provided a table overleaf, showing average weekly earnings, from the 2002 New Earnings Survey (NES), the latest survey for which data are available.

The NES can provide earnings data for small geographical areas. The release of NES data is restricted to figures that are derived from a sufficiently large sample of employees, and have an acceptable level of accuracy and I have provided the available data for the areas requested where the samples are large enough.

New Earnings Survey, April 2002
Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence

£

	Average Gross Weekly Earnings
West Midlands Government Office Region	427.3
West Midlands Metropolitan County	442.1
Birmingham	459.5
Walsall	372.6
Wolverhampton	434.1
Dudley	391.5
Solihull	465.0
Coventry	488.7
Sandwell	402.3
Hereford & Worcester	400.5
Herefordshire Unitary Authority	375.7
Shropshire	392.0

New Earnings Survey, April 2002
Full time employees on adult rates whose pay for the survey pay period was unaffected by absence

£

	Average Gross Weekly Earnings
Warwickshire	457.4
North Warwickshire	[1]—
Nuneaton and Bedworth	382.2
Rugby	[1]—
Stratford-on-Avon	440.8
Warwick	454.9

[1] Denotes the data has been suppressed in line with NES publication criteria.

Environmental Health Practitioners

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to allow tax incentives to companies who take on an environmental health practitioner. [87492]

John Healey: The Government keeps all taxes under review and any changes will be announced as part of the normal Budget process. The Government currently has no plans to allow tax relief to companies who take on an environmental health practitioner.

Equitable Life

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what contingency plans have been made to help pensioners in the event of Equitable Life going into liquidation. [86506]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Equitable Life issued its interim accounts on 15 November and made it clear that it remained solvent. The FSA continues to monitor the company to ensure that it is complying with regulatory requirements.

Should an insurer become insolvent a safety net for policyholders is already in place in the shape of the Financial Services Compensation Scheme. The Scheme will act if a company has become insolvent or gone out of business. The Scheme will first seek to take measures to safeguard policyholders, for example by trying to ensure that policies are transferred to another company. If that is not possible then compensation may be payable to eligible policyholders, subject to the Scheme rules.

Government Debt

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) how much Government debt has been generated by private finance initiatives *(a)* as a percentage of GDP and *(b)* in total; [86675]

(2) whether the forecast net borrowing for this financial year includes Government liabilities generated by private finance initiatives. [86676]

Mr. Boateng: Forecasts of the Government's net borrowing are compiled in accordance with National Accounts concepts and methods, which are based on international rules (European System of Accounts—ESA95), that the Government are legally obliged to follow. Under these rules economic activity is measured by transactions, which are recorded according to the sector considered to be undertaking the transaction.

For an on-balance sheet PFI deal, the capital expenditure adds to public sector net borrowing, assuming that there are no off-setting reductions in other capital spending. For an off-balance sheet PFI contract, the capital expenditure does not affect public sector net borrowing. Professional accountants, in preparing the accounts of Government Departments, judge whether a PFI deal is on or off balance sheet. The National Audit Office, or a comparable audit body, audits these decisions.

The Government publish a full statement of expected PFI-related payments in the Budget, showing estimated PFI payments for the next 25 years. Service charge payments made by the public sector to the private sector score as public sector current expenditure in the year in which they are made.

Highlands and Islands

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what revised gross domestic product figures for the Highlands and Islands regarding eligibility for Objective One status for 2000–06 the Office of National Statistics has calculated since the bids for Objective One status were submitted. [84295]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. David Stewart, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Highlands and Islands. (84295)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) publishes estimates of regional and sub-regional Gross Value Added (GVA, previously referred to as Gross Domestic Product—GDP), compiled using methods agreed at a European level. These data are then supplied to Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Union, who convert the data into euros and Purchasing Power Parities (PPPs) for international comparison. The PPP-based data for sub-regions (NUTS level 2) have been used to determine eligibility for Objective 1 of the Structural Funds. The Highlands and Islands Enterprise area is a single NUTS2 unit.

The GDP figures for the NUTS 2 area of Highlands and Islands for 1993 to 1996 were published in October 1998. These data (Table 1) were based on the European System of Accounts 1979 (ESA79) methodology, and were used to inform the decisions on Objective 1 eligibility for the period 2000 to 2006.

Table 1: ONS data published in October 1998

	1993	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
GDP £ million	2,739	2,877	2,990	3,093
GDP £ per head	7,385	7,729	8,020	8,308
GDP £ per head UK = 100	80	79	79	78

In April 2001, sub-regional gross value added (GVA) data were published using the new ESA95 methodology, for the period 1993 to 1998, as shown in Table 2. ESA95 is the new National and Regional Accounts convention now used for compiling regional accounts by all EU countries.

Table 2: ONS data published in April 2001

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
GDP £ million	2,947	3,052	3,176	3,217	3,306	3,461
GDP £ per head	7,943	8,199	8,515	8,634	8,898	9,369
GDP £ per head UK = 100	82	81	80	77	75	75

The ONS published revised estimates for NUTS level 1 (Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, and the nine English Government Office Regions) for 1989 to 1999 on 21 November 2002, and will be publishing provisional estimates for 2000 and 2001 in December 2002. The ONS then plans to publish consistent sub-regional and local area (NUTS levels 2 and 3 respectively) GVA for the period 1993–2000 early in 2003. These data will be supplied to Eurostat, who will, as described above, convert these to a PPP basis before publishing on an EU = 100 index basis.

However, I should like to draw to your attention to an announcement the ONS put out this week about an error in sub-national, annual business inquiry estimates which provide part of the source information for many industries. These are impacting on the ONS regional GVA publications of 21 November 2002 and 17 December 2002 referred to above. The size of the error is within the range of variability seen by changes made in the past when first published GVA estimates have been revised. We are taking the unusual step of publishing a revised series of estimates at NUTS-1, 2 and 3 level in early 2003. Therefore the regional GVA series being published in 2002 are being referred to as provisional, but because the size of the revisions is not anticipated to be outside of past user experiences they will continue to be made available, subject to being marked as provisional from now on. The announcement can be found at the NS website at: www.statistics.gov.uk/notices/Impact_on_other_regional_outputs.asp

Loan Guarantees

Harry Cohen: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on his policy relating to setting out in the national accounts the extent of Government liability for guarantees of loans, with special reference to the London Underground. [86555]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Harry Cohen, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent parliamentary question relating to setting out in the national accounts the extent of Government liability for guarantees of loans, with special reference to the London Underground. (86555).

The responsibility for the national accounts falls to me as National Statistician.

Guarantees of loans are usually accounted for as contingent liabilities. As such they are not included in national accounts under the rules of the European System of Accounts 1995. The Office for National Statistics has not been asked about the status of any guarantees for possible London Underground loans.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87347]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer that the Minister of State, Cabinet Office has given him today.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will answer written question 83395 tabled by the hon. Member for Altrincham and Sale, West on 21 November. [87228]

Dawn Primarolo: I replied to the hon. Gentleman's question on 12 December.

Partnerships UK

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures are in place to measure the effectiveness of Partnerships UK in delivering and developing public private partnerships; what plans his Department has for the future development of Partnerships UK; and if he will make a statement. [83214]

Mr. Boateng: Partnerships UK has a unique corporate governance structure geared towards safeguarding its public sector mission. The structure includes the establishment of an Advisory Council chaired by Sir Andrew Turnbull, the Cabinet Secretary. The council is comprised of a wide range of representatives of PUK's public sector client base, and is appointed by HM Treasury. HM Treasury also appoints two non-executive directors to PUK's board.

Copies of the Advisory Council's most recent report and Partnerships UK's Annual Report for the year 2002 are both available from the House Library.

Performance Reports

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the timetable is for publication of the performance reports as set out in the Pre-Budget Report, November 2002 (Cm 5664), paragraphs 6.49 to 6.54; and if he will make a statement on the performance of Government Departments on publication of their full reports; [86671]

(2) pursuant to the Budget Red Book, April 2002 (HC 592), box 6.3, what dates his Department uses to define each of the four seasons of the year; and what the publication dates are for each Department's report; [86669]

(3) pursuant to the Pre-Budget Report, November 2002 (Cm 5664), paragraph 6.32, what the timetable is for implementation of his Department's plans to provide links on its website to Departments' PSA progress reports. [86670]

Mr. Boateng: Departments are currently publishing their autumn performance reports, for which they are responsible. The page of links was established on the Treasury's website on 27 November 2002, and is being updated as reports are published. This page is available in the Public Spending and Services pages under the title, 'Links to Departmental Performance Documents'.

Public-Private Partnerships

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of Partnerships UK in ensuring successful development and implementation of public-private

partnerships; what guidance has been given to Partnerships UK; and how this differs from guidance given to the Treasury Taskforce. [83134]

Mr. Boateng: Details of Partnerships UK's business strategy were outlined in the Information Memorandum issued prior to HM Treasury's capital raising exercise in early 2001. The company's progress measured against its business plan is covered in its latest Annual Report, a copy of which is also available from the House Library. Copies of the Information Memorandum and the Annual Report are both available from the House Library.

Partnerships UK is a public-private partnership with the majority of its shares held by private sector institutions. As a minority shareholder, HM Treasury does not exercise control over the company. Partnerships UK's board is responsible for the overall management of PUK on behalf of its shareholders which include HM Treasury. HMT also appoints PUK's Advisory Council which monitors the delivery of PUK's public sector mission.

The Treasury Taskforce as an arm of HM Treasury issued regular guidance to the public sector on the application of public-private partnerships. The taskforce was also responsible for PFI policy. Following the establishment of Partnerships UK, these roles have passed back to the Treasury and the Office of Government Commerce.

Research and Development

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer how much research and development funds were provided by central Government to institutions in *(a)* England, *(b)* Wales, *(c)* Scotland and *(d)* Northern Ireland, in the last year for which figures are available. [84393]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government publication "Forward Look 2001" (Cm5338) shows that in 2000–01, UK government departments and devolved administrations were estimated to have spent £5006 million on R&D, including £1518 million on the Science Budget, much of which will have been spent with external institution. Within this total the direct expenditure by the devolved administrations was £104 million by the Scottish Executive, £21 million by the National Assembly for Wales, and £32 million by the Northern Ireland departments. No overall figures are available to indicate the geographical breakdown of the institutions who received funding from these sources, but so as far as the breakdown of Science Budget spending is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Strangford on 25 November, *Official Report*, column 33W.

Retirement

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what incentives he is putting in place to encourage young people to save for their retirement. [86890]

Ruth Kelly: The Government already provides generous tax relief, worth around £13 billion a year, to encourage saving in pensions for retirement.

The Government is publishing a consultation document, on 17 December, which includes proposals for the simplification of the taxation of pensions, thus enabling people to plan effectively for their retirement.

Royal Mint

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place a copy of the Royal Mint quinquennial prior options review in the Library. [86864]

Ruth Kelly: The 1999 review of options for the Royal Mint is commercially confidential, and therefore cannot be released in accordance with exemption 13 (third party's commercial confidences) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Targets

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the pre-Budget report, November 2002 (Cm 5664), paragraph 6.25, what the relationship is between the targets set, the outcomes departments are required to deliver and the money allocated by his Department to other Government Departments. [86672]

Mr. Boateng: Public Service Agreements are an integral part of our spending plans. PSAs set out the objectives and outcomes Departments are required to deliver within their resources.

Tax Processing

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 26 November, *Official Report*, column 159W, on Tax Processing, if he will place in the Library the underlying data for the basket of outputs for the previous two financial years; and if he will make a statement. [86909]

Dawn Primarolo: I have placed a copy of the information relating to financial year 2000–01 in the Library. This was the first year for which this data was collated.

Taxation (Non-domiciled Individuals)

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his plans are for the UK taxation of non-domiciled individuals resident in the UK. [87512]

Dawn Primarolo: My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in his Budget last April that we are reviewing the residence and domicile rules as they affect the tax liabilities of individuals. We believe that any modernisation of these rules needs to be based on clear principles: the rules should be fair, clear, easy to operate and support the competitiveness of the British economy. Paragraphs 5.81–82 of the Pre-Budget Report published on 27 November set out the latest position on the review.

Taxes (Wales)

Ian Lucas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of *(a)* income tax, *(b)* corporation tax, *(c)* inheritance tax, *(d)* capital

gains tax, *(e)* national insurance and *(f)* VAT paid by organisations and persons in Wales in each year since 1997. [86897]

Dawn Primarolo: Available information is given in the table. Data on the regional distribution of inheritance tax are not collected regularly. A special survey estimated a yield of about £50 million for Wales in 2000–01. Figures for corporation tax are not available and it would only be possible to provide reliable estimates of national insurance contributions for Wales at disproportionate cost.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*
Income tax[1]	2,670	2,630	2,990	3,230
Capital gains tax[2]	30	40	40	30
VAT[3]	2,470	2,260	2,500	2,480

[1] Estimated income tax liabilities for Wales based on the Survey of Personal Incomes.
[2] Estimated capital gains tax liabilities in Wales.
[3] VAT is a centrally collected tax and the figure for receipts is only available for the UK as a whole (HM Customs and Excise Annual Report, Table A1). The tax share for Wales is estimated by apportioning the figures for household expenditure from the ONS publication, "Family Expenditure", by the number of households in Wales from "Regional Trends".

Treasury Publications

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 506W, on Treasury publications, how many leaflets were distributed in the case of *(a)* the Budget and *(b)* the pre-Budget report; and if he will make a statement. [86896]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury distributed 2.1 million Budget 2002 summary leaflets and 1.4 million leaflets summarising the 2002 pre-Budget report.

Trust Ports

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what adjustment he has made to the public sector borrowing requirement consequent upon the decision of the Office for National Statistics to classify major trust ports as public sector bodies; [87561]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 681W, on trust ports, what adjustments have been made to public sector accounts as a result; [87559]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 681W, on trust ports, when classification of major trust ports as public bodies became effective; and whether the classification has retrospective effect. [87552]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Christopher Chope, dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on trust ports. (87522, 87559, 87561)

The reclassification of major trust ports to public corporations in National Accounts became effective in September 2001. Available data were introduced retrospectively back to 1996. The National Accounts data are used for the public sector accounts. The Chancellor's fiscal measures are based on these and hence reflect the changes made to the National Accounts data.

Trust ports data appear in the public sector accounts and net cash requirement in many places. I am not able to give you a breakdown of this. However, trust ports are not particularly significant in the overall public corporations' accounts, for example their gross operating surplus and capital formation both account for about 0.6% of the sector total.

UKAEA/BNFL

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on how *(a)* UKAEA and *(b)* BNFL's liabilities are reflected in reports to Parliament about the national finances. [84758]

Mr. Boateng: The information is as follows:

UKAEA

UKAEA is a non-ministerial public body reporting to the Department for Trade and Industry. Its liabilities are recorded in its balance sheet and in its annual report and accounts. This is available in the Library of the House and is accessible at http://www.ukaea.org.uk/about/acc 2002/cover1.htm. The liabilities that are recorded in its accounts include financial debts and provisions for the future costs of nuclear decommissioning.

The financial debts of UKAEA, owed to the private sector, are included within public sector net debt—the statistic used to monitor the Chancellor's sustainable investment rule and reported to Parliament in the FSBR and PBR. Provisions are not recorded in public sector net debt.

UKAEA's nuclear provisions are included in DTI's resource accounts that are presented to Parliament each year.

BNFL

BNFL is a public corporation. Its liabilities are recorded in its balance sheet in its annual report and accounts. This is available from the House of Commons Library and here http://www.bnfl.com/annualreport2002/pdfs/BN1726 Report.pdf. The liabilities that are recorded in its accounts include financial debts and provisions for the future costs of nuclear decommissioning. The financial debts of BNFL, owed to the private sector, are included within public sector net debt—the statistic used to monitor the Chancellor's sustainable investment rule and reported to Parliament in the FSBR and PBR. Provisions are not recorded in public sector net debt.

BNFL's nuclear provisions are included in the resource accounts of DTI and MOD that are presented to Parliament each year.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answers of 9 December (reference 86133 and 86134), whether a recipient of working families tax credit who marries prior to April 2003 and becomes responsible for children of his new wife can surrender his existing entitlement and make a new claim to include his new children. [87234]

Dawn Primarolo: No. The award would continue regardless of the change of circumstances. Working families tax credit is a fixed award and generally runs for the period of entitlement. However, a claimant can surrender an existing award and make a new claim following the birth of a baby, the adoption of a child or granting of a parental order for a surrogate child. The new tax credits will replace the current system from April 2003 and will be more responsive to changes in family circumstances.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Application Forms

Mr. David: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the process by which his Department compiles the questions used on benefit application forms. [80815]

Malcolm Wicks: Questions used on the Department's benefit application forms are deemed to be those which are most appropriate in order to capture relevant information on entitlement to benefit and how benefit may be paid, as laid down in the relevant legislation.

They are arrived at by a process of research, consultation, testing and piloting.

Benefit Payments

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether claimants having to attend interviews to assess a claim to continue receiving a benefit as a cash payment *(a)* will be provided with travel assistance where they have no ready access to public transport and *(b)* will be able to claim travel expenses; and if he will make a statement; [83998]

(2) whether interviews with claimants wishing to continue receiving cash payments will take place as close as possible to their home; and if he will make a statement; [83999]

(3) whether claimants will be required to attend an interview in order to continue receiving cash payments of their benefits from the Post Office; and if he will make a statement; [84000]

(4) what information benefit claimants will have to provide if they wish to continue receiving cash payments from the Post Office; and if he will make a statement. [84001]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: From April 2003 the normal method of payment for benefits and pensions will be directly into bank, building society or Post Office card accounts. Customers who wish to continue to collect their benefit or pension in cash at the Post Office need to choose one of the account options that can be accessed at post offices and provide these account details to the Department. Customers will not be required to attend special interviews as part of this process.

Benefits

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed *(a)* jobseeker's allowance, *(b)* child-related benefits, *(c)* winter fuel payments and *(d)* sickness related benefits in (i) Lancashire and (ii) the North West of England in each of the last five years. [82147]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the tables. Many benefit recipients fall within more than one category and there is therefore a degree of overlap between the figures.

Number of people claiming jobseeker's allowance

	Lancashire	*North West region*
May 1998	18,536	164,925
May 1999	18,242	155,903
May 2000	16,375	139,888
May 2001	14,955	126,094
May 2002	13,679	119,224

Notes:
1. Figures are unrounded.
2. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Source:
Jobseeker's Allowance Computer System, 100 per cent. claimant count.

Number of families receiving child benefit

	Lancashire	*North West region*
August 1999	141,535	872,645
August 2000	141,680	860,675
August 2001	142,150	866,530
August 2002	141,780	863,173

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. Figures by county and region are not available prior to 1999.

Source:
Child Benefit Computer System, 100 per cent. claimant count.

Number of families on key benefits

	Lancashire	*North West region*
May 1998	27,100	218,400
May 1999	26,500	208,900
May 2000	25,900	200,600
May 2001	24,800	194,300
May 2002	24,100	188,500

Notes:
1. Key benefits are income support and jobseeker's allowance with a child premium, and incapacity benefit and severe disablement allowance with a child dependency increase.
2. Child premia and child dependency increases are paid for children under 16 and young adult dependants aged 16–18 for whom child benefit is payable.

Source:
DWP Information Centre Client Group Analysis, 5 per cent. statistical samples.

Winter fuel payment recipients

	Lancashire	*North West region*
Winter 1999–2000	210,000	1,207,400
Winter 2000–01	233,600	1,335,900
Winter 2001–02	233,000	1,336,500

Notes:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:
Winter Fuel Payment Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service, 100 per cent. data.

Number of people claiming sickness related benefits

	Lancashire	*North West region*
May 1998	63,300	448,400
May 1999	62,600	444,100
May 2000	62,600	442,400
May 2001	65,000	450,100
May 2002	65,300	448,000

Notes:
1. Sickness related benefits are incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance and income support with a disability premium.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:
DWP Information Centre Client Group Analysis, 5 per cent. statistical samples.

Child Maintenance Payments

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the new system for calculating child maintenance payments will be extended to all Child Support Agency cases. [85322]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 318.

Child Support Agency

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what provisions are in place within CSA assessments to help with the additional costs that non-resident parents incur when they have to travel long distances and accommodate themselves in hotels in order to see their children. [83131]

Malcolm Wicks: A system of Departures from the formula exists in the current Child Support scheme. This allows a non-resident parent's maintenance assessment to be adjusted in cases where high contact costs are incurred. In the new scheme, this has been replaced by a system of Variations. These also take account of the cost of overnight accommodation where a return journey on the same day would be impractical. Under both schemes an award only takes effect when a threshold level of cost has been exceeded.

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the reforms to the CSA system will be introduced; and when they will be extended to parents already in the CSA system. [83132]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the letter sent to hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, a copy of which was placed in the Library. The new scheme will commence for existing clients when we are satisfied that it is working well, which we expect to be about a year later.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he will implement new guidelines for assessments by the Child Support Agency for existing clients. [84170]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the letter sent to hon. Members on 19 September 2002 by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, a copy of which is available in the Library. The new scheme will commence for existing clients when we are satisfied that it is working well, which we expect to be about a year later than for new clients.

Departmental Website

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the website links associated with his Department, including sites now dormant or closed; what the start-up costs were for each site; what the operating costs were in each year for each site; which company hosts each site; and what assessment has taken place for each site. [81954]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) on 7 November, *Official Report*, column 293–94W.

Executive Agencies

Mr. David Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the future staffing levels of his Department's Executive Agencies; what changes in employment levels will be brought about by *(a)* the move to Jobcentre Plus and *(b)* the establishment of the new Pension Service; and if he will provide estimates for total staffing levels in each of the next three years. [86731]

Mr. McCartney: Information on the future staffing levels of the Department's Executive Agencies is not as yet available. Profiles for staffing levels in each of the next three years are still being developed by each of the businesses.

Fraud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* recorded and *(b)* estimated level of fraud has taken place through benefit payments at post offices in each of the last ten years. [86811]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: As part of our programme to modernise welfare delivery, from next April we shall be paying more benefits direct into bank accounts. The move to direct paymentprovides a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way of paying benefits that will reduce the cost of red tape and make the system more secure from fraud.

The figures in the table show losses from fraudulent encashment of instruments of payment. These may include losses incurred through transactions at places other than post offices, such as banks and building societies. Figures for instrument of payment fraud prior to 1995/96 cannot be identified separately.

Year	*Order book losses £m*	*Girocheque losses £m*	*Total instrument of payment losses £m*
1995 to 1996	133.0	17.0	150.0
1996 to 1997	84.0	17.8	101.8
1997 to 1998	98.0	21.0	119.0
1998 to 1999	83.2	19.4	102.6
1999 to 2000	89.4	19.3	108.7
2000 to 2001	58.0	19.2	77.2

Source:
Fraud Strategy Unit

Guide Dogs Charity

Claire Ward: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what support he gives to the Guide Dogs for the Blind charity. [83821]

Maria Eagle: We fund voluntary and charitable organisations only to deliver specific projects or services. Guide Dogs for the Blind does not provide any specific projects or services for the Department for Work and Pensions.

The Department does work in partnership with a range of charitable and voluntary organisations to break down barriers and improve service delivery.

Housing Benefit Reforms

Mr. Kirkwood:: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will place in the Library the local reference rents for each size of property in each locality of each of the local authorities invited to be a pathfinder in the housing benefit reforms. [85303]

Malcolm Wicks: The information requested is not collected centrally. With the introduction of the standard local housing allowance, each pathfinder authority will publish in advance the rates that will payable under the scheme.

National Insurance Recording System 2

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* retirement pension, *(b)* widow's benefit, *(c)* bereavement benefit, *(d)* incapacity benefit and *(e)* jobseeker's allowance cases are awaiting a review triggered by a national insurance recording system 2 (NIRS2) calculation. [83210]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 642–44W.

NIRS2

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people *(a)* were asked to repay and *(b)* repaid overpayments triggered by the NIRS2 computer system; [83213]

(2) how much people repaid *(a)* in total and *(b)* on average, following a request for a repayment resulting from an overpayment triggered by the NIRS2 computer system. [83207]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The information is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Pensions

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he plans to take to ensure that people have confidence in the pensions they are investing in. [86891]

Mr. McCartney: It is clearly important that individuals have confidence in the long term stability of the pension system. We are publishing a Green Paper on pensions on 17 December that will look at pensions policy in the round. It will make a range of proposals to encourage more pensions saving and to balance the competing issues in pensions policy. The proposals will be designed for the long-term, as people need to be able to plan and make decisions for the future.

Personal Information (Restricted Access)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his policy on restricting access by staff to personal information held by his Department and its agencies in cases where victims of violence have changed their names and addresses. [87161]

Mr. McCartney: It is the policy of the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that all personal information held by the Department is afforded protection in accordance with legislative requirements and good practice.

Access by staff to any personal information is restricted to that needed for the proper conduct of the Department's business. On-line activity is subject to random management checking and full audit trails are maintained.

Additional protection is provided and access further restricted for cases assessed to be at serious risk. In this case all access to a record is blocked unless specifically authorised by management and all attempts at access are monitored.

The Department takes a very serious view of any unauthorised disclosures being made from its records and disciplinary action, including dismissal and prosecution, will be taken against anyone making an unauthorised disclose of customer information to a third party or casually browsing the Department's records.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what guidance he has issued to his Department and its agencies concerning restricting access by staff to personal information held in cases where victims of violence have changed their names and addresses. [87162]

Mr. McCartney: Department for Work and Pensions staff with access to customer information are made aware of their responsibilities for the security and protection of customer information during induction training. This is reinforced through various publications and regular security bulletins and awareness sessions. Comprehensive supporting guidance is also available in both paper and electronic form.

Post Office Benefit Payments

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his Department is doing to encourage those who wish to have their benefits paid through the post office. [84255]

Malcolm Wicks: We are providing customers with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to direct payment. Customers can choose the bank or building society account (including the post office card account) which best suits their needs and circumstances. The information material sets out the key features of the various accounts and explains how people can access their money at the post office, if they wish to do so.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Laws: Mr. David Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures he is taking to promote the take-up of the Post Office Card account as part of the migration to automated credit transfer. [82666]

Malcolm Wicks: DWP is providing customers with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to payment direct into accounts. Customers can choose the bank or building society account (including the Post Office card account) which best suits their needs and circumstances. The information material sets out the key features of the various accounts.

Poverty

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* people over retirement age, *(b)* children, *(c)* women, *(d)* members of ethnic minorities and *(e)* others in the Wycombe constituency lived below the poverty line in each of the past five years. [85660]

Malcolm Wicks: The requested information is not available. Poverty and social exclusion are complex and multi-dimensional problems, which affect many aspects of people's lives. They cannot be measured using a single indicator. Our long-term strategy to tackle the underlying causes of poverty is set out in our recently published "Opportunity for all—fourth annual report", which provides detailed analysis on a range of indicators of poverty and social exclusion. Unfortunately, not all indicators can be broken down to the constituency level—due to sample size limitations. The National Statistics website, www.statistics.gov.uk, provides a comprehensive source of information that is available at the constituency level.

Social Fund

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to reform the Social Fund; and if he will make a statement. [82078]

Malcolm Wicks: The Social Fund plays an important role in our agenda for tackling poverty and social exclusion by providing people on low incomes with grants and interest-free loans to help them manage a wide range of unexpected or occasional costs.

We have introduced a number of important changes to the Social Fund since 1997, including a simpler and more transparent claims process. In the PBR, we announced that from April 2003, £90 million will be added to the discretionary Fund over the three years to 2005–06. Also from next April, a further £15 million will be available for the funeral payment scheme, increasing the amount allowed for unspecified funeral expenses from £600 to £700. This extra investment will bring the total amount of cash available through the Social Fund to around 900 £million and enhance the Fund's ability to help people on low incomes manage their finances.

We also aim to improve the administration of the Social Fund and have announced that further work on this will be taken forward in conjunction with the Treasury.

Statistics (Privileged Access)

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list the series of statistics to which his Department has privileged access prior to publication. [86732]

Mr. McCartney: We have pre-release access to statistical series produced within the department and to the following National Statistics released by other government departments:

Labour Market Statistics (Office for National Statistics)

Low Pay (Office for National Statistics)

New Earnings Survey (Office for National Statistics)

Work and Worklessness (Office for National Statistics)

Individual Incomes (Department for Trade and Industry)

The Department was also given early access to the 2001 population census results. On some occasions the Department has had access to the redistribution of income series produced by the Office for National Statistics. It may also be involved in quality assurance of statistical series produced by other departments before they are finalised and published.

Sure Start Maternity Grant

Mr. John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* couple families with children and *(b)* one parent families he estimates will be passported to the Sure Start maternity grant in Leeds West, under the new tax credit scheme. [83480]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on eligibility for Sure Start Maternity Grants by family type is not available, either at local or national level.

From April 2003, Sure Start Maternity Grants will be available to families in receipt of Child Tax Credit at a rate greater than the family element (£545/year or £1090 for families with a child under the age of one), or Working Tax Credit where a disabled worker is included in the assessment.

It is estimated that nationally there will be around 250,000 awards of Sure Start Maternity Grants in 2003–04 under the new rules. This compares with 201,000 in 2001–02. Around 25,000 of the additional successful claims will be due to the link to the new tax credits.

Victims of Crime

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for the Home Department concerning the protection of new identities of victims of crime. [87160]

Mr. McCartney: While there have been no recent discussions between the two Departments, arrangements do exist for additional protection to be applied to the records, held by the Department for Work and Pensions, of certain individuals at risk when requested by the Home Office.

Requests for additional protection from individuals at particular risk are also considered.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many people became newly entitled for the 2002–03 winter fuel payment and who needed to make a claim before 20 September in order to receive their payment before Christmas but failed to do so; and what the value was of such payments. [87600]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that for winter 2002–03, there could be around 500,000 people newly entitled to a winter fuel payment. Some 250,000 of these are being paid automatically but others, who are not in receipt of certain benefits, will need to claim.

By 20 September 2002, around 170,000 claim forms had been received, although some of these may have been from people entitled to an automatic payment. By the end of November, about a further 35,000 claims had been received.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the value of unclaimed winter fuel payments because the amount due depends on the composition of the household. It is up to an individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many single *(a)* women and *(b)* men in 2002 will reach the age of 60 years after the qualifying week for winter fuel payment eligibility, but before 25 December. [87601]

Mr. McCartney: It is estimated that around 18,000 single women will attain the age of 60 after the qualifying week (16 to 22 September) and before 25 December 2002 in Great Britain.

It is estimated that around 13,000 single men will attain the age of 60 after the qualifying week (16 to 22 September) and before 25 December 2002 in Great Britain.

Note:

The figures have been calculated using the latest GAD population projections and the Family Resources Survey.

CABINET OFFICE

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office to which bodies the Cabinet Office makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87387]

Mr. Alexander: The Cabinet Office has published information on public bodies and appointments to them in "Public Bodies 2001". Copies of this publication may be found in the House Libraries. It gives details on the number of members in total, for each body and a breakdown by gender.

There is no requirement to collect data and analyse how many of the appointees are businessmen and of different sized businesses. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Better Regulation Task Force

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many times the Better Regulation Task Force has met in the last year; what allowances from public funds are made available to members of the Better Regulation Task Force; and what the cost has been since the task force was established. [87608]

Mr. Alexander: There were 10 meetings of the Better Regulation Task Force during the past year. Members of the task force are unpaid, but can claim reasonable travel and subsistence expenses. Before July 1999, when a dedicated support team was established, the administrative costs for the task force were met from within the budget of the Regulatory Impact Unit (and its predecessor) in the Cabinet Office. It is not possible to identify the specific costs within this overall budget. But over the period from July 1999 to the end of November 2002, the administrative and running costs of the task force, covering staff salaries, printing and publication costs etc., have totalled approximately £1,422,000.

Civil Servants and Spending

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by his Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87178]

Mr. Alexander: The data are not available in the format requested, except at disproportionate cost. Data for the number of civil servants in the major Departments are published in Table D of *Civil Service Statistics*, copies of which are laid in the Libraries of both Houses. The latest information, for April 2001, was published in June this year. The remaining information is available for the Government Office Regions of Great Britain.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in the Cabinet Office in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87433]

Mr. Alexander: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

Detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Panel for Regulatory Accountability

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many times the Panel for Regulatory

Accountability has met in the last year; what allowances from public funds are made available to members of the Panel for Regulatory Accountability; and what the cost was in each year since 1997. [87609]

Mr. Alexander: The panel has been a Cabinet Committee since July 2001. It is established practice under Exemption 2 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information that information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committee business is not disclosed.

Prior to this, no allowances from public funds were made available to members of the panel in relation to their membership.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many regulatory reform orders have been made since the Regulatory Reform Act 2001 came into force; how many regulatory reform orders are before Parliament; and how many proposed regulatory reform orders were out to public consultation on 1 December. [87604]

Mr. Alexander: Since the Regulatory Reform Act came into force in April 2001 we have made six regulatory reform orders (RROs) . There are a further seven RROs undergoing parliamentary scrutiny. On 1 December there were no proposed RROs out for consultation, but consultation had just ended on four RROs.

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate his Department has made of the total savings to business as a result of regulatory reform orders made to date; and what estimate his Department has made of the potential savings to business of *(a)* regulatory reform orders before Parliament and *(b)* proposed regulatory reform orders out to public consultation on 1 December. [87605]

Mr. Alexander: The Regulatory Reform Action Plan, which was published in February 2002, listed 268 items, of which 63 were potential Regulatory Reform Orders (RROs), 160 related to business. No total estimate of savings has been made. All Regulatory Reform Orders have to be accompanied by a full Regulatory Impact Assessment, setting out the costs and benefits. Departments have been asked to make these available to the House of Commons Library and on departmental websites.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Air Quality

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment he has made of air quality standards in market towns. [86900]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

Air quality in the UK is monitored through the national air quality monitoring networks, which comprise over 1,500 automatic and non-automatic monitoring sites. Many of these monitoring sites are situated in small towns. Historic and current levels of air pollution at all of these sites can be checked via the National Air Quality Information Archive at www.airquality.co.uk For some sites, this information is updated on an hourly basis. For others, the information is updated on a monthly or quarterly basis, depending on the type of site.

In addition to this, local authorities carry out their own reviews and assessments of air quality in their areas, in order to identify any pollution hotspots. Several authorities have identified potentially elevated levels of air pollution in small towns, particularly alongside congested streets. In these cases, authorities are required to designate air quality management areas and to draw up action plans setting out what they intend to do to remedy the situation. Details of all the air quality management areas designated by local authorities to date, together with information on their action plans where available, can be found via the local air quality management section of the National Air Quality Information Archive (www.airquality.co.uk).

Council Tax

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will estimate the cumulative percentage increase in the council tax for a Band D property in each billing local authority in England since 1996. [85494]

Mr. Leslie: A table setting out the cumulative percentage increase in real terms in area council tax for a Band D properly in each billing local authority in England since 1996 has been placed in the Library.

East Lancashire

Mr. Evans: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many times he has visited East Lancashire in his official capacity; and what the purpose was of each visit. [82406]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have visited East Lancashire twice since June 2001. Both visits were related to community cohesion, housing and neighbourhood renewal following the disturbances in June 2001. I plan to return following an invitation from my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike).

Fire Service

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to publish a fire cover review. [87801]

Mr. Raynsford: The fire cover review task group agreed the text of its final report at the end of September 2002. The central fire brigades advisory council will consider the report at a future meeting. If the council endorses the report, it will be published.

Firefighters

Mr. James Paice: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, (1) pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W, if the proposals for retained firefighters' pay as described in the Fire Employers statement of 13 November would enable individual retained firefighters to assess the impact of their proposals on their own annual income; [87237]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 130W, if he will provide the calculations and assumptions from which he derived the typical increase for retained firefighters being 6.4 per cent. more than wholetime firefighters; [87117]

(3) how many hours per annum he estimates *(a)* a Leading Retained Firefighter and *(b)* a Retained Firefighter of two years' service would need to work at the hourly rates detailed in the Fire Employers' Statement of 13 November in order to compensate for the combined effects of the alterations to the Annual Retaining Fee, the Turn-out fee and the Attendance fee detailed in the same statement. [87096]

Mr. Raynsford: The local government employers have informed the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials that they calculated this figure on the basis that, under the deal outlined in the Fire Brigades Employers Circular of 12 November:

The Retained hourly rate would have been equal to the wholetime hourly rate

The Retaining Fee would have been 10 per cent. of the wholetime annual rate

The Turn-out fee would have been 1.25 per cent. of the wholetime hourly rate

The Attendance fee would have been 0.75 per cent. of the wholetime hourly rate

But under the deal the current Turn-out fee of £13.93 would have been frozen, until the Turn-out fee calculated on the new basis reached this level.

The local government employers have informed the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials that under this deal the pay of wholetime firefighters would have risen; and any increases in wholetime rates would have raised retained rates, because they would have been linked.

The local government employers have also informed Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials that this would have led to the typical increase for retained firefighters being 6.4 per cent. more than that for wholetime firefighters. The Fire Brigades Union rejected this deal.

The information which the local government employers have supplied to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials, as described, should allow individual retained firefighters to assess the impact of the proposals on their own annual income. Ultimately, however, it is dependent on the individual retained firefighter's workload.

Homeless People

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of homeless people have suffered from *(a)* physical assault and *(b)* mental abuse whilst living on the streets since 1997. [87192]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not collected centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) if he will commission research into the causes, extent and possible solutions to household overcrowding in the United Kingdom; [86819]

(2) what measures he plans to bring forward to address changes in the number of households who are two or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard. [86822]

Mr. McNulty: Information on the extent of overcrowding in England is available from the Survey of English Housing. As mentioned in the reply given to my hon. Friend on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 621W, we are considering whether overcrowding is best tackled through a modern set of standards—updating the present legislative framework or through the new Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS), which we hope to introduce as a replacement for the housing fitness standard when parliamentary time allows. Our consideration of options will take account of our understanding of the underlying causes of household overcrowding.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many households in each Government Office region have been shown by the Survey of English Housing 2001–02 to be two or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard *(a)* in total and *(b)* in the private rented sector; [86821]

(2) how many households are three or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard; and if he will make a statement. [86818]

Mr. McNulty: The number of households three or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard is extremely small which means that any estimate from a sample survey will be subject to a very wide margin of error. The best estimate from Survey of English Housing data, averaged over the last three years (1999–2000, 2000–01, 2001–02) is 4,000 households out of more than 20 million households.

The number of households in each Government Office region two or more bedrooms below the bedroom standard, estimated from Survey of English Housing data and averaged over the last three years, is shown in the table.

Households in England: difference from bedroom standard[1] by tenure (average 1999–2000, 2000–01, 2001–02)

thousands

	Owner occupied			*Social rented*				*Privately rented*				*All tenures*			
	1 below	*Equal or below*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*
Government Office region															
North East	8	673	681	1	7	332	340	0	2	73	75	1	17	1,078	1,096
North West	29	1,953	1,985	2	22	577	601	1	5	234	239	6	56	2,763	2,825
Yorks and Humber	15	1,393	1,411	1	14	471	486	1	8	196	205	4	37	2,060	2,102

Households in England: difference from bedroom standard[1] by tenure (average 1999–2000, 2000–01, 2001–02)

thousands

	Owner occupied				*Social rented*				*Privately rented*				*All tenures*		
	1 below	*Equal or below*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*	*2 or more below*	*1 below*	*Equal or above*	*Total*
East Midlands	14	1,279	1,295	1	10	304	314	0	3	143	146	2	28	1,726	1,756
West Midlands	23	1,501	1,527	1	18	458	477	0	5	148	153	4	47	2,107	2,157
Eastern	14	1,625	1,641	1	15	368	385	1	5	202	208	3	35	2,196	2,234
London	41	1,693	1,739	10	86	702	797	4	25	406	435	19	152	2,801	2,971
South East	21	2,480	2,503	2	24	430	456	0	9	328	338	4	55	3,238	3,298
South West	16	1,517	1,533	1	11	298	310	0	6	219	225	2	32	2,034	2,067
England	182	14,114	14,315	19	208	3,940	4,167	7	69	1,948	2,023	45	458	20,002	20,506
percentages															
North East	1.2	98.8	100.0	0.2	2.1	977	100.0	0.0	2.7	97.3	100.0	0.1	1.6	98.3	100.0
North West	1.5	98.4	100.0	0.3	3.7	96.1	100.0	0.2	2.1	97.6	100.0	0.2	2.0	97.8	100.0
Yorks and Humber	1.1	98.7	100.0	0.2	2.8	96.9	100.0	0.4	3.8	95.8	100.0	0.2	1.8	98.0	100.0
East Midlands	1.1	98.8	100.0	0.3	3.2	96.5	100.0	0.0	2.3	97.7	100.0	0.1	1.6	98.3	100.0
West Midlands	1.5	98.3	100.0	0.3	3.8	95.9	100.0	0.3	3.1	96.6	100.0	0.2	2.2	97.6	100.0
Eastern	0.8	99.1	100.0	0.3	4.0	95.7	100.0	0.3	2.6	97.1	100.0	0.1	1.6	98.3	100.0
London	2.3	97.3	100.0	1.2	10.8	88.0	100.0	0.9	5.8	93.3	100.0	0.6	5.1	94.3	100.0
South East	0.9	99.1	100.0	0.4	5.3	94.3	100.0	0.1	2.8	97.1	100.0	0.1	1.7	98.2	100.0
South West	1.0	99.0	100.0	0.3	3.4	96.3	100.0	0.2	2.5	97.3	100.0	0.1	1.5	98.4	100.0
England	1.3	98.6	100.0	0.5	5.0	94.6	100.0	0.3	3.4	96.3	100.0	0.2	2.2	97.5	100.0

[1] Bedroom standard is an indicator of occupation density. A notional number of bedrooms are allocated to each household in accordance with its age/sex/marital status composition and the relationship of the members to each other. This is then compared with the actual number of bedrooms (including bedsitters) available for the sole use of the household.

Source:

Survey of England Housing, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

Inspectors

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what standards of competence he sets for *(a)* building regulations inspectors and *(b)* National House-Building Council inspectors. [86907]

Mr. Leslie: It is for each local authority with building control responsibilities to decide on the qualifications and experience of officers employed by them on building control duties.

The National House-Building Council is an independent, non-profit distributing company. Inspectors employed by the NHBC carry out inspections in connection with their Buildmark new home warranty scheme. It is for the NHBC to decide whom to employ for purposes connected with that non-statutory scheme.

NHBC inspectors also carry out inspections for building control purposes in cases where NHBC's subsidiary, NHBC Building Control Services Ltd, is acting as an approved inspector. Under Part II of the Building Act 1984, a person carrying out regulated building work may engage an approved inspector as an alternative to applying to the local authority building control department.

Approved inspectors are subject to periodic re-approval by the Construction Industry Council, which is the body designated by the Secretary of State for the purpose of approving inspectors under Part II of the Building Act. The CIC have drawn up criteria for assessing the qualifications and experience of companies and individuals applying or re-applying for the status of approved inspector.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will meet a delegation comprising of hon. Members from Dorset and representatives of the county and district councils to discuss the local authority funding settlement for the county. [87557]

Mr. Raynsford: I would be happy to consider meeting such a delegation, if a representative of the authorities concerned were to write to me setting out the points they wish to raise.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many people he estimates are sleeping rough. [87422]

Mrs. Roche: As of June 2002, local authority statistics show that around 600 people are sleeping rough on any one night. This represents a reduction of around two-thirds since 1998 when it was estimated that nearly 2,000 people were sleeping rough on any one night.

Sangatte

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether persons from Sangatte admitted to the UK under special arrangements will be eligible for local authority housing at the end of their period in hotels financed by central Government. [87510]

Beverley Hughes: I have been asked to reply.

Those persons admitted from Sangatte to the United Kingdom under special arrangements are being brought here, not as asylum seekers, but on work visas to contribute and pay taxes. Once they arrive they are being given accommodation while we start the process of training and job matching. We are confident that they will be able to move on to alternative accommodation within three months. In the event of an individual being unable to find their own accommodation they would be eligible to apply for assistance from a local housing authority, but we expect numbers to be small and any burden to be spread across different local authorities.

Sellers' Packs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he intends to publish the two further consultation papers on the seller's pack. [87596]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister intends to publish early next year consultation papers on the detailed contents of the seller's pack and the application of seller's packs in areas of lowest property values and demand.

Tax Credits

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister in the Local Government Finance Report (England) 2003–04 (1) what figure was used for the number of children of claimants of *(a)* working families tax credit and *(b)* disabled person's tax credit, used in the calculation of (i) additional needs for primary pupils and (ii) additional needs for secondary pupils, for each local authority; [87018]

(2) how many pupils *(a)* of primary school age have a mother tongue that is not English and *(b)* of secondary school age are in low achieving ethnic groups in each local authority; [87016]

(3) what figures were used in the calculation of *(a)* district, *(b)* environmental protection and *(c)* cultural services deprivation top-up for each non-metropolitan district council in non-metropolitan areas; [87020]

(4) what was the average number of dependent children of claimants receiving income support and income-based jobseeker's allowance used in the calculation of *(a)* additional needs for primary pupils and *(b)* additional needs for secondary pupils, for each local authority; [87017]

(5) what figure was used in the calculation of net in-commuters and day visitors of each non-metropolitan district council in non-metropolitan areas. [87021]

Mr. Leslie: The figures for the number of children of recipients of working families tax credit and disabled person's tax credit used in the additional education needs for both primary and secondary pupils are from the August 2001, November 2001, February 2002 and May 2002 releases, as published by the Inland Revenue.

For reasons of confidentiality, data on children of working families tax credit recipients are combined with children of disabled person's tax credit recipients by the Inland Revenue, and are therefore not available separately. The combined figures are used within the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement.

The same data are used for both (i) additional needs for primary pupils and (ii) additional needs for secondary pupils.

The total number of working families and disabled person's tax credit recipients, in each authority, together with the other information requested (and all the data used in calculating the provisional Local Government Finance Settlement) are on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website within "Table 1" of the data section. http://www.local.odpm.gov.uk/finance/0304/tabs034.htm

HOME DEPARTMENT

Aerosol Spray Paint

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he intends to take to ban sales of aerosol spray paint to children across the UK. [86424]

Mr. Denham: The Government take the problem of graffiti very seriously and are examining ways in which it they can reduce the problem. The London Local Authorities Bill, which is currently before Parliament, would clamp down on the sale of spray paints to under 18 year olds within the London area. We are looking carefully at whether we should adopt this approach nationally as part of the Anti-Social Behaviour Bill.

Anti-social Behaviour Orders

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many anti-social behaviour orders have been in force in each month since their introduction. [86182]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* An anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) is a civil order that has been available to the police and local authorities since April 1999. ASBOs are granted for a minimum period of two years.

From 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000, data on the number of ASBOs issued was collected by police force area. From 1 June 2000, official statistics on the number of ASBOs issued are based on quarterly returns from Magistrates' Courts Committees (MCCs).

Available information in the table shows the number of notifications received by the Home Office of ASBOs issued from 1 April 1999 up to 30 June 2002 (latest available) and by duration of order given since June 2000. We do not collect information on the number of ASBOs in force at any given period, and cannot estimate it reliably from the data in the table.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates' courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

We are aware that the numbers of ASBOs made locally have been consistently under reported in returns made by magistrates' courts and are considering how reporting can be improved.

Number of anti-social behaviour orders granted, as notified to the Home Office, by duration from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002, England and Wales

	2 years	2.25 years	2.5 years	2.75 years	3 years	3.25 years	3.75 years	4 years	5 years and over	Until further order	Not known	Total
1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000[1]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	[3]	104	104
June 2000[2]	9	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	1	13
July to September 2000	32	0	0	0	6	0	0	1	5	2	4	50
October to December 2000	41	0	0	0	13	0	0	3	6	7	1	71
January to March 2001	48	1	0	0	11	0	0	4	3	7	2	76

Number of anti-social behaviour orders granted, as notified to the Home Office, by duration from 1 April 1999 to 30 June 2002, England and Wales

	2 years	2.25 years	2.5 years	2.75 years	3 years	3.25 years	3.75 years	4 years	5 years and over	Until further order	Not known	Total
April to June 2001	44	0	1	0	20	0	0	4	14	7	3	93
July to September 2001	27	0	1	1	19	0	1	4	8	3	3	67
October to December 2001	26	1	1	0	14	1	0	1	9	4	0	57
January to March 2002	19	0	2	0	9	1	0	2	12	6	0	51
April to June 2002	28	0	1	0	18	0	0	2	16	7	0	72
Total	274	2	6	1	111	2	1	22	74	43	118	654

[1] Total figures only available from police force areas for period 1 April 1999 to 31 May 2000.
[2] As from 1 June 2000, data collected centrally by Magistrates' Courts Committee (MCC) area by quarter.
[3] Not available.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it takes to introduce an anti-social behaviour order. [86427]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* A survey of anti-social behaviour order (ASBO) monitoring forms indicated that the court process was taking on average 13 weeks. To improve the effectiveness of ASBOs and reduce delays, legislative changes have been made under the Police Reform Act 2002 and new guidance published. Courts may now make an interim order to protect the community from the start of the court process, and criminal courts may make orders on conviction, thereby avoiding the need for a separate court process and making better use of court time. In addition, orders may now also cover a wider area, and from 1 April 2003, county courts will be able to make orders when dealing with other civil action.

We will continue to review implementation of these orders with a view to considering whether they can be further streamlined.

Asylum Seekers

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide temporary accommodation for asylum seekers within the Daventry district; and if he will make a statement. [87120]

Beverley Hughes: Daventry is not currently a dispersal area for asylum seekers who need accommodation. Asylum seekers without accommodation will be provided with emergency accommodation while their application for support is assessed. The National Asylum Support Service (NASS) does not have any current plans to use Daventry as either a dispersal area or for the emergency accommodation of asylum seekers.

Urgent accommodation has had to be found to cater for the arrivals from Sangatte. As part of this exercise NASS did consider a site (the Landmark hotel) in the Daventry district. In the event a decision was taken not to use the site for this or any other purpose at this time.

NASS needs to keep its accommodation needs under continual review. While I cannot say that the area will never be used to accommodate asylum seekers I can say that we have no present plans to do so.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make it a policy of the Government to require all asylum seekers to comply with a medical examination; and if he will make a statement. [87556]

Beverley Hughes: We do not believe that it is necessary to require all asylum seekers to undergo a medical examination as a matter of policy although development of the new policy initiatives introduced by the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act will effectively introduce screening to all those who attend an induction centre.

Once they are fully operational we intend that all new asylum applicants who go to an induction centre on arrival will undergo basic health screening. A pilot screening programme started at the Dover induction centre this summer. The evaluation of this pilot has not yet been completed. Immigration officers are obliged, under the terms of the immigration rules, to refer for medical examination anyone who mentions health or medical treatment as a reason for coming to the United Kingdom or who appears not to be in good physical or mental health. Furthermore those seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom for a period of more than six months should normally be referred.

Asylum Seekers (Support)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of applicants per week who, from 8 January 2003, will no longer be eligible for support as a result of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; what steps he will take to monitor the number of in-country asylum applicants refused National Asylum Support Service assistance as a result of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, whose claim for asylum is subsequently refused on the grounds of non-compliance; and if he will make a statement. [85820]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* Based on an analysis of recent intake it is estimated that, from 8 January 2003, 700 applicants per week (ie an average of about 100 per day) would fall into the category of people who could no longer be eligible for support as a result of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 (the 2002 Act) unless they could show that they had made their asylum application as soon as reasonably practicable after entering the United Kingdom.

From 8 January 2003, there will be detailed internal monitoring of the numbers refused National Asylum Support Service support as a result of section 55 of the 2002 Act. This information will be used to track each case through to service of the initial decision on the asylum application and to monitor the number subsequently refused on the grounds of non-compliance.

Child Safety Orders

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many child safety orders have been in place in each month since their introduction. [86178]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Two child safety orders were issued in the areas in which they were piloted between September 1998 and June 2000.

Child Curfew Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local child curfew schemes were in force in each month between *(a)* October 1998 and July 2001 and *(b)* August 2001 and the latest month for which figures are available. [86181]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* No applications have yet been received to establish a local child curfew scheme under section 14 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Some local authorities and police forces have considered the possibility, but concluded that other measures should be taken to tackle relevant local problems.

Class A Drugs (Teenagers)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many teenagers have tried class A drugs in *(a)* the United Kingdom, *(b)* the north-east of England and *(c)* the constituency of Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East. [86499]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The 2001–02 British Crime Survey estimates that 11 per cent. of 16 to 19 year-olds in England and Wales have tried a class A drug. The equivalent estimate for the north-east of England is 14 per cent. The difference between theEngland and Wales estimate and the north-east estimate is not statistically significant. These data are not available at constituency level.

The drug use, smoking and drinking among young people in England in 2001 survey estimates that six per cent. of school children aged between 11 and 15 years old have tried a class A drug. No geographical breakdown is available for this age group.

Community Beat Officers

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many community beat officers are working in the London Borough of Wandsworth. [86825]

Mr. Denham: This information is not collected centrally.

Community Support Officers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many local authorities contributed to the cost of recruiting, training and equipping local neighbourhood special constables for duty in their area in each year since section 2 of the Police Act 1996 came into operation. [86916]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* This information is not collected centrally.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he intends to reply to the letter forwarded to him, dated 17 October 2002, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Burham Fajax; [86657]

(2) when he intends to reply to the letter to him, dated 17 October 2002, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Burham Fatah. [87662]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 13 December 2002.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 28 October regarding a constituent, ref. 22821/2. [86873]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* My noble Friend (Lord Filkin), wrote to my right hon. Friend on 11 December 2002.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 14 August, 11 September, 7 November and 5 December relating to her constituent, Mr. Mohamed Mady. [87006]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to the hon. Member on 16 December 2002.

County Support Officers

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if county support officers will be issued with *(a)* body armour, *(b)* radios and *(c)* other forms of officer safety equipment; if they will undergo (i) officer safety training and (ii) first aid training; who will supervise the CSOs; whether additional training in supervision will be provided to officers assuming this responsibility; who will complete CSO annual appraisals; if they will form part of the service PDRs; who will be responsible for CSO professional development; and who will be required to check and monitor reports generated by the CSOs; [86809]

(2) if there will be a facility for the services of a county support officer to be dispensed with if the required standards are not achieved; if there will be grading within the CSO infrastructure; who will be responsible for CSO complaints and discipline; what arrangements have been made for CSO transport; if the CSOs will have their own drivers; and who will deal with administration in connection with CSOs; [86808]

(3) who will brief and de-brief county support officers; if they will be posted operationally with police officers; who will be assuming responsibility for discharging a duty of care towards CSOs; what impact he estimates additional supervision will have on

(a) sergeants and inspectors; where CSOs will be based; what educational standards are necessary for recruitment to CSO recruitment; what medical and health standards are required; if CSOs will be required to attain a set level of fitness; what the requirements are with respect to previous convictions; what the content is of the CSO training programme; who will be delivering the CSO training; where it will be delivered; and if he will make a statement. [86810]

Mr. Denham: Chief officers can designate persons employed by their police authority as Community Support Officers (CSOs) under section 38 of the Police Reform Act 2002 when they are satisfied that the person is a suitable person to effectively carry out the functions for the purposes of which he is designated and that he has received adequate training in the carrying out of those functions. Issues such as the deployment, equipment, and supervision arrangements for CSOs are operational matters and are determined by chief officers with knowledge of the local areas where they will deploy CSOs. A chief officer can also remove a designation if he considers that the conditions for designation are no longer met.

CSOs are a new addition to the extended policing family. We are aiming to have 1,200 CSOs deployed nationally in 27 forces by 1 April 2003. Once the lessons from the deployment of the first batches of CSOs become clear the Secretary of State, following consultation with the Association of Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers, will issue a Code of Practice under section 45 of the Police Reform Act to which chief officers must have regard, to set out good practice in relation to some of these matters.

Crime (Cleveland)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library the crime statistics for the area covered by the Cleveland police in each of the last five years. [86399]

Mr. Denham: Numbers of crimes recorded by the police, broken down by police force, are published annually. Details for the years from 1997 to 2000–01 have been published in successive editions of "Criminal Statistics England and Wales", which are available in the Library. The figures for 2001–02 have been included in a new publication, "Crime in England and Wales 2001–02" (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 7/02), which was published in July this year, and which is also available in the Library.

Crime (Teesside)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what Government initiatives have been put in place in Teesside to bring down crime. [86498]

Mr. Denham: A total of £3,404,361 is being provided to Teesside Crime Reduction Partnerships for crime reduction initiatives in Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Stockton, Redcar and Cleveland during 2002–03.

Crime reduction initiatives which are currently being taken forward are the Safer Communities Initiative (£231,204), Closed Circuit Television (£782,650), Small Retailers in Deprived Areas (£120,000), Reducing Domestic Violence (£389,385), Street Wardens Initiative (£712,712), Neighbourhood Wardens Initiative (£376,550), Communities Against Drugs (£611,300), Reducing Burglary Initiative (£248,300) and Partnership Development Fund (£188,560). In addition, there are two New Deal for Communities areas at Middlesbrough and Hartlepool, each spending over six million on crime reduction initiatives over the lifetime of the scheme. Cleveland Police have also received £300,000 for 2002–03 to fund 40 Community Support Officers.

Departmental Offices

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what timber has been used at the construction site of the new Home Office building at 2 Marsham Street; who supplied this timber; and what evidence the supplier gave that it came from legal and sustainable sources. [83927]

Beverley Hughes: As the former towers are still being demolished no construction works have so far been undertaken on the Home Office's new building at 2 Marsham Street. Foundation works are scheduled to start in December.

While the timing of timber purchases is not yet known the contract management arrangements will provide information to the Department about what timber has been purchased and to ensure that it is sourced from suppliers in a legal and sustainable way.

Drug-related Crime (Teesside)

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of crime in Teesside is deemed to be drug-related. [86458]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Recorded crime figures include statistics on drugs offences, such as possession, and on acquisitive crimes, such as burglary, but do not record whether the latter are related to an offender's drug habits.

However, the New English and Welsh Arrestee Drug Abuse Monitoring (NEW-ADAM) research programme, which involves interviewing and drug testing those arrested by the police, confirms a link between drug misuse and crime, although the conclusions do not relate specifically to Teesside. Analysis of the data from the first eight sites in the survey, collected during 1999–2000, shows that 65 per cent. of arrestees provided a urine sample that tested positive for one or more illegal drug. The analysis also shows that up to 29 per cent. of arrestees tested positive for opiates (including heroin) and/or cocaine (including crack).

As a guide to the proportion of crime that is drug-related, analysis of the NEW-ADAM self-report data indicates that while only 21 per cent. of non-drug using arrestees reporting having previously offended in the past 12 months, this figure rises to 75 per cent. for those arrestees who use heroin and/or cocaine/crack. Moreover, while users of both heroin and cocaine/crack represented just under one quarter of all arrestees interviewed, they were responsible for more than three-fifths of all the illegal income reported.

In support of this, 55 per cent. of arrestees who reported using one or more drugs in the last 12 months and committing one of more acquisitive crimes, acknowledged a link between their drug use and their offending behaviour. This proportion rose to 78 per cent. for arrestees who said they had used heroin and cocaine/crack.

Family Support Grant

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much money his Department has allocated to awards for family support grant; under what headings applications are being considered; how much funding is allocated under each heading; and if he will make a statement. [87143]

Beverley Hughes: The Family Support Grant is currently worth a total of £5.8 million a year. The Home Office has allocated up to £1.265 million to make new awards under the Family Support Grant starting in 2003–04. As in previous years there are three strands.

The first strand is for national, regional or local voluntary organisations seeking to deliver innovative projects for parenting support—£440,000 has been allocated.

The second strand is for national, regional or local voluntary organisations wishing to further develop and replicate previously successfully completed Family Support Grant funded work. It must focus on either fathering and/or parenting teenagers as funded in the first or second Family Support Grant rounds (1999–2000 and 2000–2001). £440,000 has been allocated.

The third strand is for voluntary organisations for work with black and minority ethnic parents specifically to help them with their parenting skills. To be eligible the work must focus either on supporting refugee parents with their parenting and/or supporting parents who are struggling with parenting their teenagers. £385,000 has been allocated. In addition, up to £55,000 will be available to provide extra support to the newly funded organisations given that they are likely to be less experienced than those applying for the other two strands, and to enable shared learning.

Each grant is worth up to £55,000 per annum for up to three years. This is a rise from the previous annual maximum of £50,000.

The closing date for applications was 10 December. These are still being processed but there are approximately 300 applications, with the majority applying under the first and third strands. Decisions will be announced no later than mid March 2003 and if it is possible to notify applicants any earlier this will be done.

The Family Support Grant also give score funding to Parentline Plus for its helpline; to the National Family Parenting Institute and to Home Start.

The balance is for continuation funding for those organisations funded from the previous two rounds.

Fireworks

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the anti-social behaviour associated with fireworks around 5 November this year. [83634]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* We are concerned about the nuisance and noise associated with fireworks. We have set up a monitoring exercise involving nine Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) to focus on best practice and to identify clearly the number and scale of the problem caused. This commenced on 23 October and will run until 15 January in order to take into account 5 November, New Year and other festivals. At the end of the exercise we will analyse the findings and place the results in the Library.

Hard Case Support

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications he has received for hard case support over the last year; and how many have been successful. [86565]

Beverley Hughes: The information requested is not available.

Hornchurch

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, including statistical information relating as directly as possible to the constituency, the effect on the Hornchurch constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2 May 1997. [85081]

Mr. Denham: Detailed information on the impact of Home Office policies across the full range of responsibilities is set out in Home Office annual reports. A copy of the most recent report, Home Office Annual Report 2001–2002, is available in the Library. Information on recorded crime and policing is also published.

The impact of Home Office policies and actions is not normally examined by constituency and the statistics which the Department collects cannot be matched in the way requested although set out are examples relating to the Hornchurch constituency or the immediate locality, as follows:

Hornchurch benefits from projects which cover the wider area of Havering. The Havering Drugs Action Team is receiving £566,000 this year from a combined Home Office and Department of Health fund to develop and extend local drug treatment services. These funds will rise to £924,000 by 2005–06. Separately the current "Don't Buy Crime" campaign is raising awareness about purchasing stolen goods. This is part of the Home Office's "Safer Communities Initiative" under which £72,565 has been allocated to Havering for 2002–03.

One recent initiative specifically affected Hornchurch: a London Regional Transport close circuit television (CCTV) scheme called the "Hewkeye Project", in which CCTV cameras and associated equipment provided coverage of a station car park. The project was a joint venture involving London Regional Transport, the British Transport Police and local partnerships. Forty-six other car parks in the London region also benefited from the scheme. The package is intended to reduce incidences of motor vehicle crime and the fear of crime for car park users and passengers.

Essex was one of 27 police forces which successfully bid for funding for community support officers and in the year ending 31 March 2002 the Metropolitan Police Force strength had increased by over 1,300 officers compared with the previous 12 months.

More generally, all of the policies of the Home Office will impact on the residents of Hornchurch to a greater or lesser extent. For example:

The level of Class A drug abuse by under 25-year-olds has stabilised and we are increasing the emphasis on treatment as a response to drug abuse generally;

The interim target of 60 per cent. of all asylum applications being decided within two months has been met;

Vehicle crime is down 8.8 per cent. from levels in 1998–09.

There have been no escapes by Category A prisoners since 1995.

Information on the Home Office and its policies is also published on its website www.homeoffice.gov.uk

Immigration

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons will be admitted to the UK under the special arrangements covering people previously accommodated at Sangatte. [87508]

Beverley Hughes: 1,018 people have been brought to the United Kingdom under these arrangements and Sangatte is now empty.

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many work permits *(a)* have been and *(b)* will be issued to persons formerly accommodated at Sangatte and admitted to the UK under the recently negotiated special arrangements. [87509]

Beverley Hughes: Iraqis from Sangatte have been given a visa which permits them to work; 899 of these visas had been issued.

Iraqi Asylum Seekers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what account he has taken of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office document "Saddam Hussein: Crimes and human rights abuses" in determining asylum applications from Iraqis; how many Iraqis await determination of their applications; what the *(a)* current average wait and *(b)* 20 longest waits for determination for present Iraqi asylum seekers; how many such asylum seekers are (i) in jail and (ii) in detention; how long each one has been there; whether he plans to change his Department's policy as a consequence of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office report; and if he will make a statement. [86230]

Beverley Hughes: As with all asylum applications, Iraqi cases are considered on their individual merits under the terms of the 1951 UN Convention, and in the light of up to date information from a wide variety of sources, including information from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

We continue to monitor events in Iraq closely. We will keep under review our handling of asylum applications in light of any changes in country conditions.

Information on how many Iraqis are awaiting determination of their asylum applications, and the length of time they have been outstanding, is only available by examination of individual case files at disproportionate cost.

Published statistics on immigration detention are issued on a quarterly basis. The latest available data on asylum seekers held in detention in the United Kingdom solely under Immigration Act powers are for 28 September 2002 and are as follows:

Iraqi asylum seekers held solely under Immigration Act powers on 28 September 2002

By place of detention	
Removal centres/immigration short term holding facilities	10
Prison Service establishments	5
Total	10
By length of detention	
Less than 1 month	10
Between 1 and 6 months	5
Total	10

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest five with * denoting 1 or 2. Figures may not sum due to rounding.
1. Persons detained solely under Immigration Act powers who are recorded as having sought asylum at some stage.
2. Length of detention information relates to current period of detention; where persons have been transferred to and subsequently from Oakington Reception Centre, excludes time in detention prior to the transfer from Oakington.

Justice and Home Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the outcome was of the Justice and Home Affairs Council held in Brussels on 28 and 29 November; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [85856]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: My hon. Friend (Lord Filkin) and the noble Baroness Scotland of Asthal represented the United Kingdom at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council in Brussels on 28–29 November.

The A points were approved as in document PTS A 62 (14754/02) (a copy of which has been placed in the Library) with the exception of item 16. Ministers signed the Protocol to the Europol Convention agreed at item 4.

The presidency advised on progress in implementing the Seville European Council conclusions, presenting a report on action taken to combat illegal immigration and human trafficking and on management of the external border. Member states urged the Commission to produce its overdue report on financial resources for repatriation, border management and migration projects. The Commission explained that the financial resources had to come from the current financial perspective, which required re-evaluation of existing commitments within the JHA and External Relations budgets, but that national expenditure would need to remain a significant source of funding.

The Council adopted negotiating mandates for the Commission to pursue readmission agreements with Turkey, Albania, Algeria and China. The aim will be to agree arrangements with those countries for the return

of their nationals who have entered the EU illegally. Over lunch, Ministers also discussed the application of the readmission provision in the Cotonou agreement. This would allow member states to approach African Caribbean and Pacific areas countries bilaterally to ask them to take back their nationals.

The Council discussed the time limits to be applied for determining responsibility for an asylum claim in the regulation establishing the criteria and mechanisms for determining the member state responsible for examining an asylum application lodged in one of the member states by a third-country national (Dublin II). The presidency concluded that member states would have one week in which to accept or reject a compromise package comprising a time limit of one year for responsibility on the basis of illegal entry across the external frontier and five months for tolerated illegal presence in a member state. The Council agreed that the latter criterion should apply only to asylum seekers illegally present after the entry into force of the regulation. The Council also agreed to a minutes statement addressing the possible future inclusion in the regulation's scope of applicants for subsidiary protection.

The Council held a brief discussion of Articles 1–19 of the Council directive on minimum standards for the qualification and status of third-country nationals and stateless persons as refugees or as persons who otherwise need international protection concerning the definition of a refugee and those entitled to subsidiary protection. However, two member states maintained reservations on the text.

With the exception of one member state, Ministers agreed to amend Article 16 of the directive laying down minimum standards for the reception of asylum seekers in member states in line with a United Kingdom proposal allowing for the refusal of support to asylum seekers making late applications. The one other remaining reserve on the text was lifted following a change to Article 11 concerning access to labour markets.

The Council also agreed a statement declaring the European Free Trade Areas and Accession States (from the date of signature of the Accession Treaties) to be safe third countries for the purposes of asylum.

The Council adopted a Community programme on the return of third country nationals to source countries and a programme intended specifically to address returns to Afghanistan. The Council also took note of Council conclusions agreed by the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 18 November concerning the integration of immigration policy into the Union's relations with third countries. Lord Filkin welcomed the conclusions as a positive first step but called for the monitoring of returns projects to ensure that they were effective.

The Council agreed a package of provisions on child abduction for inclusion in the regulation concerning jurisdiction and the recognition and enforcement of judgments in matrimonial matters and in matters of parental responsibility. These were based on retention of existing Hague Convention arrangements with additional rules where a non-return order has been issued under the 1980 Hague Convention on Child Abduction. In order to encourage other member states to accept the compromise, Baroness Scotland proposed the creation of a strict timetable to initiate custody proceedings in the home court following a non-return order.

Consequently, member states were also able to agree the Council Decision authorising the member states, in the interest of the European Community, to sign the Convention on jurisdiction, applicable law, recognition, enforcement and co-operation in respect of parental responsibility and measures for the protection of children.

The Council agreed to revise the negotiating mandated for the draft agreement between the European Union and United States of America on judicial co-operation in criminal matters and on extradition.

The Council discussed a presidency compromise package intended to address member states' outstanding reservations on the proposed offences in the Framework Decision combating racism and xenophobia. Lord Filkin, with four other member states, agreed that proposal struck the right balance between punishing racist and xenophobic acts and protecting freedom of expression. However, the remaining member states were divided in either expressing fundamental problems with the scope of the instrument or wanting to go substantially further, in particular in reducing the threshold for criminal liability.

The presidency sought agreement to its compromise proposal regarding the abolition of the dual criminality requirement in the Framework Decision on the application of the principle of mutual recognition to financial penalties. This would enable member states to maintain dual criminality for a transitional period of up to five years. Although this was acceptable to the majority of delegations, including the United Kingdom, five member states maintained reservations.

Two member states maintained reservations on the proposed penalties for trafficking in small quantities of drugs in the Framework Decision laying down minimum provisions on the constituent elements of criminal acts and penalties in the field of drug trafficking.

Two member states also maintained reservations on the scope of the offences of active and passive corruption in Article 2 of the Framework Decision on combating corruption in the private sector.

Under Any Other Business the presidency emphasised the importance of securing an agreement between Europol and the United States of America on the exchange of personal data. The Commission also asked the Council to consider its proposal for a Council Decision on financing certain activities carried out by Europol to fight terrorism. The latter point would be considered at the December JHA Council.

National Alert Rating

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the national alert rating for each public sector was in each year since 1997. [85642]

Mr. Denham: For reasons of security it would not be appropriate to comment on the states of alert operated across the various sectors.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84931]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* On current estimates the Home Office expects to spend £14,920,000 on official travel in 2002–03. The estimated expenditure of the agencies is as follows:

	£
Forensic Science Service	1,949,000
Her Majesty's Prison Service	9,640,000
United Kingdom Passport Service	1,327,000

The above figures include the cost of subsistence allowance which cannot be identified separately without disproportionate cost. The Prison Service figure includes the travel and subsistence cost of prison staff escorting prisoners. The cost of escorts for asylum seekers is not included as they are provided by the private sector.

Police Appointments

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recruitment and deployment practices exist for the appointment of a police borough commander in a London Borough; and if he will make a statement. [85678]

Mr. Denham: The appointment of a police borough commander to a London borough is an operational policing matter that falls under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis.

Police Transfers

Mr. Wilshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of, and how many, police officers transferred out of each police force in England and Wales in each of the last three years. [83370]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The tables show (i) the numbers of officers transferred from each force, (ii) the proportion of force strength represented by these transfers, (iii) the numbers of officers transferred in to each force and (iv) the net result for each force of this transfer activity in the last three years.

		1999–2000		
Police transfers	*Strength at 31 March 1999*	*Transfers from force*	*Transfers out as proportion of strength (percentage)*	*Transfers to force*	*Net transfers*
Avon and Somerset	2,999	16	0.53	29	13
Bedfordshire	1,041	5	0.48	1	−4
Cambridgeshire	1,274	6	0.47	12	6
Cheshire	2,071	4	0.19	12	8
City of London	778	13	1.67	0	−13
Cleveland	1,416	1	0.07	9	8
Cumbria	1,126	6	0.53	4	−2
Derbyshire	1,759	6	0.34	10	4
Devon and Cornwall	2,887	8	0.28	19	11
Dorset	1,279	3	0.23	54	51
Durham	1,568	3	0.19	6	3
Dyfed-Powys	1,026	5	0.49	15	10
Essex[1]	2,891	10	0.35	23	13
Gloucestershire	1,104	3	0.27	13	10
Greater Manchester	6,810	15	0.22	25	10
Gwent	1,247	3	0.24	23	20
Hampshire	3,473	20	0.58	31	11
Hertfordshire[1]	1,724	23	1.33	25	2
Humberside	1,974	5	0.25	15	10
Kent	3,201	12	0.37	18	6
Lancashire	3,245	7	0.22	7	0
Leicestershire	1,993	13	0.65	8	−5
Lincolnshire	1,140	5	0.44	14	9
Merseyside	4,211	10	0.24	9	−1
Metropolitan Police[1]	26,073	244	0.94	36	−208
Norfolk	1,381	2	0.14	13	11
Northamptonshire	1,137	2	0.18	3	1
Northumbria	3,840	9	0.23	7	−2
North Wales	1,391	5	0.36	14	9
North Yorkshire	1,337	5	0.37	10	5
Nottinghamshire	2,225	10	0.45	9	−1
South Wales	2,981	11	0.37	7	−4
South Yorkshire	3,168	8	0.25	22	14
Staffordshire	2,238	2	0.09	2	0
Suffolk	1,190	5	0.42	2	−3
Surrey[1]	1,662	18	1.08	43	25
Sussex	2,847	21	0.74	21	0

1999–2000

Police transfers	Strength at 31 March 1999	Transfers from force	Transfers out as proportion of strength (percentage)	Transfers to force	Net transfers
Thames Valley	3,748	26	0.69	1	−25
Warwickshire	908	2	0.22	3	1
West Mercia	2,025	6	0.30	2	−4
West Midlands	7,321	42	0.57	26	−16
West Yorkshire	4,982	15	0.30	0	−15
Wiltshire	1,151	7	0.61	13	6

2000–01

Police transfers	Strength at 31 March 2000	Transfers from force	Transfers out as proportion of strength (percentage)	Transfers to force	Net transfers
Avon and Somerset	2,934	25	0.85	48	23
Bedfordshire	1,028	21	2.04	9	−12
Cambridgeshire	1,237	12	0.97	15	3
Cheshire	2,011	6	0.30	8	2
City of London	732	18	2.46	2	−16
Cleveland	1,404	4	0.28	0	−4
Cumbria	1,084	10	0.92	9	−1
Derbyshire	1,777	5	0.28	3	−2
Devon and Cornwall	2,841	7	0.25	62	55
Dorset	1,306	9	0.69	36	27
Durham	1,558	5	0.32	14	9
Dyfed-Powys	1,040	9	0.87	13	4
Essex[1]	2,806	25	0.89	50	25
Gloucestershire	1,114	6	0.54	14	8
Greater Manchester	6,795	28	0.41	48	20
Gwent	1,264	5	0.40	13	8
Hampshire	3,419	24	0.70	41	17
Hertfordshire[1]	1,767	43	2.43	31	−12
Humberside	1,932	18	0.92	10	−8
Kent	3,204	26	0.81	30	4
Lancashire	3,179	7	0.22	13	6
Leicestershire	1,993	27	1.35	34	7
Lincolnshire	1,115	6	0.54	32	26
Merseyside	4,085	14	0.34	18	4
Metropolitan Police[1]	25,485	382	1.50	72	−310
Norfolk	1,381	6	0.43	28	22
Northamptonshire	1,117	10	0.90	16	6
Northumbria	3,788	5	0.13	9	4
North Wales	1,403	2	0.14	19	17
North Yorkshire	1,283	5	0.39	36	31
Nottinghamshire	2,204	6	0.27	33	27
South Wales	2,926	3	0.10	60	57
South Yorkshire	3,163	4	0.13	21	17
Staffordshire	2,170	9	0.41	2	−7
Suffolk	1,145	11	0.96	8	−3
Surrey[1]	1,785	171	9.59	303	132
Sussex	2,822	31	1.10	23	−8
Thames Valley	3,740	80	2.14	9	−71
Warwickshire	900	8	0.89	2	−6
West Mercia	1,887	6	0.32	18	12
West Midlands	7,194	59	0.82	22	−37
West Yorkshire	4,822	19	0.39	21	2
Wiltshire	1,118	12	1.07	15	3

2001–02

	Strength at 31 March 2001	Transfers from force	Transfers out as proportion of strength (percentage)	Transfers to force	Net transfers
Avon and Somerset	2,994	19	0.63	44	25
Bedfordshire	1,036	51	4.92	6	−45
Cambridgeshire	1,296	26	2.01	27	1
Cheshire	2,002	18	0.90	8	−10
City of London	703	11	1.54	42	31

	Strength at 31 March 2001	Transfers from force	2001–02 Transfers out as proportion of strength (percentage)	Transfers to force	Net transfers
Cleveland	1,407	4	0.28	17	13
Cumbria	1,048	18	1.72	29	11
Derbyshire	1,823	6	0.33	18	12
Devon and Cornwall	2,934	13	0.44	87	74
Dorset	1,354	20	1.46	36	16
Durham	1,595	10	0.63	10	0
Dyfed-Powys	1,055	4	0.38	23	19
Essex[1]	2,897	56	1.93	50	−6
Gloucestershire	1,173	20	1.71	18	−2
Greater Manchester	6,909	39	0.56	64	25
Gwent	1,274	8	0.63	15	7
Hampshire	3,438	61	1.77	54	−7
Hertfordshire[1]	1,922	59	3.07	54	−5
Humberside	1,917	12	0.63	24	12
Kent	3,319	28	0.84	24	−4
Lancashire	3,255	36	1.11	28	−8
Leicestershire	2,032	37	1.82	13	−24
Lincolnshire	1,202	6	0.50	8	2
Merseyside	4,081	8	0.20	17	9
Metropolitan Police[1]	24,878	436	1.75	196	−240
Norfolk	1,420	9	0.63	33	24
Northamptonshire	1,157	13	1.12	29	16
Northumbria	3,857	26	0.67	29	3
North Wales	1,444	0	0.00	32	32
North Yorkshire	1,305	4	0.31	80	76
Nottinghamshire	2,275	14	0.62	42	28
South Wales	3,154	6	0.19	12	6
South Yorkshire	3,197	12	0.38	26	14
Staffordshire	2,129	22	1.02	35	13
Suffolk	1,133	3	0.26	21	18
Surrey[1]	2,066	246	11.93	55	−191
Sussex	2,855	34	1.19	29	−5
Thames Valley	3,703	72	1.94	13	−59
Warwickshire	926	17	1.84	27	10
West Mercia	1,951	10	0.51	65	55
West Midlands	7,423	132	1.77	41	−91
West Yorkshire	4,815	47	0.98	22	−25
Wiltshire	1,120	10	0.89	22	12

[1] As of April 2000, the Metropolitan Police force was reduced in size by a transfer of responsibility for policing some areas to the surrounding forces of Surrey, Hertfordshire and Essex. The effects of the Metropolitan Police boundary changes on 1 April 2000 were incorporated into the police funding formula and the overall transfer between the forces was in terms of financial resources, not of officers.

Prince of Wales (Gifts)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department under what powers, and on whose authority, the security services intercepted the conversation between Harold Brown and Jan Havlik about the model of an Arabian ship given as a wedding present to their Royal Highnesses the Prince and Princess of Wales by the Emir of Bahrain; and if he will make a statement. [86184]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The policy of successive governments is to neither confirm nor deny allegations as to whether a particular individual is or has been subject to an interception warrant under part I of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will ensure that the question and advice about social security benefits that appears on the back of ordinary death certificates is printed on the back of death certificates provided by coroners' offices. [86603]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* We have been considering with the Department for Work and Pensions how best to ensure that timely information about such benefits can be drawn to the attention of the bereaved. I am afraid that coroners' interim certificates of the fact of death are not suitablefor this ppurpose, but I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

States of Alert

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list the states of alert which are operated by government establishments, and the criteria which apply in each case. [86447]

Mr. Denham: I refer the hon. Member to the reply my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 106W.

Truant Children

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times in each month since

its introduction police have used their powers under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to remove truant children to designated places. [86180]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The information is not held centrally. Police forces are not required to inform the Secretary of State when using the powers provided by section 16 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to pick up truants in public places and return them to school or other designated place.

We have encouraged the police and local education authorities to undertake truancy sweeps on a regular basis, based on an assessment of local truancy problems. We are also making use of truancy sweeps as part of our efforts to tackle street crime. A co-ordinated programme of truancy sweeps during May this year in the street crime areas saw over 12,000 pupils stopped in 900 sweeps.

Drugs Strategy

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department which targets have been *(a)* abandoned, *(b)* retained and *(c)* newly adopted following the updated drug strategy; and how progress on targets is to be monitored and reported. [86536]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have not abandoned our targets. Following a review of the Drug Strategy, we concluded that the targets covered the right areas but, as the Home Affairs Committee noted, in some cases they were aspirational. We need targets which are challenging but achievable and which drive an emphasis on tackling problematic drug use and on reducing the harm caused by drugs.

The new targets are set out in the list. The targets are monitored and delivered by Departments working closely together, although each target has a lead Department which co-ordinates delivery. These are indicated in the list.

We will continue to report publicly on our progress through general reports on the strategy and through specific statistical bulletins. As with previous targets, more detailed information on how the new targets will be measured will be set out in technical notes available on departmental websites. The Department of Health Technical Note is already on their website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/psa/index.htm. Other technical notes will be published shortly.

Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets from the previous spending review (SR2000) and the corresponding new targets from this latest spending review (SR2002).

Young People (Home Office lead)

SR2000 target: reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of class A drugs 25 per cent. by 2005 and by 50 per cent. by 2008

New target: reduce the use of class A drugs and the frequent use of any illicit drug among all young people under the age of 25 especially by the most vulnerable young people

Tackling Supply: (Her Majesty's Customs and Excise lead)

SR2000 target: reduce the availability of Class A drugs by 25 per cent. by 2005 and 50 per cent. by 2008

New target: reduce the availability of illegal drugs by increasing:

the proportion of heroin and cocaine targeted on the UK which is taken out;

the disruption /dismantling of those criminal groups responsible for supplying substantial quantities of class A drugs to the UK market; and

the recovery of drug-related criminal assets.

And the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has also set a target to:

Contribute to the reduction of opium production in Afghanistan, with poppy cultivation reduced by 70 per cent. within five years and elimination within 10 years.

Drug related crime: (Home Office lead)

SR2000 target: reduce the levels of repeat offending among drug misusing offenders by 25 per cent. by 2005 and 50 per cent. by 2008

New target: reduce drug-related crime, including as measured by the proportion of offenders testing positive for arrest

Treatment: (Department of Health lead)

SR2000 Target: Increase the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes by 55 per cent. by 2004 and by 100 per cent. by 2008.

New target: Increase the participation of problem drug users in drug treatment programmes by 55 per cent. by 2004 and by 100 per cent. by 2008, and increase year on year the proportion of users successfully sustaining or completing treatment programmes.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places are available on government—unded drug rehabilitation programmes; and how many will be made available as a result of the Updated Drugs Strategy. [86539]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Since 1997 the number of treatment services in England has increased by a third to 715. Under the Updated Drug Strategy, the National Treatment Agency will continue to work to increase the number and capacity of all treatment services to meet the target of doubling the number of people in structured treatment to 200,000 a year by 2008.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what part the concept of indefinite remedial care and harm minimisation for individuals using illegal drugs or prescribed substitutes will play as an alternative to rehabilitation and abstinence under the Updated Drug Strategy. [86540]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The primary goal of all treatment is abstinence while recognising that some drug misusers may require longer-term support to achieve this. Approaches, such as prescribing methadone or diamorphine as a substitute for illicit opiates, have proven benefits for certain individuals and for society, particularly in terms of stabilising the individual, and reducing injecting behaviour and criminal activity.

The Updated Drug Strategy also contains as a key element the target of reducing drug-related deaths by 20 per cent. by 2004—often the final tragic result of years of risky patterns of use and poor health. Improving the basic health of drug misusers benefits them and the wider community. Programmes will focus on the key risks to health, reaching out on to the street and other places to target drug misusers in crisis.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what breakdowns are available for each of the four headings in the direct annual expenditure table on page 64 of the Updated Drugs Strategy document. [86543]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The following initiatives will be among those funded from the additional expenditure being injected into the Drug Strategy.

Drug Treatment

An expansion of the volume and range of treatment provision including treatment in adult Prisons.

Protecting Young People

The Positive Futures programme;

Outreach workers for young people;

Expansion of treatment and care both in the community and in custodial facilities;

Arrest referral and community treatment for young people;

Community sentences for young people; and

Drug workers in juvenile custodial facilities.

Safeguarding communities.

The expansion of drug testing for those arrested for certain offences;

The introduction, on a pilot basis, of a presumption against bail for those arrested for certain offences who test positive and decline treatment; The expansion of Drug Treatment and Testing Orders and the introduction of generic community sentences; Consolidation and improvements in the quality of the Arrest Referral initiative; and

The Introduction of a comprehensive programme of throughcare and aftercare for those in and leaving treatment, including those leaving prison.

The amount spent on each initiative may vary from year to year as an initiative is rolled out and as the actual as opposed to estimated costs are established.

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the access to drug detox and rehab programmes of drug addicts *(a)* within the criminal justice system and *(b)* outside of it; and if it is an aim of the Updated Drug Strategy to achieve equality of access. [86544]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Treatment works. It leads to reductions in both drug use and offending. We want to ensure that all those in need of treatment have access to it, whether it is through the community or criminal justice system.

The Updated Drug Strategy focuses on getting problematic drug users into treatment. Filling gaps in provision, reducing waiting times and using every opportunity presented by the criminal justice system will ensure this target is met.

Mr. Gary Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans the Government has to monitor average persistence of prescribed *(a)* diamorphine and *(b)* methadone use per individual under programmes supported by the Updated Drug Strategy. [86545]

Mr. Streeter: Under the Updated Drug Strategy, the treatment target has been extended not only to monitor the number of drug misusers entering treatment services, but also to monitor the proportion of users successfully sustaining or completing treatment programmes. This will include drug misusers on diamorphine or methadone prescribing programmes. Performance against the treatment target will be monitored by the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System.

TRANSPORT

Ecological Cars

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport why ecological cars licensed prior to March 2001 do not benefit from the lower road tax applicable to vehicles in this class registered post March 2001. [87114]

Mr. Jamieson: In order to introduce a VED scheme based on carbon dioxide CO_2 emissions (in turn, based on information obtained during the EU Type Approval test) it was necessary to develop systems to enable emissions information to be held on the vehicle register at the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). It was also necessary to allow time for motor manufacturers and dealers to make changes to their IT systems to accommodate the new system. Although CO_2 information has been available for most new cars registered since 1997, it would have been major and very costly bureaucratic exercise to collect CO_2 information retrospectively.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer took these factors into account in setting 1 March 2001 as the date when the scheme should take effect. Whatever date the Chancellor had set, apparently identical vehicles registered either side of that date might have paid different VED rates.

A further reason for choosing the date took into account the effect on the second hand car market. The March 2001 date coincided with the introduction of the "Y" registration prefix letter and accordingly would make for a clear indication of what vehicles were, and which were not taxed under the CO_2 scheme. That was particularly important as we expect and intend that the scheme to have a strong impact on incentives in the second hand market.

Since CO_2 emissions data are not readily available for vehicles registered before 1 March 2001 these cars are taxed on the basis of their engine capacity as a rough indicator of CO_2 emissions. There are now around 9 million cars in the lower band of the engine size scheme (set at under 1549 cc) benefiting from a rate of £105, a reduction of £55 per annum on the standard rate.

10-year Transport Plan

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will announce his investment decisions on projects envisaged under the 10 year transport plan; if he will publish a timetable for the implementation of each project; and what proportion of the funding under the 10 year transport plan will be spent on subsidised bus services. [R] [85161]

Mr. Jamieson: The plan provides an overarching funding framework and it included some illustrative outputs to show the scale and type of projects that could be delivered. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State

for Transport made a further announcement about transport investment to the House on 10 December, 2002.

A303 (Construction Works)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the timetable is for construction of works on the A303 near Stonehenge; what the cost is; what works are proposed; what changes there have been to the original proposals; what assessment has been carried out of the impact of the works; what representations have been received; and what discussions have taken place. [86093]

Mr. Jamieson: The proposed timetable for the A303 Stonehenge Improvement is:

Publication of draft orders: spring 2003

Public inquiry : late autumn 2003

Decision: late 2004

Start of works (subject to the above) 2005

Completion 2008

The current estimated cost of the scheme is £183 million (excluding development and land costs.) The scheme is a 10.8 km long improvement of the A303 between Amesbury and Berwick Down, upgrading the single carriageway to a dual carriageway, providing a bypass for the village of Winterbourne Stoke and taking the road in a tunnel past Stonehenge. The scheme estimate is based on a 2.1 km bored tunnel.

The assessment of the impact of the works is ongoing. The details in the form of an environmental statement will be published in the spring. There will be a public exhibition and anyone will be able to comment, support or object to the proposals.

To date there have been a variety of views expressed, particularly on the type and length of tunnel that needs to be built. There have also been numerous discussions with partners and stakeholders over the planning and development of the scheme. All those views are being taken into consideration.

Abandoned Vehicles

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to require the last registered keeper of a motor vehicle to pay the costs of dealing with its abandonment. [87493]

Mr. Jamieson: Abandoning a motor vehicle is currently a criminal offence attracting a maximum penalty of a fine of £2,500, three months' imprisonment or both. When a vehicle is abandoned, the local authority that deals with it has the power to recover the cost of removing and disposing of the vehicle from the keeper.

Local authorities can seek information about the keeper of the vehicle from the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA). The DVLA has recently made a successful bid under the Invest to Save Programme to fund an electronic link to local authorities to enable them to seek that information more quickly and efficiently. That link is currently being rolled out to local authorities, following a successful pilot in Sussex.

The 2002 Finance Act contained outline powers to establish a system of continuous registration, which will ensure that keepers of vehicles remain responsible for licensing that vehicle until such time that DVLA has been properly notified of its disposal. This will ensure that it is much more difficult for keepers of vehicles to evade their responsibilities to dispose of vehicles properly, or to evade meeting local authority costs when a vehicle is abandoned. We are currently considering how this legislation will be implemented and will make an announcement in due course.

Air Traffic (Scotland)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many aircraft departed from *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Glasgow and *(c)* Prestwick airports in each month since January 2000, broken down by aircraft type. [87167]

Mr. Jamieson: An analysis by aircraft type is not readily available. Information for all aircraft is as follows:

Air transport movements (aircraft landing or take-offs) [1]

Thousand

	Edinburgh	*Glasgow*	*Prestwick*
2000			
January	6.8	6.5	0.9
February	7.0	6.6	0.9
March	7.7	7.3	0.9
April	6.8	6.9	0.8
May	7.4	8.0	1.0
June	7.6	8.2	1.0
July	7.9	8.7	1.1
August	7.9	8.4	1.0
September	7.6	8.1	1.0
October	7.9	8.1	1.0
November	7.8	7.3	1.0
December	6.8	6.4	1.0
2001			
January	7.5	7.2	1.0
February	7.1	6.6	0.9
March	8.2	7.6	1.1
April	8.0	7.3	1.1
May	8.7	8.5	1.1
June	8.5	8.2	1.1
July	8.8	8.6	1.2
August	8.7	8.4	1.2
September	8.5	8.3	1.2
October	9.3	8.7	1.2
November	8.5	7.0	1.2
December	7.2	6.2	1.1
2002			
January	8.1	6.6	1.1
February	8.0	6.0	1.1
March	8.7	6.6	1.3
April	8.7	6.9	1.2
May	9.3	7.9	1.3
June	8.6	7.8	1.3
July	9.5	8.7	1.4
August	9.1	8.2	1.3
September	8.9	7.8	1.3

[1] Landings or take-offs of aircraft engaged on the transport of passengers, cargo or mail on commercial terms. Information about departures only is not available.

Air Transport

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer given to the hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 32–33W, on the future development of air transport, how many *(a)* questionnaires and *(b)* written letters were received in response to the consultation from Scotland by (i) 30 November and (ii) 10 December. [87168]

Mr. Jamieson: The breakdown of responses received in response to the consultation about Scotland and logged up until the 30 November and 10 December.

	30 November	*10 December*
NOP questionnaires	790	860
Letters	61	68
E-mails	80	98
Total	931	1,026

Aircraft Emissions

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much carbon dioxide is produced on average by an individual aircraft per mile travelled, broken down by aircraft type. [87185]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not readily available. Some information on CO_2 emissions for different aircraft types, based on British Airways fleet of 1997–98, is given on pages 285–6 of *Aviation and the Global Atmosphere*, published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in 1999.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87399]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office today.

Aviation Fuel (Taxation)

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to increase revenues from taxation of aviation fuel; and what recent studies he has commissioned of the effect on air passenger numbers. [86898]

Mr. Jamieson: Decisions on taxation are a matter for my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As announced in his pre-Budget report, the Government will discuss with stakeholders the most effective economic instruments for ensuring that, where justified, the industry limits or reduces its contribution to climate change, local air quality and noise pollution. Any decision to tax fuel used for international aviation would be subject to international agreement under the Chicago Convention. And EU Directive 92/81/EEC, on the harmonisation of the structures of excise duty on mineral oils, prohibits levying duty on most aviation fuel.

An analysis published in *Air Traffic Forecasts* for the United Kingdom 2000 (May 2000, pages 19–20) indicates that an environmental fuel tax introduced in 2006 and increased by 10 percentage points every year for the next nine years until the tax were 100 per cent. of fuel costs in 2015 would reduce passenger demand by 10 per cent. by 2020.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87346]

Mr. Jamieson: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office (Mr. Alexander) today.

Railway Rolling Stock

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what types of, and how much, new rolling stock have been ordered in each year since 1994 by each train operating company. [86548]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table provides the required information.

Year/TOC	*Volume (vehicles)*	*Type*
1994		
Information not available	—	—
1995		
Information not available	—	—
1996		
Chiltern	12	DMU
1997		
c2c	184	EMU
Connex South Eastern	120	EMU
Midland Mainline	34	DMU
South West Trains	120	EMU
1998		
Anglia	24	DMU
Arriva Trains Northern	48	EMU
Central Trains	76	DMU
Chiltern	8	DMU
Connex South Eastern	90	EMU
First Great Western	40	DMU
First North Western	70	DMU
Catwick Express	64	EMU
ScotRail	45	DMU
ScotRail	120	EMU
Virgin Cross Country	352	DEMU
1999		
Chiltern	10	DMU
First Great Western	30	DMU
ScotRail	33	DMU
Virgin West Coast	477	EMU

Year/TOC	Volume (vehicles)	Type
2000		
Arriva Trains Northern	8	EMU
c2c	112	EMU
Chiltern	9	DMU
SWT	16	DMU
2001		
Arriva Trains Northern	8	EMU
Chiltern	7	DMU
First Great Eastern	84	EMU
Midland Mainline	10	DMU
South Central	240	EMU
South West Trains	785	EMU
2002		
Anglia	8	DMU
Connex South Eastern	408	EMU
Midland Mainline	127	DMU
South Central	460	EMU

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many railway rolling stock leases involving Mark 1 passenger carriages are in existence; and in respect of each lease, what is *(a)* the name of the rolling stock company owning the vehicles and *(b)* the name of the train operating company leasing them; how many Mark 1 vehicles are covered by that lease; and what is the date to which the train operating company is committed to leasing the vehicles; [86549]

(2) how many railway rolling stock leases involving Mark 1 passenger carriages there are; and in respect of each lease, which rolling stock company owns the vehicles; which train operating company leases them; how many Mark 1 vehicles are covered by that lease; and what the date is to which the train operating company is committed to leasing the vehicles. [86552]

Mr. Jamieson: There are 1,741 Mark 1 vehicles leased through 19 leases as follows:

ROSCO: Angel Trains

Number of vehicles: 600

Number of leases: 5

Allocation to lessee: South West Trains (0), South Central Trains (324), Connex South Eastern (276)

ROSCO: Portebrook Leasing

Number of vehicles: 621

Number of leases: 10

Allocation to lessee: South West Trains (195), South Central Trains (224), Connex South Eastern (202)

ROSCO: HSBC

Number of Vehicles: 520

Number of leases: 4

Allocation to lessee: South West Trains (380), South Central Trains (60), Connex South Eastern (80)

The dates to which train operating companies are committed to leasing the vehicles are commercially confidential. However, in general terms, leases are being extended up to 31 December 2004 where necessary.

Station Improvements (North Wales)

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what funds he has allocated for rail track and station improvements in the last three years; and how much of this funding has been spent in North Wales. [87155]

Mr. Jamieson: Most public funds for railways are channelled through franchise support payments and cannot be allocated to specific expenditure. The Strategic Rail Authority has recently awarded over £2.4 million of funding from its Rail Passenger Partnership scheme for the 'Inform Cymru' project, providing customer information systems at stations along the Cambrian Line.

Transport Police

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what additional funding has been made available since 11 September 2001 to the Chief Constable of British Transport Police to assist with the policing of the London Underground system. [87100]

Mr. Jamieson: The British Transport Police (BTP) Committee sets the budget for the force and the users of the BTP, such as London Underground, the train operating companies and Network Rail, provide the funding.

The BTP have advised me that LUL's contribution to the BTP's budget in 2002–03 increased by 4.5 per cent. on the £30.9 million paid in 2001–02. It was announced on 1 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 115W, that my right hon. Friends the Secretary of State for Transport and the Home Secretary were providing £1.36 million of central funds to the BTP to support their participation in the Street Crime Initiative in London.

Trust Ports

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action his Department has taken following the classification by the Office for National Statistics of major trust ports as public bodies. [87558]

Mr. Jamieson: We have been working with the Office for National Statistics to identify the implications of this classification.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Bow Street Magistrates Court

Mr. Malins: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) how many hours the night session at Bow Street Magistrates' Court has operated; and how many cases have *(a)* been disposed of at first hearing and *(b)* been remanded over to a later date; [82096]

(2) what the cost of operating the night session at Bow Street Magistrates' Court has been since its inception. [82097]

Yvette Cooper: The consultation report has just been received by ministers The Department is still completing its consideration and analysis of the findings and I hope to be able to write to the hon. Member with the figures requested shortly.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department to which bodies the Lord Chancellor's Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87394]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for the Cabinet Office today.

Boundaries Review

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will make a statement on progress with the review of policies and processes to be adopted during the fifth general review of parliamentary constituencies and the review of Assembly electoral regions by the Boundary Commission for Wales. [85619]

Mr. Leslie: I have been asked to reply.

In carrying out the fifth general review of parliamentary constituencies and Assembly electoral regions in Wales, the Boundary Commission for Wales will publish provisional recommendations for groups of constituencies, following the rules on the redistribution of seats set out in Schedule 2 of the Parliamentary Constituencies Act 1986. Provisional representations will be publicly available and interested parties will have one month from their publication in which to make representations.

Local inquiries will be held if representations objecting to the proposals are received from an interested local authority or from a body of 100 or more electors. Inquiries will be conducted by Assistant Commissioners who will report to the Commission.

Following receipt of reports, the Commission may decide to modify their revised recommendations before submitting their final proposals to my. right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister, the procedure for publication and inviting representation is again repeated. The report containing the Commission's final recommendations relates to all constituencies for Wales. No separate reports are submitted on any group of constituencies.

Midnight Courts Pilot

Simon Hughes: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when the midnight courts pilots in Manchester and London *(a)* commenced and *(b)* terminated; how many defendants were dealt with by each court; how many were sentenced on the evening of their appearance; and how many were remanded or bailed to a future date. [84300]

Yvette Cooper *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The consultation report has just been received by ministers. The Department is still completing its consideration and analysis of the findings and I hope to be able to write to the hon. Member with the figures requested shortly.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by the Lord Chancellor and *(b)* by ministers in the Lord Chancellor's Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87351]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1999 this Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government has also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

Detailed information requested in respect of UK travel is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

HEALTH

Prions

Mr. Paul B[illegible]stow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what[illegible]sessment her Department has made of the risk of[illegible]ions being transferred to meat for consumption[illegible] through blood and *(b)* by cutting equipment in[illegible]oirs.[Transferred] [86071]

Ms Blears: [illegible]ood Standards Agency advises me that the risk o[illegible]ns being transferred to meat for consumption is cu[illegible]ntly estimated to be low. Specified risk material (SRM) controls cover those parts of animals considered most likely to harbour any transmissible spongiform encephalopathy (TSE) infectivity. The TSE regulations require that SRM neither enters the food chain nor comes into contact with any other animal material while in the slaughterhouse.

Ongoing research underway includes investigation of different parts of a bovine animal beyond the currently defined SRM, and their response to an experimental challenge of BSE infected feed. This has not indicated to date that muscle tissue would itself become infected.

The Agency is, in addition, undertaking research to evaluate the risk of prions being inadvertently transferred to meat at abattoirs, and possible ways through which risk can be reduced. This work in progress includes the examination of alternative cutting techniques for removal of spinal column. Results will be published once the work has been completed.

EU Directives (Food Supplements)

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the effects of the proposed EU directives on nutritional supplements and herbal remedies on *(a)* employment, *(b)* profit, *(c)* the number of small firms and *(d)* sales in the health

food industry; what licence fees will be required for licensing each product; and what costs will be charged for testing each batch; [83841]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive on employment in the retail sector; what representations he has received on the issue from *(a)* the National Association of Health Stores, *(b)* Consumers for Health Choice, *(c)* Holland and Barrett Retail and *(d)* general nutrition centres; and if he will make a statement; [84213]

(3) whom he has recently met from the natural health specialist retail sector and its consumers to discuss the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive; what views those individuals expressed to him; and what action he intends to take. [85086]

Ms Blears: Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements was published in the Official Journal of the European Communities on 12 July 2002 and must be implemented into Member States' national legislation by 31 July 2003. The Food Standards Agency is currently consulting on draft implementing Regulations.

In the short-term the EU food Supplements Directive is unlikely to have any effect upon employment, profit, the number of small firms or sales in the health food industry.

In the longer-term, the impact of the directive will depend upon progress in adding vitamin and minerals and their sources to the lists of permitted nutrients in the Directive and upon developments in the setting of maximum limits for vitamins and minerals in food supplements. The Food Standards Agency is arguing the case for these maximum limits to be based on thorough scientific risk assessments so that there is no unnecessary restriction on the range of products that can be marketed.

We have received a substantial number of representations from the National Association of Health Stores, Consumers for Health Choice, Holland and Barrett and General Nutrition Centres about the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products. The main thrust of the representations is to express strong opposition to, or serious concerns about, the proposed Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products and to express the view that the proposals would threaten viability, profits and jobs in the health food sector, particularly among independent stores. They fear that the Directive will lead to a substantial reduction in consumer choice and have expressed the view that the proposals are over-regulatory in terms of the scope of the Directive and the likely costs of meeting the various requirements. They indicate their belief that there is no evidence that products in question are unsafe or dangerous.

Ministers have met representatives of the natural health specialist retail sector on a number of occasions. Most recently, my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (the Lord Hunt of Kingsheath) met a representative from the National Association of Health Stores on 21 November and representatives of Consumers for Health Choice, Holland and Barrett and General Nutrition Centres on 28 November. He also attended a Consumers for Health Choice Parliamentary reception on 4 December.

The main regulatory burdens arising from the Directive, for example in relation to the cost of preparing dossiers and applying for registrations, would fall on manufacturers. At meetings with Ministers representatives from a wide range of United Kingdom trade associations representing manufacturers of herbal remedies and health foods have told us that that they believe the Directive will lead to greater consumer confidence and greater stability in the market and have requested that the Government should support the initiative while seeking to achieve maximum flexibility. The Herbal Forum which represents ten UK manufacturers' trade associations, covering the health food, herbal remedies, ethnic medicines and aromatherapy sectors wrote to my noble Friend on 18 November to support the case for appropriate regulation in order to ensure that the public is properly protected against inferior quality products which the current system can allow onto the market. The forum indicates that it appreciates the need for the Directive while identifying a number of areas of concern that it wishes to see addressed in European negotiations or in implementation at national level.

The proposals remain under negotiation, and there are wide differences of view within the herbal sector about the possible impact of the Directive. It is therefore problematic to make reliable estimates of the kind requested in relation to the health food sector. However, our overall assessment remains that it will be possible for a very wide range of herbal remedies to be brought to the market under the Directive as currently drafted. We also share the view put to us by many people in the sector that the proposed systematic approach to standards of quality, safety and information are likely to enhance public confidence and the future prosperity of the sector. Moreover, if in negotiations we achieve the ability to extend the principle of simplified registration to an additional range of products which currently require a full marketing authorisation, in particular traditional herbal remedies with added nutrients, this is likely to lead to increased opportunities for both manufacturers and retailers and a significant expansion in consumer choice as compared with the current position in the UK.

We intend to continue to engage positively in the ongoing European negotiations on the Directive, seeking to ensure the maximum flexibility, consistent with the protection of public health. In negotiations on the Directive, and in any subsequent implementation, we will also seek to contain the regulatory impact, and we welcome the stated intention of the Herbal Forum to work constructively and closely with the Medicines Control Agency to achieve this objective.

At this stage of negotiations on the Directive it is not yet possible to make estimates of costs of registering products. The cost of testing finished products before release onto the market is a matter for the relevant licence holders and, if they choose to purchase the service from a third party, this is for negotiation between the user and supplier of such services.

Anatomy Act

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the application of the Anatomy Act 1984; and if he will make a statement. [86591]

Mr. Lammy: A comprehensive review of the law relating to human organs has been undertaken. Consultation has taken place through the report, "Human Bodies, Human Choices", published in July 2002.

We expect to legislate when parliamentary time allows.

Autism (Good Practice Guidelines)

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to monitor progress in implementing his Department's good practice guidelines in respect to autism. [84503]

Jacqui Smith: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Ivan Lewis) at the Department for Education and Skills, on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 96W.

Care Homes

Mr. Pickthall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what statistics he collates on the *(a)* abuse and *(b)* neglect of residents in (i) private care homes, (ii) local authority care homes and (iii) NHS hospitals. [86507]

Jacqui Smith: Statistical data on the incidences of abuse or neglect of residents in care homes or inpatients in national health service hospitals is not collected centrally.

Local councils are required to keep clear and accurate records of complaints or allegations of abuse. They should be kept in such a way that they create statistical information as a by-product.

Child Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the timetable is for the introduction of legislation to change the child protection system following the inquiry into the death of Victoria Climbie. [83217]

Jacqui Smith: We expect to receive Lord Laming's report into the circumstances that led to the death of Victoria Climbie later this year or early next year. The Government will consider the report's recommendations fully, before deciding what, if any, action, which might include legislation, needs to be taken as a result.

Drug Rehabilitation

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many drug rehabilitation centres treat addicts of *(a)* cocaine and *(b)* heroin. [86397]

Ms Blears: There are 715 drug treatment services in England that treat addicts of cocaine and heroin.

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost of drug rehabilitation was in each of the last five years; and how much was spent per person treated in *(a)* England, *(b)* the North East of England and *(c)* the constituency of Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland. [86398]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally. There are 138 drug treatment residential rehabilitation services in England, providing over 3000 bedspaces within the drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation sector. The cost per week, per patient, varies from around 300 to around 1000 for a placement within a medical/clinical facility.

There is no information at present on community rehabilitation programmes, although work on unit costs is being developed by the National Treatment Agency.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of those receiving drug treatment are private patients. [86696]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally.

In England, during the year 2000–2001 the overall number of drug users reported as being in treatment was around 118,500.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are undergoing drug treatment, broken down by drug action team area. [86691]

Ms Blears: Information on the numbers of drug misusers in contact with drug treatment agencies in England, broken down by drug action team area of treatment, is given in table 11 of the Statistical Bulletin, Statistics from the Regional Drug Misuse Databases on drug misusers in treatment in England, 2000–01—http://www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0133.htm. This document is available in the Library.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what menu of treatments he requires to be available in each drug action team area. [86693]

Ms Blears: The overall menu of treatment services that residents of a drug action team (DAT) area should have access to, located either within the DAT area or located outside, is as follows:

Open access services:
- Advice and information services
- Harm reduction services

Structured community based services:
- Community prescribing—specialist service
- Community prescribing—general practitioners
- Structured counselling
- Structured day programmes
- Aftercare

Residential services:
- In-patient detoxification
- Residential rehabilitation

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former drug addicts there are, broken down by *(a)* treatment method and *(b)* type of drug use. [86694]

Ms Blears: This information is not available centrally.

Recent research evidence demonstrates that around half (47 per cent.) of drug users who have gone through residential programmes, and more than a third (35 per cent.) of those from methadone programmes are still abstinent from opiates at four to five years. More than a third (38 per cent.) of all the residential clients were also abstinent from all six illicit target drugs (illicit heroin, non-prescribed methadone, non-prescribed benzodiazepines, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, amphetamines) at four to five years.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of ex-drug addicts who have undergone treatment are drug free. [86699]

Ms Blears: Recent research evidence demonstrates that around half (47 per cent.) of drug users who have gone through residential programmes, and more than a third (35 per cent.) of those from methadone programmes are still abstinent from opiates at four to five years. More than a third (38 per cent.) of all the residential clients were also abstinent from all six illicit target drugs (illicit heroin, non-prescribed methadone, non-prescribed benzodiazepines, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, amphetamines) at four to five years.

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many former drug addicts have remained drug free for *(a)* over one year and *(b)* over five years following treatment. [86700]

Ms Blears: Recent research evidence noted that:

The percentage of residential clients who were abstinent from illicit opiates (heroin and illicit methadone) was around 50 per cent. at one year. Abstinence rates from stimulants (all forms of cocaine and amphetamines) was around 68 per cent. at one year. Abstinence from crack cocaine was around 82 per cent. The percentage of clients treated in community methadone treatments who were abstinent from illicit opiates at one year was around 22 per cent. Abstinence rates from stimulants (all forms of cocaine and amphetamines) was around 64 per cent. at one year. Abstinence from crack cocaine was around 79 per cent.

These reductions in illicit drug use were generally maintained throughout the four to five year follow-up period. Almost half (47 per cent.) of the residential, and more than a third (35 per cent.) of those from the methadone programmes were still abstinent from opiates at four to five years. More than a third (38 per cent.) of all the residential clients were abstinent from all six illicit target drugs (illicit heroin, non-prescribed methadone, non-prescribed benzodiazepines, crack cocaine, powder cocaine, amphetamines) at four to five years.

Harefield Hospital

Mr. Randall: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to improve cardiac surgery facilities at Harefield Hospital and when they will be operational. [86433]

Mr. Hutton: The Royal Brompton and Harefield National Health Service Trust has planned the replacement of a catheter laboratory and two cardiac operating theatres at Harefield Hospital. The former will be in operation by July 2003 and the latter by May 2003.

Heroin

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many deaths from heroin overdoses there were in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* 2002. [82268]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Mann dated 16 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question asking how many deaths from heroin overdoses there were in a) 2001 and b) 2002. (82268)

The latest available figures for deaths related to drag poisoning[1] in England and Wales are for 2000. The number of deaths in that year where heroin or morphine[2] was mentioned on the death certificate was 926.[3];

[1]selected using the following codes from the International Classification of Diseases Ninth Revision:

292 (drug psychoses)

304 (drug dependence)

305.2–305.9 (nondependent abuse of drugs)

E850-E858 (accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biologicals)

E950.0-E950.5 (suicide and self-inflicted poisoning by solid or liquid substances)

E980.0-E980.5 (poisoning by solid or liquid substances, undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted)

E962.0 (assault by poisoning—drugs and medicaments)

where heroin or morphine was also mentioned on the death certificate.

[2] As heroin breaks down in the body into morphine, the latter is often detected at post mortem. For this reason, all deaths mentioning heroin or morphine have been included.

[3] Source: Office for National Statistics (2002) Report: Deaths related to drug poisoning: results for England and Wales, 1993–2000. Health Statistics Quarterly 13, 76–82.

HIV

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he plans to take to counter the increase in cases of HIV; and what extra resources will be made available to improve awareness of HIV and the need for better sexual health practices, with particular reference to younger people. [85672]

Ms Blears: The aims of the sexual health and HIV strategy published last year include reducing the transmission of HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and reducing the prevalence of undiagnosed HIV and STIs. The strategy sets a goal to reduce newly acquired HIV and gonorrhoea infections by 25 per cent., by the end of 2007.

The Department has allocated an extra £47.5 million towards implementation of the strategy. This includes £4 million for the new sex lottery awareness campaign about preventing STIs, including HIV, which targets young adults aged 18 to 30 years. This complements the teenage pregnancy awareness campaign, which also highlights the importance of condoms in preventing STIs.

Homeless People

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the report by Dr. Sian Griffiths, commissioned by the Rough Sleepers Unit, on primary health care provision for homeless people has been published. [81749]

Mr. Hutton: The paper 'Addressing the health needs of rough sleepers' was published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on Wednesday 11 December 2002.

Hospices

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding via the NHS has been given to support *(a)* St Catherine's Hospice and *(b)* Derian House Hospice. [84062]

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to provide additional funding via the NHS to *(a)* Derian House Hospice and *(b)* St. Catherine's Hospice. [84063]

Ms Blears: During 2002–03, the Chorley & South Ribble Primary Care Trust (PCT) provided recurrent funding of £427,000 to St. Catherine's Hospice and 11,000 to Derian House Hospice.

In addition, some non recurrent funding has recently been made available across Central Lancashire for which £40,000 will be allocated to hospices in Chorley, South Ribble and Preston. In the development of the local delivery plan, the PCT is considering increasing its investment in hospice services in 2003–04. However this will be dependent on other priorities.

Imported Poultry

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the FSA has taken to identify imports of turkeys from Brazil that have been treated with antibiotic furazolidine; and whether all poultry imported in 2002 from Brazil has been treated with furazolidine. [86935]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Since October 2002, all imports of Brazilian turkey and other poultry meat have been tested for nitrofuran antibiotic residues. Furazolidone has not been detected in any sample.

Inter-country Adoptions

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the current backlog is of cases of inter-country adoptions being dealt with by his Department. [85528]

Jacqui Smith: The Department of Health is currently taking approximately five months to process inter-country adoption applications received from local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies. This involves comprehensive checking of all the papers received to ensure that they are in the format required by the country of origin and that the various legalisation and authentication procedures have been correctly carried out. The Department process every case as quickly and efficiently as they are able so that all children can have a safe and smooth transition to their new life in the United Kingdom. This processing time has increased following a significant increase in the complexity of cases and UK adopters applying to new countries.

In addition to processing applications, the Department also has responsibility for:

providing information and assistance to prospective adopters and professionals in the social care field;

on inter-country adoption procedures and how the relevant pieces of UK legislation on adoption should be applied in practice;

the production of fact sheets giving information on how to adopt from overseas countries, which prove to be an invaluable tool for both adoptive parents themselves and also the social workers carrying out home study assessment;

handling a continuous stream of telephone inquiries and letters from adopters wanting to inquire about how their adoption application is progressing;

general inquiries about both domestic and inter-country adoption; and

providing urgent advice to entry clearance officers overseas and the Home Office about whether all the required documents are in place to be able to issue entry clearance to the UK, and on whether a court in the UK would be likely to make an adoption order after the family have returned.

A number of initiatives are being put in place to improve processing times including: Saturday working to target outstanding cases; the recent recruitment of an additional caseworker; and a change in processing for Northern Ireland cases allowing them to be managed direct by the Department of Health and Social Services Public Safety, therefore cutting their overall processing time.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting times were for *(a)* children and *(b)* adults suffering from mental health problems to receive treatment in each year since 1997. [82701]

Jacqui Smith: The estimated mean waiting times for first outpatient appointments following general practitioner referrals to child and adolescent psychiatry and other mental health specialties, between 1996–97 and 2001–02, are shown in the table. At end March 1997 there were 600 and 1,370 patients waiting over 26 weeks for a first outpatient appointment for child and adolescent psychiatry and other mental health specialties respectively. The equivalent figures for March 2002 were 13 and 52.

Mean waiting time[1] (in weeks) for first outpatient appointment.

	Child andadolescent psychiatry	*Other MH specialities[2]*
1996 to 1997	10.4	6.3
1997 to 1998	10.1	6.1
1998 to 1999	10.6	6.0
1999 to 2000	10.0	6.1
2001 to 2002	10.3	6.1
2001/2	10.8	6.6

[1] The means should be interpreted with caution because they are estimated from the total number of patients seen within 4, 9,13, and 26 week timebands
[2] Other MH specialties includes the following: mental illness, forensic psychiatry, psychotherapy, and old age psychiatry.
Source:
Department of Health form QM08

Mid-Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the mid-Essex hospital trust area were waiting for in-patient treatment on the latest date for which figures are available; and how many were waiting on 31 March 1997. [87140]

Mr. Lammy: The total number of patients waiting at mid-Essex hospital services national health service trust at the end of October 2002 was 9,675. The total number of patients waiting at the end of March 1997 was 8,391.

MMR

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take-up of *(a)* MMR and *(b)* separate vaccinations for measles, mumps and rubella was in the last 12 months for which figures are available. [86032]

Ms Blears: The uptake rates of MMR in the last 12 months in the United Kingdom is shown in the table.

Quarter	*Percentage uptake*
July to September 2001	84.2
October to December 2001	84.0
January to March 2002	83.8
April to June 2002	84.3

Note:
Uptake rates for single measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations are not routinely collected.

MRI Scans

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued in respect of waiting times for MRI scans; and what the average waiting time is in *(a)* England and *(b)* North Staffordshire. [85673]

Ms Blears: We do not collect waiting times for a magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) scan, nor has any central guidance been issued. The length of time that a patient may have to wait for any scan is dependent on their clinical condition. Emergency cases need to be seen immediately. Other cases will be carried out as quickly as possible, dependent on the clinical priority of all the remaining patients waiting to be scanned.

Where an MRI scan forms part of the diagnostic process for a patient urgently referred with suspected cancer, this will be covered by the target of a maximum two months wait from urgent referral to first treatment, which will be rolled out for all cancers by the end of 2005.

To increase the capacity of diagnostic services, funding has been made available for the provision of new and replacement scanners, including a replacement scanner at North Staffordshire. By 2004, approximately 100 MRI scanners will have been provided through central purchasing programmes.

Nurses (North Essex)

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for nurses in the North Essex Mental Health Partnership; and how many approved nursing posts there are. [86510]

Mr. Lammy: The number of nurse vacancies at North Essex Mental Health Partnership national health service trust is shown in the table. Information on the number of approved nursing posts is not collected centrally.

Vacancies in NHS trusts by DHSC and North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS trust, qualified nursing, midwifery and health visiting staff (excluding health authority staff)

	3 month vacancy rate (percentage)	*3 month vacancy (number)*	*Staff in post (whole-time equivalent)*	*Staff in post (headcount)*
England (excluding HA staff)	3.1%	8,390	265,720	329,980
Midlands and Eastern	2.5%	1,860	72,170	90,190
North Essex Mental Health Partnership NHS trust	2.2%	20	700	790
London	6.1%	2,750	45,250	55,150
Northern	2.0%	1,730	85,420	103,080
Southern	3.3%	2,050	61,910	80,460
Special health authorities	0.9%	10	970	1,090

Key Notes:
1. Three-month vacancy information is as at 31st March 2002.
2. Three-month vacancies are vacancies which trusts are actively trying to fill, which had lasted for three months or more, (whole-time equivalent).
3. Three-month vacancy rates are three-month vacancies expressed as a percentage of three-month vacancies plus staff in post.
4. Three-month vacancy rates are calculated using staff in post from the Vacancy Survey, March 2002.
5. Staff in post data is from the Non-Medical Workforce Census, September 2001.
6. Staff in post data excludes staff employed by health authorities, as vacancy information was only collected from trusts, PCTs and Special Health Authorities.
7. Vacancy and staff in post numbers are rounded to the nearest ten.
8. Percentages are rounded to one decimal place.
Other Notes:
9. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
10. Due to rounding, calculating the vacancy rates using the above data may not equal the actual vacancy rates.
11. Figures may not match previously published data due to a different method of rounding used on the staff in post data.
Source:
Vacancy numbers and rates: Department of Health Vacancies Survey March 2002
Non-medical staff in post: Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce census September 2001.

Prison Health Services

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, Official Report, col. 748W, on prison health services, if the increased funding is ring-fenced for NHS services within prisons. [86964]

Jacqui Smith: Detailed decisions on the allocation of the increased funding announced for prison health services have not yet been finalised.

Restaurant Menus

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information restaurants and take-away food outlets are required to publish in relation to the presence of genetically modified foods and food products in the meals they supply; how they are able to find out about such a presence in *(a)* their ingredients and *(b)* the food which the animals which produced it were fed on; what the penalties are for non-compliance with these requirements; which enforcement authorities are responsible for ensuring compliance; how many prosecutions have been brought for failing to comply with the regulations; what the outcome was in each of those cases; and what estimate he makes of the total cost to date to (i) industry in implementing and (ii) public funds in enforcing this legislation. [85833]

Ms Blears: Current labelling regulations require food sold to the final consumer or to mass caterers to be labelled as genetically modified if an ingredient contains novel genetic material (DNA or protein). There are no requirements to label products from animals fed GM feed. In the United Kingdom, these requirements also extend to food sold in catering establishments where information on the extent to which GM ingredients are used is provided to customers on demand.

Enforcement of the Genetically Modified and Novel Food (Labelling) (England) Regulations 2000 is a matter for the local authorities, with the penalty on conviction under these regulations being a fine not exceeding level five on the standard scale. Parallel arrangements apply in other of parts of the UK. Compliance checks are usually carried out as part of routine premises inspections and no specific costs are recorded for the enforcement of these regulations. There have been no prosecutions to date. No details of the actual costs incurred by the hospitality industry have been received in recent consultations, but the total cost to the catering industry was estimated at £1 to £2 million in the regulatory impact assessment for the Genetically Modified and Novel Food (Labelling) (England) Regulations 2000.

Smallpox Vaccine

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the side effects from smallpox vaccinations are. [85635]

Mr. Hutton: Full details of the side effects of vaccination and contraindications to vaccination are given in the Department's draft smallpox plan available at http://www.doh.gov.uk/epcu/cbr/boil/smallpoxplan.htm

Severe side effects that could occur in anyone included generalized vaccinia and progress vaccinia and post-vaccination encephalitis. However these side effects were more likely to occur in those with any degree of immuno-suppression or in pregnant women and their offspring. Eczema vaccinatum was a very serious side effect in those with active skin lesions at the time of the vaccination. Post vaccination encephalitis could also occur in anyone.

The overall risk of severe complications following vaccination is low but they could be fatal. Complications occurred more frequently in persons receiving their first dose of vaccine, and among very young children.

Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what recent estimate he has made of the total registration cost for a product under the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive; [85795]

(2) if he will make a statement on the cost to manufacturers of the testing of each batch of products under the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive; [85797]

(3) what estimate he has made of the cost of completion of an individual dossier to support an application under the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [85796]

Ms Blears: I refer the hon. Member to the replies I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) today and on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 967W.

Vaccination

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on his plans to extend the vaccination of children in the UK. [86035]

Ms Blears: The existing childhood immunisation programme has been extremely effective in eradicating diseases that previously killed and disabled large numbers of children. For example, polio vaccination has eliminated polio for more than 15 years from this country. MMR has virtually wiped out congenital rubella syndrome and has prevented any child deaths from acute measles for 10 years.

The impact of the childhood programme is reviewed regularly. Changes to programme are only considered following a careful assessment of all of the evidence by the expert advisory body the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation. No decisions have yet been made concerning extending the programme.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list take-up rates of vaccinations generally available through the NHS for each of the past five years. [86033]

Ms Blears: The information available about uptake of immunisations, primarily childhood immunisations and the numbers of vaccinations given in England is contained in the Statistical Bulletin "NHS Immunisation Statistics, England: 2001–02". A copy of

the bulletin is in the Library and can also be found on the Department's website at www.doh.gov.uk/public/sb0218.htm.

Data were not collected on a routine basis for influenza immunisation before 2000–01. In that year, uptake among the age target group of people over 65 years of age was 65 per cent., across England and improved to 68 per cent., across England in the following year, 2001–02. Data are not yet available for the end of the programme for 2002–03.

Woodhill Prison

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding Milton Keynes PCT received in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 1999–2000 in respect of the prison population at Woodhill. [86965]

Jacqui Smith: Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust (PCT) received specific funding of 50,000 in 2001–02 and 108,000 in 2002–03 to support the development of improved mental health services for the prison population at Her Majesty's Prison Woodhill.

In each year the PCT, and previously the health authority, received funding for the secondary care of that part of its population classified by the Office for National Statistics as normally resident in HMP Woodhill. This funding comprised part of the general resource allocation for the PCT and was not separately identified.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding Milton Keynes PCT will receive in repect of Woodhill Prison as a result of the increased national funding. [86966]

Jacqui Smith: Primary care trusts (PCTs) will not immediately assume financial responsibility for prison health services as a result of the transfer of Departmental budgetary responsibility for these services to the Department from April 2003. Future allocations to PCTs in respect of local prison populations have not yet been calculated, but in most cases the resources allocated will be significantly greater than current prison service expenditure on health care in the relevant prisons.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether remand prisoners in Woodhill Prison are included in the funding calculation for Milton Keynes PCT. [86967]

Jacqui Smith: Remand prisoners will be taken into account in future funding calculations for Primary Care Trusts.

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding Milton Keynes PCT received in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 1990–2000 for upgrading health facilities within Woodhill Prison. [86968]

Jacqui Smith: The prison service is responsible for the maintenance of health care facilities at Her Majesty's Prison Woodhill. Accordingly, no funding was allocated to Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust, or to its predecessor, Buckinghamshire Health Authority, for upgrading health facilities within HMP Woodhill during the three years in question.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 17 December 2002

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Deaths in Custody

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the report on deaths in custody which was consulted upon last year; and if he will make a statement. [86115]

The Solicitor-General: In May 2002 the Attorney General issued a consultation paper on the prosecution process in cases arising from a death in custody. During May and June he received many thoughtful responses, including the views expressed by those who attended a seminar which he held in May. The Attorney General had originally hoped to make a statement before the House rose in July, but was compelled to conclude that to do justice to this difficult exercise in the light of further developments following another case, the issues would need further work. He continues to be engaged on the project and expects to be able to publish a statement in the New Year.

Emergency Services (Hoax Calls)

Mr. Heath: To ask the Solicitor-General how many individuals suspected of hoax calls to the emergency services have been referred for prosecution to the Crown Prosecution Service since 22 November. [85176]

The Solicitor-General: Two individuals have been charged in relation to hoax calls made during the first fire fighters strike which began on 13 November 2002.

Since 22 November 2002, three individuals suspected of making hoax calls to the emergency services have been referred to the CPS by the police.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Rugby World Cup

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what representations she has received from the governing bodies of *(a)* Welsh and *(b)* Scottish Rugby Union in respect of the English Rugby Football Union's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2007; [86930]

(2) if she will make a statement on the English Rugby Football Union's bid to host the Rugby World Cup in 2007; [86926]

(3) what assessment her Department has made of the likely *(a)* economic benefit to the United Kingdom and *(b)* benefit to amateur rugby of hosting the Rugby World Cup in 2007. [86928]

Mr. Caborn: This Department fully supports the English Rugby Union's very strong bid for the 2007 Rugby World Cup. The RFU has already demonstrated its ability to host major events by providing first class facilities, organization and hospitality as co-host of the 1991 and 1999 Rugby World Cups.

To date this Department has not received any representations from the Welsh and Scottish Rugby Unions in respect of the bid.

It is anticipated that the UK would benefit from the additional tourism that this event would bring. The Rugby Football Union has commissioned an independent assessment of the potential economic impact of the 2007 Rugby World Cup from Bone Wells Associates. The assessment estimates that the tournament would bring approximately 175,400 visitors to the UK, spending approximately £100 per day over an average of 14 days. Hosting a major sporting event of this size would also provide UK companies with a number of opportunities for commercial sponsorship and investment. The Rugby Union is working on its own assessment of the economic impact of the 2007 World Cup and should make the results available after the final bids have been submitted on 15 January 2003.

The Rugby Football Union's bid document predicts that the 2007 Rugby World Cup will generate substantially enhanced income streams for investment in the development of grass roots rugby.

Sports Events (Hosting)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps her Department takes to ensure that all United Kingdom sport can benefit from the hosting of international sports events by an individual home nation. [86929]

Mr. Caborn: The sporting benefits of hosting major international sports events are not easily quantified. The economic benefit to the United Kingdom as a whole of individual Home Nations hosting such events is clear—not least, because spectators from overseas often combine their visits to events held in the Home Nations with visits to other areas and Nations of the UK.

It is also clear that the hosting of major events by individual Home Nations generates benefits in terms of sporting prestige to the whole of the UK. However, it is not clear how the Government could ensure that such benefits accrue directly to sport in other parts of the country.

Sports Governing Bodies (Financial Assistance)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost has been to her Department of providing financial assistance to sports governing bodies preparing bids to host international championships since 1997. [86927]

Mr. Caborn: The provision of financial assistance to governing bodies for the preparation of bids for major international events is the responsibility of UK Sport or, in the case of the Football Association's bid for the 2006 World Cup, of Sport England.

No payments have been made by the Department to governing bodies to assist in the preparation of such bids since 1997. Direct bid-related expenditure by the Department in that period has consisted only of 20,000 to cover the travelling costs of the Prime Minister's Special Envoy in his work in support of the 2006 World Cup bid.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Visitor Centre

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the honourable Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission if the Commission will examine the case for locating a new parliamentary visitor centre outside the precincts of the Palace of Westminster. [87378]

Mr. Kirkwood: Yes. The House of Commons Commission has considered the feasibility study produced by the consultants Haley Sharpe, and has asked them to carry out further studies of possible sites off the Parliamentary Estate. In the New Year the Commission will consider these studies, together with the views of the Modernisation and Finance and Services Committees, the Domestic Committees, The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association United Kingdom Branch, the Inter-Parliamentary Union British Group and individual hon. Members. A final decision would need to be agreed with the authorities of the House of Lords.

PRIME MINISTER

Lend-Lease (Second World War)

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Prime Minister how much debt arising out of the Second World War US/UK lend/lease programme remains outstanding; what recent discussions he has had with President Bush on this issue; whether he has sought its cancellation; and if he will make a statement. [87760]

The Prime Minister: The Government intends to meet its obligations under the 1945 Agreement by repaying the United States Government in full the amounts lent in 1945. Therefore no representation to the United States Government has been made.

For details of the loans, I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Economic Secretary gave to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Dr Spink) on 28 February, *Official Report*, columns 1437–9W.

SCOTLAND

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list for her Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87700]

Mrs. Liddell: The Scotland Office was established in its present form on 1 July 1999 and thus the department had no targets arising from the Comprehensive Spending Review 1998.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many civil servants are employed by her Department; and how much money was spent by her Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87177]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Data on the location of civil servants is not available in the format requested, except at disproportionate cost. Information on the number of civil servants is provided in Table D of Civil Service statistics 2001, published in June 2002. Information on the breakdown of Departmental expenditure by local authority area is not available.

Public Appointments

Keith Vaz: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department how many public appointments he has made, other than judicial appointments, since 1 June 2001. [85050]

Ms Rosie Winterton: 407 non-judicial Ministerial public appointments were made to the Lord Chancellor's non-departmental public bodies from 1 June 2001 to 31 October 2002. This figure includes re-appointments.

CABINET OFFICE

Public Appointments

42. **Mr. Brady:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will make a statement on the programme of work of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. [85943]

Mr. Alexander: The Commissioner for Public Appointments, Dame Rennie Fritchie, regulates, monitors, advises and reports on ministerial appointments to public bodies within her remit. Her work and advice are highly regarded and respected by the Government.

Government Websites

43. **Barbara Follett:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans his Department has to harmonise Government website addresses. [85945]

Mr. Alexander: As outlined in my answer to my hon. Friend in June all central Government Departments use the .gov.uk domain name.

A Domain Naming Approvals Committee oversees the approval of every domain name request. Requesting Departments and the Committee are steered on eligibility by guidelines and standard conventions.

The Office of Government Commerce (managers of the .gov.uk domain name) and the Office of the e-Envoy have agreed to establish a working party and early in the new year will conduct a formal review of the naming guidelines and how they are applied.

E-Government

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to support progress in e-government delivery of the Government's targets for public services. [85939]

Mr. Blizzard: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to support progress in using e-government to deliver Government targets for public services. [85942]

Mr. Alexander: In support of our commitment to radical public service reform, we are investing £6 billion over the next three years in e-enablement.

This includes, for example a new commitment to extend broadband connectivity within our education system and major IT enablement in the national health service.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many employees work in the Regulatory Impact Unit. [87606]

Mr. Alexander: As at 2 December 2002 the Regulatory Impact Unit employed a total of 59 staff. This figure is rounded to full time equivalents.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87690]

Mr. Alexander: The Department published progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its departmental report 2002 (CM5429) published in June 2002. The Department's autumn performance report 2002 (CM5732) is due to be published and presented to the House shortly.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Warm Front Programme

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has for publicising the Warm Front Programme to those in receipt of a designated benefit. [86970]

Mr. Morley: Warm Front is the Government's main programme to provide assistance to households in the private sector in England through the provision of a range of measures including heating and insulation to those in receipt of certain benefits.

Warm Front is administered by two Scheme Managers—TXU Warm Front Ltd. and the Eaga Partnership. The Scheme Managers have responsibility for marketing and publicising the scheme and in doing so work in partnership with many organisations. These include local authorities, targeting recipients of council tax and housing benefit, local health and social services providers and other groups in the charity and voluntary sectors.

Mr. Best: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are being taken to improve the performance of the Government's warm front scheme. [86679]

Mr. Morley: Warm front is the Government's main programme to provide assistance to households in the private sector in England through the provision of a range of measures including heating and insulation to those in receipt of certain benefits. Since its launch in June 2000, warm front has provided assistance to over 400,000 households.

We are currently carrying out a review looking at the effectiveness and impact of warm front including consideration of the operation of the scheme including the eligibility criteria and range of measures offered.

Agricultural Waste

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to publish draft regulations on agricultural waste. [87224]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* We are preparing the draft regulations necessary to apply the provisions of the Waste Framework Directive to agricultural waste. A Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) is also being prepared. On completion, the draft regulations and RIA will be issued

for consultation with the farming industry and other interested groups. A firm date for publication of the consultation paper has not yet been set but our aim is to publish it early in the new year. I will ensure that a copy of the consultation paper is sent to the hon. Member when it is issued.

Animal Welfare Bill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Mansfield (Mr. Meale), on 26 November 2002, *Official Report*, c.230–31W, on the Animal Welfare Bill, if she will list those organisations that she or her officials have met to discuss the issue of pheasants in the proposed Animal Welfare Bill; and if she will make a statement on the balance of views of those organisations. [86123]

Mr. Morley: The organisations that have expressed views on the rearing of pheasants and were invited to the stakeholder meetings on the Animal Welfare Bill include:

Animal Defenders
British Association for Shooting and Conservation
Compassion In World Farming
Farm Animal Welfare Council
Game Conservancy Trust
Game Farmers Association
League Against Cruel Sports
National Gamekeepers Organisation
RSPCA
Union of Country Sports Workers

A number of other organisations have given their views on pheasant rearing and husbandry in response to the consultation on the bill.

I am satisfied that I have received a balanced range of views.

Common Agricultural Policy

Mr. Byers: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people received more than £1 million in payments from the Common Agricultural Policy in the last year for which information is available. [86434]

Mr. Morley: In the 12 months ending June 2002, four claimants received more than £1 million each in direct grants and subsidies under the Common Agricultural Policy in England. The payment of direct grants and subsidies in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland was the responsibility of the devolved authorities in that period. In addition, 130 claimants throughout the UK each received payments in excess of £1 million as part of the market support measures of the CAP, such as export refunds, for which traders as well as farmers are eligible. The figures exclude any compensation received for animals slaughtered during the FMD crisis for reasons of disease control or animal health. We are unable to identify the total payments received by any individual or business making applications using more than one name.

Diversification

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, pursuant to her answer of 20 November, Official Report, column 157W, on diversification, when the research study will be published. [85365]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The research study is nearing completion and it is expected that the report will be published early in 2003.

Farmers' Markets

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to promote farmers' markets. [87410]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The Government does recognise that farmers' markets can bring benefits for both producers and consumers. In support of this, there is provision under the England Rural Development Programme and the Agricultural Development Scheme for grants for activities such as the establishment of farmers' markets.

More specifically, to encourage the development of farmers' markets we have:

written to all Local Authorities drawing their attention to the benefits which farmers' markets can bring;

provided funding towards the National Association of Farmers' Markets' training and marketing programme and their accreditation scheme;

sponsored the Local Government Association Guide on Farmers' Markets;

and

provided funding to help with the re-launch of farmers' markets following the foot and mouth crisis.

Food Prices

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average *(a)* farmgate and *(b)* retail price was of (i) one kilogram of (A) beef, (B) lamb, (C) pork, (D) chicken, (E) turkey, (F) bacon, (G) dessert apples, (H) potatoes, (I) tomatoes, (J) cauliflower and (K) peas, (ii) one pint of (A) milk, (B) cream and (C) yoghurt, (iii) one dozen eggs and (iv) one litre of (A) English wine and (B) brandy in (1) 1980, (2) 1985, (3) 1990, (4) 1995 and (5) 2000, distinguishing between (I) organic and (II) conventionally produced foodstuffs. [86309]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: The farmgate and retail prices of conventionally grown foodstuffs, where available, are shown in table 1. Prices are not collected for English wine or brandy. Small quantities of cream and yoghurt are sold at the farmgate direct to consumers at retail prices. The amount of processing taking place between farmgate and retail varies from commodity to commodity; an indication is given in the table. Farmgate prices include produce destined for highly processed food, which is normally lower quality and sells at a lower price. Changes to the level of processing over time will impact on the trends shown within the table.

Prices of organically produced food are only available for 1998 onwards. Indications of farmgate prices in 2000 are shown in table 2, where available, as provided by the Soil Association. There are no retail prices available.

Table 1. Conventionally grown produce

		1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	Indication of further processing
Beef							
Farmgate value[1]	£/kg	1.44	1.67	2.00	2.31	1.69	
Retail value[2]	£/kg	2.21	2.83	3.55	3.82	3.80	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Lamb							
Farmgate value[1]	£/kg	1.28	1.67	1.68	2.28	1.90	
Retail value[2]	£/kg	2.18	2.72	3.17	3.96	4.52	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Pork							
Farmgate value[1]	£/kg	0.87	1.03	1.12	1.20	0.95	
Retail value[2]	£/kg	1.17	1.45	1.84	1.88	2.00	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Chicken							
Farmgate value[3]	£/kg	n/a	0.90	0.87	0.84	0.71	
Retail value[4]	£/kg	1.48	1.76	2.16	2.03	2.23	Slaughtered
Turkey							
Farmgate value[3]	£/kg	n/a	1.41	1.21	1.24	1.30	
Retail value	£/kg	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	Slaughtered
Bacon							
Farmgate value[1]	£/kg	0.87	1.03	1.012	1.20	0.95	
Retail value[2]	£/kg	1.48	1.91	2.50	2.71	3.10	Slaughtered, trimmed and cut
Apples, dessert							
Farmgate value[5]	£/kg	0.26	0.37	0.50	0.44	0.36	
Retail value[6]	£/kg	0.53	0.70	1.04	1.01	1.08	Packing and grading where off farm
Potatoes							
Farmgate value[5]	£/kg	0.05	0.05	0.10	0.19	0.08	
Retail value[7]	£/kg	0.13	0.18	0.33	0.70	0.67	Packing and grading where off farm
Tomatoes							
Farmgate value[5]	£/kg	0.49	0.49	0.70	0.60	0.75	
Retail value[6]	£/kg	0.99	1.06	1.43	1.15	1.50	Packing and grading where off farm
Cauliflower							
Farmgate value[5]	£/kg	0.19	0.21	0.24	0.28	0.24	
Retail value[6]	£/kg	0.22	0.36	0.58	0.62	0.57	Packing and grading where off farm
Peas							
Farmgate value[8]	£/kg	n/a	0.25	0.52	0.45	0.57	
Retail value	£/kg	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	
Milk							
Farmgate value[9]	£/pint	0.07	0.09	0.10	0.14	0.10	
Retail value[6]	£/pint	0.17	0.23	0.31	0.36	0.34	Pasteurised, bottled and delivered
Eggs							
Farmgate value[10]	£ dozen	0.44	0.48	0.54	0.53	0.53	
Retail value[6]	£ dozen	0.68	0.92	1.13	1.31	1.60	Packing and grading where off farm

[1] Source: MLC, Defra
[2] Source: MLC for 2000, other years derived by applying RPI for the item to 2000 value
[3] Average producer price (p/kg carcase weight). Source: Defra
[4] Chicken, roasting, fresh. Source: ONS
[5] Average farmgate prices for 1985–86, 1990–91, 1995–96, 2000–01. Source: Defra
[6] Source: ONS
[7] Old white loose potatoes, not including pre-packed. Source: ONS
[8] Peas, green for market. Source: Defra
[9] Source: MMBs, Defra
[10] Source: Defra

Table 2. Organically grown produce

Farm gate value		2000
Beef	£/kg	2.60
Lamb	£/kg	3.00
Pork	£/kg	2.20
Chicken	£/kg	3.75
Turkey	£/kg	n/a
Bacon	£/kg	n/a
Apples, dessert	£/kg	1.00
Potatoes	£/kg	0.25–0.30
Tomatoes	£/kg	n/a
Cauliflower	£/kg	0.70
Peas	£/kg	2.57
Milk[1]	£/pint	0.16–0.17
Cream	£/pint	n/a
Yoghurt	£/pint	n/a
Eggs	£ dozen	1.40

[1] All milk was sold as organic in 2000. From early 2001, the market for milk became oversupplied and some organic milk was sold into the conventional market.

Notes:
1. n/a—not available.
2. No farm gate values prior to 1998 are available.
3. No retail prices are available

Fish Quotas

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the EU's plans for white fish quotas and their effects on the UK. [87013]

Mr. Morley: The cuts in total allowable catches proposed for 2003 by Commissioner Fischler would correspond, in fisheries which are of critical interest to

the UK industry, to a reduction of 80 per cent. in fishing effort on cod and haddock and of 75 per cent. on whiting. I do agree that we cannot ignore the scientific advice that radical action is needed to prevent the collapse of the cod stocks, but the action proposed would have a devastating effect on our fishing industry. I am determined to negotiate an alternative approach which will give sustainable fishing opportunities to our industry, while still respecting the scientific advice and leading to stock recovery.

Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what further consideration she has given to the recommendation of the report of the Salmon and Freshwater Fisheries Review Group; whether legislation is planned to bring these reconciliations into law; and if she will make a statement. [87141]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer my right hon. Friend to the reply I gave him on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W.

I can confirm that the Government intend to introduce proposals for new salmon and fresh water fisheries legislation to implement the agreed changes when parliamentary time permits.

EU Fisheries Council

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on *(a)* the outcome of the EU Fisheries Council Meeting on fish quotas for 2003 and *(b)* the effect it will have on Northern Ireland's fishing fleet. [87099]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: Total allowable catches and quotas for 2003 are due to be determined at the meeting of the Council of Ministers which started on the 16 December. The Council is likely to last for several days, and I will of course be happy to comment on the outcome when it is known.

Fixed Assets

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total value is of the fixed assets held by her Department, its agencies, non-departmental public bodies and public corporations. [85010]

Margaret Beckett: The total value of the fixed assets held by DEFRA, its agencies, NDPBs and public corporations is £2,625,564,000 (as detailed in the table):

£000

NDPB	*Land and buildings*	*Plant and machinery*	*Total*
Apple and Pear Research Council	0	0	0
British Potato Council	518	129	647
Countryside Agency	3,488	789	4,277
English Nature	3,612	5,202	8,814
Environment Agency	—	—	1,962,211
Home Grown Cereals Authority	0	163	163
Horticultural Development Council	0	52	52
Horticulture Research International	44,982	1,608	46,590
Meat and Livestock Commission	4,649	601	5,250
Milk Development Council	0	41	41
National Forest Company	1,551	0	1,551
Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew	57,386	3,331	60,717
Sea Fish Industry Authority	2,945	524	3,469
Wine Standards Board	0	7	7
Total	119,131	12,447	2,093,789
Total DEFRA and agencies			531,775
			2,625,564

Fluoridation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans there are to fluoridate water supplies in the UK; and what health risks have been identified with fluoridation. [86305]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

We consider that decisions to fluoridate a water supply should be taken locally. We are seeking to ensure that, where a local community wishes to consider this option, they have easily accessible and reliable information on the effects of fluoridation. The only risk that has been identified is that of dental fluorosis or flecking or mottling of the teeth which, where it is judged to be cosmetically unacceptable, can be treated by dental polishing or, in extreme cases, by veneers.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consultation has taken place with relevant groups regarding the fluoridation of water supplies in the UK; and if she will make a statement on her assessment of the impact of fluoridation on oral health. [86307]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

We funded research projects undertaken by the University of York in 1999–2000 and the Medical Research Council in 2001–02, aimed at strengthening the evidence base on fluoridation. Steering groups including consumers, people sceptical about the benefits of fluoridation, doctors, toxicologists and dentists contributed to these projects. The reports concluded that fluoridation achieves a 14.6 per cent. reduction in dental decay and that further research is needed to improve our understanding of this beneficial effect.

Illegal Food Imports

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what quantities of illegal imports of food were found in each of the last three years, broken down by port of entry. [86931]

Mr. Morley: A central database of illegal animal product seizures notified to Defra was set up in April 2001. The database holds details of seizures of illegal imports of products of animal origin, including foodstuffs.

Port of entry	*Weight (kg)*
From April 2001 to March 2002	
Aberdeen	12
Avonmouth	2
Belfast City Airport	11
Belfast International	17
Birmingham Airport	240

Port of entry	*Weight (kg)*
Bristol Airport	1
Cardiff Airport	13
Coventry Sorting Office	238
Dover	2,184
Edinburgh Airport	13
Felixstowe	24,329
Gatwick Airport	18,461
Glasgow Airport	15
Heathrow Airport	12,534
London City Airport	1,106
Luton Airport	207
Manchester Airport	276
Mersey Port	14
Mount Pleasant Sorting Office	155
Newcastle Airport	21
Southampton	48,777
Stansted Airport	65
Teesport	1,689
Teesside Airport	15
Thamesport	3,625
Waterloo International	3
From March 2002 to date	
Aberdeen	117
Belfast City Airport	1,061
Belfast International	327
Birmingham Airport	802
Bristol Airport	41
Coventry Sorting Office	69
Dover	1,642
Edinburgh Airport	482
Felixstowe	9,173
Gatwick Airport	6,828
Grangemouth	10
Heathrow Airport	13,365
Leeds/Bradford Airport	118
Liverpool Airport	241
London City Airport	1,551
Luton Airport	27
Manchester Airport	441
Mersey Port	34
Mount Pleasant Sorting Office	22
Newcastle Airport	14
Norwich Airport	1
Portsmouth	1,338
Rosyth	7
Southampton Port	259
Stansted Airport	128
Teesport	106
Teesside Airport	1
Thamesport	32
Waterloo International	6

Import Controls

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* airports and *(b)* seaports there are, broken down by region at which her Department has responsibility for import controls. [86576]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: Responsibility for setting policy on import controls at all airports and seaports for animals and plants and their products, and live fish from non-EU countries, lies with Defra and the devolved administrations.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced in the House on 6 November, responsibility for anti-smuggling controls is to transfer to Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, as soon as is practicable. Currently the responsibilities for execution and enforcement of import controls are as set out below.

The State Veterinary Service, part of Defra, is responsible for executing checks and enforcement of the rules at border inspection posts (BIPs) through which only those products referred to in Annex I of Council Directive 92/118/EEC which are not intended for human consumption; or live animals are introduced into the UK. There are 16 BIPs approved for this purpose—five airports and six seaports in England, and two airports and three seaports in Scotland.

Each local authority is responsible for executing the import checks rules within its area for products of animal origin other than those products mentioned above. These are carried out at approved BIPs as set out below:

England	18 ports	5 airports
Wales	1 port	
Scotland	4 ports	1 airport
Northern Ireland	1 port	1 airport

Local authorities are also responsible for enforcing the import rules in their areas, whether they include BIPs or not.

Responsibility for checks to protect plant health of imported plants and plant produce lies with Defra's Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate at all airports and seaports in England and Wales.

Insecticides

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations prevent gardeners from manufacturing home-made insecticides for use in their own gardens; and if she will make a statement. [86487]

Mr. Morley: All pesticides used in this country, including those used in domestic gardens, must first be approved by Ministers. Approval is then only granted provided thorough scientific evaluation shows that they can be used safely.

I am, however, aware that there are some gardeners who like to use home garden remedies to protect their plants. The Department does not however condone the promotion of such use either by individuals, organisations or the media.

Landfill

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the *(a)* number and *(b)* total size is of planned landfill sites in the United Kingdom; and when each is expected to begin operations, broken down by region. [85893]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: Waste Strategy 2000 recognises that landfill will still have a role to play in any sustainable waste management system, but that it will be a much smaller role.

Local authorities should take into account the landfill diversion targets required by the landfill directive to reduce the landfilling of biodegradable waste across the United Kingdom by around two-thirds in line with the

timetable set out in the directive (i.e. by 2016, should the UK decide not to take advantage of the final four-year derogation) and the recycling and recovery targets set out in WS2000.

Information on the number of planned landfill sites is not available centrally.

Packaging Waste

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment her Department has made of the viability of enforcing greater use of *(a)* biodegradable plastic bottles and *(b)* plastic bottles which can be crushed down once empty. [86022]

Mr. Meacher: Substitutes for plastic made from potato starch have been developed and are being used for some types of packaging by some retailers. Such material is entirely biodegradable and can be composted.

A number of companies are marketing degradable plastics technology and products manufactured from these materials. These new materials are based on modified plastics manufactured from mineral oil and still have to be sent for recycling after use. We do strongly support the development of biodegradable plastics made from non-fossil sources, providing these will actually be composted and not sent to landfill.

Plastic bottles which can be crushed down once empty are useful, particularly in terms of saving space in household bins. We are looking at ways to encourage this.

Ministerial Speeches

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what speeches *(a)* she and *(b)* Departmental ministerial colleagues have made since 23rd July to external organisations, stating in each case whether the speech is publicly available; and if she will place in the Library copies of those speeches not hitherto publicly available. [82852]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* All Defra Ministers make a number of speeches every week and so it would only be at disproportionate cost that a fully comprehensive list could be assembled. However a list has previously been placed in the library of the House which shows the principal keynote speeches made by DEFRA Ministers from 7 June 2001 to 1 June 2002. Some of these are available on the DEFRA website (as are other, more minor speeches) and, where possible, the others are available upon request although generally not in an 'as delivered' format.

Secretary of State

Date	*Speech*
12 September 2002	European Parliament Temporary Committee
17 September 2002	Launch of the Plant Atlas
18 September 2002	Environmental Services Association third Environmental Conference
20 September 2002	Ribble Valley Millennium Link
21 October 2002	Meat and Livestock Commission Dinner, SIAL
23 October 2002	2002 Silver Lapwing Award
24 October 2002	Launch of England Biodiversity Strategy
6 November 2002	Foreign Policy CentreCAP reform
14 November 2002	Combined Heat and Power Association National Conference
19 November 2002	Darwin Initiative Phase II Launch
20 November 2002	Speech to Parliament Press Gallery
25 November 2002	Outcome of Johannesburg Summit
26 November 2002	Warm Homes Week

Michael Meacher

Date	*Speech*
17 September 2002	UCL Conference
19 September 2002	Water UK
25 September 2002	Defra Conference
26 September 2002	ENVEC (recorded)
10 October 2002	European Environment Bureau
14 October 2002	Soil Association Conference
18 October 2002	Nuclear Free Local Authorities Conference
4 November 2002	RIIA Seminar
5 November 2002	LARAC Conference
6 November 2002	DEMOS Seminar
14 November 2002	Defra Conference
15 November 2002	Country Land and Business Association Conference
20 November 2002	Magistrates Association Conference

Elliot Morley

Date	*Speech*
2 September 2002	Wildlife Trust Conference
18 September 2002	Royal Association of British Dairy Farmers Dairy Show
19 September 2002	Timber Trade Federation Annual Conference
11 October 2002	Open Wash Banks Flood Alleviation
16 October 2002	Economist Water Conference
17 October 2002	Launch of CAWC Report
24 October 2002	Cold Water Prawn Forum
28 October 2002	National Flood Forum
4 November 2002	Abbots Hall Farm
6 November 2002	Launch of Pets for North America

Lord Whitty

Date	*Speech*
31 July 2002	Sheep 2002
2 September 2002	Dorset Chamber of Commerce
12 September 2002	Learning to last Conference by Learning Skills and Development Agency
19 September 2002	Congress of European Agriculture
21 October 2002	TGWU Food and Agriculture Conference
25 October 2002	Food From Britain Reception
29 October 2002	Association of Parliamentary Food and Health Forum Conference
30 October 2002	David Black Awards
31 October 2002	Women's Food and Farming Union
31 October 2002	Meat and Livestock Commission Catering Sector Conference
12 November 2002	National Food Assurance Conference

Alun Michael

Date	*Speech*
23 July 2002	Countryside Agency Launch
24 July 2002	Sustainable Development evening
25 July 2002	Launch of Defra-led Magic Project
26 July 2002	Shooting Seminar CLA Game Fair
5 September 2002	National Conference on Rural Stress
12 September 2002	Launch of the National Training Strategy for Town and Parish Councils
18 September 2002	Association of National Park Authorities' Annual Conference
30 October 2002	Climbing Mountains
31 October 2002	Urban Summit-Rural Urban Linkages
5 November 2002	National Village Halls Forum AGM

Alun Michael

Date	*Speech*
6 November 2002	British Horse Society Awards
8 November 2002	Visit to Groundwork Project
8 November 2002	Fourth Rural Affairs Forum
9 November 2002	Rural Affairs Conference
12 November 2002	Second National Angling Summit
15 November 2002	Launch of the Institute of Air Quality Management

Recycling (Agricultural Waste)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on what basis she provides funding to assist a business in England proposing to recycle agricultural film waste; and what account she will take of recycling facilities in Scotland when reaching such a decision. [87219]

Mr. Meacher: We do not provide funding specifically for the development of schemes to recycle agricultural film waste. The Rural Development Service may consider funding under ERDP for a particular scheme on the basis of an application put to them. All relevant factors would be taken into account in considering any application that is made, including recycling facilities in Scotland.

Animal Welfare (Sows)

Mr. Russell Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment the Department has made of the effect on expectant and nursing sows of being kept in farrowing crates; and whether the Government plans to ban the use of farrowing crates. [86583]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 11 December 2002]*: We have, for a number of years, funded research directly or indirectly related to the welfare of the sow and her piglets, from farrowing to weaning. Part of this research has been directed towards determining which aspects of confinement in farrowing crates could, potentially, cause frustration in pregnant and lactating sows. A key issue emerging is that changes in farrowing systems to improve sow welfare can frequently have an adverse effect on the welfare of the piglets. As a result, we are not yet able unreservedly to recommend free-farrowing systems for widespread commercial adoption.

Our research, and that of others, continues. Our aim is to reach a position where it is possible to avoid the close confinement of all sows.

Sustainable Energy

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with the Department of Trade and Industry on promoting sustainable energy sources; and if she will make a statement. [87133]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is in regular contact with the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry on a wide range of matters that affect the business of both their Departments. Sustainable energy sources are amongthe issues that have been discussed at those meetings.

Water Supplies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures are in place to ensure that medication cannot be administered in the UK's waters supplies. [86306]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

Regulations 25–28 of the Water Supply (Water Quality) Regulations 1989 (as amended) require water undertakers to only use substances and products in the treatment and supply of drinking water which have been approved by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. She is advised by the Committee on Products and Processes for Use in Public Water Supply, which is an advisory non-departmental public body.

TRANSPORT

West Coast Main Line

12. **John Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what action he is taking to improve rail links to the west of Scotland. [85912]

Mr. Jamieson: The west coast upgrade will increase the frequency of InterCity services to Glasgow from September 2004 and reduce journey times.

Bus Services

13. **Annette Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent changes have *(a)* recently taken place and *(b)* are planned to bus subsidies provided by his Department. [85913]

Mr. Spellar: We have recently extended Bus Service Operators Grant (formerly called fuel duty rebate) to many community transport services and introduced a 100 per cent. fuel duty rebate on biodiesel. We are considering ways of applying this grant to scheduled coach services in 2003–04 in return for half-fare concessions for older and disabled passengers. Our Bus Subsidy Review is considering whether any further changes to subsidy mechanisms will help to achieve our policy objectives for bus services, which include increasing patronage, modal shift and promoting social inclusion.

14. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what conclusions he has reached on the future use of fuel duty rebate to support public bus services. [85914]

Mr. Jamieson: Our Bus Subsidy Review is currently considering whether any changes to fuel duty rebate will help to achieve our policy objectives for bus services, which include increasing patronage, modal shift and promoting social inclusion. The review will report its conclusions to Ministers by February 2003.

20. **Dr. Starkey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what response he will be giving to the report of the Commission for Integrated Transport on Public Subsidy for the Bus Industry. [85920]

Mr. Jamieson: We welcome the report of the Commission for Integrated Transport on Public Subsidy for the Bus Industry. We will consider our response as part of my Department's Review of Bus Subsidies.

22. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people used buses in England in the last year for which figures are available. [85922]

Mr. Jamieson: In 2001, according to data from the National Travel Survey, 58 per cent. of household residents in England used local buses at least once a year and 27 per cent. used them at least once a week.

Bus passenger journeys in England increased by one per cent. in 2001–02 compared to 2000–01, with £3.8 billion journeys in all.

Rail Services (Wales)

15. **Hywel Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority regarding the Wales rail franchise, and in particular the service on the Cambrian coast line. [85915]

Mr. Spellar: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet the chair and chief executive of the Strategic Rail Authority on a regular basis; and discuss a range of issues.

19. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he last met the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) to discuss rail services *(a)* to and *(b)* within Wales. [85919]

Mr. Jamieson: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet the Chairman and Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority on a regular basis and discuss a range of issues.

Capital Investment

16. **Mr. Stunell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on projected future levels of capital investment under the *(a)* Department for Transport and *(b)* Strategic Rail Authority 10-year plans for (i) railways, (ii) roads, (iii) multimodal studies and (iv) local transport. [85916]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport is today publishing a progress report on the 10-year investment plan. As well as describing the considerable progress that has been made during the first 18 months of the 10-year plan, this will also set out our plans for investment in all transport modes for the remainder of the decade.

Airport Development

17. **Mr. Andrew Mitchell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the impact on Sutton Coldfield of the proposed airport expansion at *(a)* Birmingham airport and *(b)* Rugby. [85917]

Mr. Jamieson: The potential impacts of Midlands' airport development options have been assessed against a range of local and national indicators, including economic benefits and environmental costs.

In general terms, development at Birmingham airport may result in increased aircraft noise for Sutton Coldfield, but could also generate additional jobs. The Rugby option assumes the closure of Birmingham,so the converse is likely to be true.

Cliffe Airport

21. **Mr. Francois:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to consult residents in southern Essex in relation to the proposals to build a new airport at Cliffe. [85921]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November 2002 that the consultation on airports capacity will be extended until we have consulted on proposals in respect of Gatwick. My right hon. Friend made it absolutely clear to the House that it is open for anyone in the country to respond to the consultation.

Those who have already responded to the consultation will be able to amend, add to, or replace their response having considered the new document. We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process, including how to inform respondents, when we publish the further consultation paper in the new year.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, pursuant to his answer of 9 December 2002 (ref 86522) if he will explain his plans for the consultation process in the new year to the public meeting on Canvey Island. [87286]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* As I set out in my previous answer to the hon. Member on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 29–30W, we will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process when we publish the further consultation in the new year.

Air Safety and Security

23. **Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on plans to improve safety *(a)* at airports and *(b)* on board aircraft. [85923]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government, the Civil Aviation Authority and the aviation industry as a whole work together at all times to maintain the present high safety and security standards at UK airports and on board aircraft using our airports. These standards are monitored and further improvements made wherever appropriate.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve security checks on aircraft crews; and if he will make a statement. [87503]

Mr. Jamieson: Under arrangements being brought in next year, UK aircrew will be subject to five-year reference and criminal record checking. We have already ordered that a study be carried out into the benefits to security of conducting additional checks on crews, balanced against the practicalities of undertaking them. This study will be completed early in the New Year.

Railway Stations

24. **Michael Fabricant:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the progress of the upgrading of railway stations following Railtrack's entering receivership. [85924]

Mr. Jamieson: Railtrack's arrangements for upgrading railway stations relate to like for like replacements. These have not been affected by Railtrack being taken into administration. The Strategic Rail Authority operate several schemes with other partners to improve the quality and facilities at stations.

Regional Transport Strategies

25. **Mrs. Ellman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps is he taking to ensure that transport strategies support regional economic regeneration. [85925]

Mr. Jamieson: Our national planning policy guidance on regional planning clearly states that Regional Transport Strategies, produced as part of Regional Planning Guidance, should inform and support the Regional Economic Strategies being developed by Regional Development Agencies.

My Department is committed to working closely with RDAs, in conjunction with Regional Planning Bodies, in the development of these strategies and in identifying transport improvements that will support economic regeneration in all regions. Last week, for instance, we announced a major package of improvements to tackle congestion on the country's strategic highway network, helping to support business competitiveness.

M6/M56

27. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to announce the Government's decision on the options for improving the link between the M6 and the M56. [85927]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of States response to the West Midlands to North West Multi Modal Study recently instructed the Highways Agency to provide further advice on alternative options for improving connections between the M6 and the M56. That advice is expected early in 2003, following which he will consider his decision.

Transport Costs

28. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the implications for his transport policy of the relative changes in the cost of travelling by *(a)* car, *(b)* rail and *(c)* bus since 1997. [85928]

Mr. Jamieson: Development of policies in the 10-year plan has been informed by extensive modelling using the National Transport Model and its forebears. This modelling takes account of the best data we have on how demand for different transport modes varies with respect to the overall cost of using those modes.

Airports (Transport Links)

29. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his assessment is of the priorities for improvements in public transport to airports in the south-east of England. [85929]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are committed to improving access to airports by public transport. This is a key component in the ongoing consultation on "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom". Comments received will be considered carefully before final decisions are taken on the policies for the air transport White Paper, to be published next year.

Road Deaths

30. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his strategy to reduce the number of deaths on the road. [85931]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are fully committed to meeting or beating its casualty reduction targets for 2010 as set out in "Tomorrow's roads—safer for everyone". Total deaths and serious injuries in 2001 were 15 per cent. down from the baseline for the 40 per cent. target reduction. Child deaths and serious injuries in 2001 were 27 per cent. down from their baseline—and thus over halfway towards their 50 per cent. target reduction.

Aviation Industry (Environmental Impact)

31. **Mr. Borrow:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the work his Department is undertaking to reduce the environmental impact of the aviation industry. [85932]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Transport on behalf of the United Kingdom is a leading participant in international bodies dealing with the environmental impact of the aviation industry, including the Committee on Aviation Environmental Protection (CAEP) of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

For example, the phase-out of most 'Chapter 2' jet aircraft, completed in March 2002, has produced significant reductions in noise around mature airports. The UK has been and remains at the forefront of states pressing for stringent certification rules for both noise and atmospheric emissions.

Trunk Roads

32. **Dr. Murrison:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received on the state of trunk roads. [85933]

Mr. Jamieson: I regularly receive representations from a wide range of organisations and individuals on the state of trunk and local roads.

Manchester Metrolink

33. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the next phase of the Manchester tram system to be open. [85934]

Mr. Jamieson: My right hon. Friend announced his confirmation of funding approval for the third phase of Manchester Metrolink on 10 December. It is expected to be fully operational by 2010.

Norwich/Liverpool Street Rail Line

34. **Norman Lamb:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the capacity of the Norwich to Liverpool street rail line. [85935]

Mr. Jamieson: On 6 November the Strategic Rail Authority confirmed their intention to create a new "Greater Anglia" franchise, combining the services of the three current operators into Liverpool street. Provision of capacity into London Liverpool street will be a key issue for the new franchise to address.

Road Improvements (Yorkshire)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include the provision of a bypass on the A614 for the village of Middleton-on-the-Wolds in the further studies on road improvements in Yorkshire, announced on 10 December 2002. [87383]

Mr. Spellar: Any proposal for a bypass for the village of Middleton-on-the-Wolds would be for the local highway authority, to promote through its Local Transport Plan. The proposal would then be considered on its merits.

Fatal Accidents (School Children)

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will meet the Environment Secretary in the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the implications of the recent fatal accidents involving school children travelling home from school on a scheduled bus service. [87384]

Mr. Jamieson: It would be inappropriate to meet the Environmental Secretary in the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the implications of the fatal accident near Cowbridge on 3 December 2002 in the immediate future, while there is an on-going Police investigation into it. I am not aware of there having been any other recent fatal accidents involving school children on scheduled bus services.

General Lighthouse Authorities

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what were the *(a)* role, *(b)* terms of reference and *(c)* annual budget of (i) the Trinity House Lighthouse Authority and (ii) The Commission for Irish Lights in each year since 1997. [87597]

Mr. Jamieson: The role and terms of reference of the General Lighthouse Authorities (GLA) are set out in the Merchant Shipping Act 1995 as amended. This requires them to provide marine aids to general navigation in their respective areas, adjacent seas and islands. The Trinity House Lighthouse Service is the GLA for England, Wales and the Channel Islands and Gibraltar. The Commissioners for Irish Lights is the GLA for Northern Ireland. Under the Republic of Ireland Merchant Shipping Act 1894 as amended, CIL is also the GLA for the Republic. The GLAs deliver services in accordance with international standards agreed by the International Association of Marine Aids to Navigation and Lighthouse Authorities. All three GLAs submit annual Corporate Plans for approval by the Secretary of State.

The annual budget spend from 1997/98 to 2002/03 is set out in the table.

£000

	Trinity House Lighthouse Service	*Commissioners of Irish Lights*
1997–98	29,187	13,775
1998–99	29,362	13,401
1999–2000	28,587	13,701
2000–01	30,364	15,077
2001–02	30,203	16,168
2002–03	31,998	16,034

M25

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will place in the Library a copy of the full report on the assessment by the Transport Research Laboratory of the controlled motorway project on the M25. [87268]

Mr. Jamieson: A full report on the assessment of the controlled motorway project on the M25 is expected to be placed in the Library in late autumn 2003.

Rail Services (Northern England)

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what plans he has to improve the rail services between Liverpool and Manchester serving parts of the Wigan borough; [87245]

(2) when he expects the Strategic Rail Authority to publish the structure of the franchise to run rail services in the north of England. [87242]

Mr. Jamieson: Wigan is currently served by the First North Western franchise. The SRA is planning to combine services currently operated by First North Western and Arriva Trains Northern to form new Transpennine Express (TPE) and Northern franchises. TPE will run inter-city services across the north, including between Liverpool and Manchester. Northern will operate rural and urban services. The SRA expects to issue documentation about the structure of the Northern franchise early in 2003.

Information about the franchise replacement programme and the composition of franchises can be found on the Strategic Rail Authority's website at www.sra.gov.uk

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what consultation he plans to have with hon. Members on the structure of the new franchise for services and stations in the north of England. [87640]

Mr. Jamieson: It is primarily for the Strategic Rail Authority to determine the structure of franchises. As a matter of course, the Authority consults during the replacement process—including with local authorities, Passenger Transport Executives, RegionalAssemblies and the Rail Passengers Committees.

Railways (Arson)

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many incidences of arson on the railways there were in each year since 1995, broken down by *(a)* train operating company and *(b)* line. [87629]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive's Annual Report on the safety record of the railways in Great Britain contains details of arson on the railways. Copies are available from the House Libraries. The 2001–02 report will be published on 18 December 2002.

The HSE is unable to provide information on the train operating company and line involved in arson incidences, as these details are not recorded as part of the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, 1995 (RIDDOR).

Road Transport

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what progress he has made in implementing the Government's 10-year transport plan in respect of road transport. [85918]

Mr. Jamieson: The Secretary of State is today publishing a progress report that sets out the progress that has been made with road transport. A copy of the report will be placed in the House Library.

Road Maintenance

Mr. Rendel: If he will make a statement on the role of his Department in tackling the backlog of road maintenance on the road network. [85926]

Mr. Jamieson: There is no backlog in maintenance on the motorway and trunk road network.

The Government are committed to halting the deterioration in local road condition by 2004, and to eliminating the backlogs in carriageway, footway, bridge and street lighting maintenance by 2010. Over £30 billion for local road maintenance is being provided over the timescale of the 10 Year Transport Plan, 23 per cent. more in real terms than the previous 10 years.

Maritime Control Agency

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the seagoing qualifications and experience, including period in command of vessels on international voyages, of each individual named on the job structure accompanying the Maritime Control Agency's Business Plan 2002–03 and Forward Look. [87566]

Mr. Jamieson: It would be inappropriate to list individual civil servants and their qualifications. However, of the individuals named on the organisational chart accompanying the MCA Business Plan 2002–03, there are:

six who hold a Master Mariners Certificate and have served on ships trading internationally;

five who have a degree in Naval Architecture;

eight who are Qualified Marine Engineers; and

two who served in the Royal Navy.

Between them they have approximately 150 years of seagoing experience.

Tramways

Ross Cranston: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the requirements placed on potential operators of light tramway systems in obtaining a licence to operate on little-used railway branch lines with special reference to the Stourbridge to Stourbridge Junction line. [87307]

Mr. Jamieson: Where a light rail or tram scheme is proposed which would need to share track access with the heavy rail network, it will need to satisfy the requirements of relevant railway group standards (save in the case of the Great Central Railway). Where the line is no longer used for heavy rail, however, HMRI would be the sole approval body as with other tramway schemes.

I understand that it is proposed that the Parry People Mover will operate on shared track between Stourbridge junction and Stourbridge town centre. For this to be permissible it would need to meet Railway Group standards.

British Transport Police

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what discussions he has had with train operating companies on additional funding for British Transport Police since 11 September 2001. [87101]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* There have been no discussions between the Secretary of State for Transport and the train operating companies, but the Secretary of State has discussed policing matters with the Chief Constable of the British Transport Police.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many uniformed officers are deployed to police the London Underground system. [87102]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The deployment of the British Transport Police (BTP) is an operational matter for the Chief Constable. The BTP have advised me that they have budgeted for a total of 471 officers within their London Underground area, and that 413 of these are allocated to uniformed duties. 383 uniformed officers are currently deployed to police the London Underground.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

HIV/AIDS

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress she has made with HIV/AIDS education within African school curriculum projects supported by her Department. [87170]

Clare Short: DFID is working with development partners to ensure that HIV is mainstreamed throughout education systems, plans and interventions in all African countries where we are providing education support. This includes working directly with

Ministries of Education to ensure that school curricula address HIV and AIDS in a manner that is gender-sensitive and relevant to students.

We are also making progress by piloting targeted school-based HIV prevention programmes—the Nigeria Extended Life Planning Education Project is one such initiative.

DFID is also supporting innovative programmes in Southern Africa, using multiple media such as radio drama, pamphlets and cartoon books to communicate about HIV prevention. We are supporting Soul City on a regional initiative to provide materials on HIV/AIDS to all 12 to 16-year-olds in Botswana, Namibia, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Republic of the Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what funds the Government of the Republic of Congo has made available for *(a)* prevention and *(b)* treatment of HIV/AIDS. [87169]

Clare Short: We have no current information on the level of funding being made available by the Government for the prevention and treatment of HIV/AIDS.

Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many meetings she has had with *(a)* companies, *(b)* governments and *(c)* new governmental organisations regarding the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative since the World Summit on Sustainable Development. [87212]

Clare Short: The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative team hosted the first UK stakeholders' meeting on 26 November. Forty participants attended with approximately equal representation from extractive companies, investors, international agencies, NGOs and other UK Government departments.

Many other bilateral meetings have taken place with other Government officials, companies and NGOs to raise awareness of the initiative. In addition, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative was presented at the launch workshop of the World bank's research into the Governance of Natural Resources, held in Paris, 9–10 December.

An international meeting will take place on 11–12 February to draw in wider, international support for the initiative and to discuss the substance of mechanisms to make transparency a reality. This will be followed by a ministerial-level conference in April 2003.

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to her answer to the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 530W, if she will list the principles underpinning the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. [87221]

Clare Short: The draft principles adopted by the stakeholders meeting which we hosted on 26 November are as follows:

We recognise that revenues from natural resources should be an important engine for economic growth, social development and poverty eradication, but, if not managed properly, can create negative economic and social impacts.

We recognise that the benefits of resource extraction occur as revenue streams over many years and that, although highly price dependent, a public understanding of current and future revenue streams would help inform the choice of appropriate and realistic development options.

We support the principle and practice of accountability for the stewardship of revenue streams—from their receipt to their eventual end use.

We are committed to honest, legal and transparent behaviour.

We support the principle and practise of financial transparency—as a necessary condition for good governance.

We believe that a comprehensive, consistent and workable approach to the disclosure of payments and revenues is required.

In seeking solutions, we believe that all stakeholders have important and relevant contributions to make—including host and home governments, multilateral organisations, regulatory agencies, financial and lending organisations, non-governmental organisations and industry.

We commit to develop effective mechanisms to achieve transparency of payments and revenues in the extractive industries. This will entail disclosure by oil, gas and mining companies of tax and non-tax payments to host country governments and government-linked entities, and transparency by governments over revenues from this sector. We encourage other Governments, national and multinational extractive companies and other interested parties to join us to develop effective and lasting solutions.

Burundi

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department has taken to support the Transitional Government of Burundi since November 2001. [87148]

Clare Short: We are supporting the full implementation of the Arusha agreement on Burundi and the Transitional National Government, including through financial support for the peace facilitation process and for the costs of the South African security deployment in Burundi. We continue to work energetically in the international community including at the recent Donors Round Table Conference in Geneva to carry forward the Arusha agreement. We are playing an active role in encouraging international financial institutions to re-engage in Burundi, and are increasing our development assistance—including a $1 million contribution to the Burundi Multidonor Debt Trust Fund. We have posted a full-time DFID representative to Bujumbura to facilitate this increased activity.

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps her Department will be taking to support the recent peace agreement between the Transitional Government of Burundi and rebel group the FDD and to encourage peace talks between the Transitional Government of Burundi and rebel group the FNL. [87149]

Clare Short: We are actively engaged with our international partners in considering how we should respond to the proposed African Mission to support the Dar es Salaam ceasefire agreement with the FDD. We are also in discussion with the Transitional National Government on their security sector reform needs to support the agreement. We are working closely with the FCO and international partners to help the facilitation efforts of the South Africans, Tanzanians, Ugandans and Gabonese to continue efforts to get the FNL to sign the ceasefire.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what correspondence she has had with the Government of Burundi regarding alleged human rights violations against children held in detention centres; and if she will make a statement. [87171]

Clare Short: I have not had any correspondence with the Government of Burundi on this issue. According to the latest statistics published by UNICEF and Libejeun (a local NGO) there are currently 199 children in Burundian prisons.

Conditions appear to be well below international minimum standards. However, considerable improvements have been noted by Amnesty International and the ICRC over the last two to three years in prisons where ICRC have been paying monitoring visits and installing water and sanitation equipment. We are providing financial support to the ICRC programmes in Burundi and elsewhere in the Great Lakes. Our embassy continues to monitor the situation.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Ann McKechin: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the Final Report of the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [87050]

Clare Short: We broadly welcome the final report of the UN Panel of Experts, which contains some important recommendations aimed at ensuring that the Democratic Republic of Congo's natural resources are used for the benefit of all its people. However we believe that it contains significant inaccuracies and some allegations on which there is no evidence. We and other members of the Security Council have asked for further information from the panel on the claims contained within it. The panel's mandate expired when it submitted its final report, and there is currently no mechanism or process in place to take forward their work. We are working on a draft Security Council Resolution to resolve this administrative problem.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what percentage of her Department's budget was spent on *(a)* reproductive health and *(b)* HIV/AIDS in (i) 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [87052]

Clare Short: Figures for HIV/AIDS related activities which includes reproductive health activities, for the last three financial years are set out in the table.

HIV/AIDS activities as percentage of DFID bilateral programme

£ million

	1999–2000	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
HIV/AIDS related expenditure	75.7	124.9	206.6
Annual bilateral programme	1,323.9	1,414.8	1,506.2
Percentage of total programme	6%	9%	14%

The above data combine projects that have been marked against the Reproductive Health Services and HIV/AIDS policy markers. Increasingly, DFID is helping to tackle HIV/AIDS within the context of large sexual and reproductive health programmes and sustainable health systems development. In these circumstances, it is often difficult to attribute spend to particular aspects of sexual and reproductive health. For example, provision of condoms serves the dual purposes of HIV/AIDS prevention and protection against other sexually transmitted infections as well as family planning. We strongly believe that a cross-sectoral approach to tackling HIV/AIDS is essential if we are to be successful. The International Development Committee share this view. This does, however, pose problems of attribution.

Education

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what contributions to the Education for All action plan she expects to make in the next five years. [87431]

Clare Short: Our forecast support for basic education amounts to £1.3 billion over the next five years, either through education sector support or direct budget support. Of this, about £500 million will go to Africa and £800 million to Asia. A substantial proportion will go to low income countries included within the Fast Track Initiative, notably to the five high population countries with large numbers of children out of school (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, DRC) which the Government successfully pressed to have included in the initiative. These spending figures are forecasts, not targets or commitments, and depend on agreeing high quality programmes with our partners.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is the total volume of food aid *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the EU has delivered to Ethiopia in 2002; and on what dates that food arrived in Ethiopia. [87476]

Clare Short: My Department has provided 4,887 Mts of food aid through the World Food Programme and 6,400 Mts through Save the Children (UK) in 2002. In both cases, food was drawn down from the Emergency Food Security Reserve (EFSR) and distributed immediately following our commitment. Both organisations subsequently purchased food locally. WFP paid back into the EFSR in September and SC(UK) will complete repayment this week.

We understand that the EU has so far provided 99,800 Mts of food aid in 2002. Of the 99,800 Mts, 22,800 Mts was delivered through the World Food Programme. We are told that it is difficult to produce actual delivery dates as the 99,800 Mts was purchased

locally. A further 22,800 Mts will be delivered by the end of December. DFID contributes almost 20 per cent. of the cost of EU assistance.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what volume of food *(a)* her Department and *(b)* the EU has pledged to Ethiopia for 2003; and when she expects these food deliveries to arrive in Ethiopia. [87477]

Clare Short: In addition to the 11,287 Mts of food aid we provided in 2002, we have just approved the provision of 2,577 Mts of supplementary food aid through CARE International for 2003 for 286,300 vulnerable people in East and West Hararghe zones. It is expected that this will be delivered in the first two months of 2003. We are keeping the situation in Ethiopia under continuous review and are considering the provision of further food aid for 2003.

On 9 December, in response to the December Emergency Appeal, the European Union announced the provision of 260,000 Mts of food aid for Ethiopia in 2003. We understand that they expect that this will be delivered in March-April 2003. DFID contributes almost 20 per cent. of the cost of EU assistance.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the level of Ethiopia's food deficits for the first quarter of 2003. [87478]

Clare Short: In the Joint UN/Government of Ethiopia Appeal, which was launched on 7 December, it was indicated that the food needs for Ethiopia in the first quarter of 2003 would be 410,809 MT.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what was discussed at the meeting of the EU's General Affairs and External Relations Council on 9 and 10 December regarding Ethiopia. [87479]

Clare Short: Ethiopia was not discussed at the GAERC on 9–10 December despite it being on the agenda. However, in response to the Government of Ethiopia/UN Appeal on 9 December the Commission announced a new emergency food aid programme worth £70 million, which is equivalent to 260,000 metric tonnes of cereals.

Gambia

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on recent levels of malnutrition among children in Gambia. [87172]

Clare Short: The most recent figures for levels of malnutrition in The Gambia that we are aware of, come from a nutritional survey carried out in October 2002 by the World Food Programme (WFP), in collaboration with other agencies, in 29 villages. This found levels of acute malnutrition among children surveyed to be 11.2 per cent. Children in the age group between 12 and 23 months were found to be worst affected.

Landmines (Angola)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact she estimates landmines are having on humanitarian efforts in the Mavinga region of Angola. [85878]

Clare Short: On 2 December, a vehicle belonging to Medicins Sans Frontieres (MSF) working on an emergency relief project in the southeastern region of Mavinga, funded in part by DFID, was blown up by a mine resulting in the deaths of 7 people, and the wounding of 6 others. As a result of this tragic incident, MSF have stated their intention to reduce their humanitarian activities in the area—one of the worst affected in Angola. Relief agencies in Angola state that landmines continue to restrict the delivery of humanitarian assistance.

According to the UN Office for the Co-ordination of Human Affairs (OCHA), Angola is one of the most heavily mined countries in the world. As many as 70,000 Angolans are believed to have lost limbs as a result of landmine explosions. My Department has allocated US$ 459,000 to UNDP for a project aimed at improving the effectiveness of mine action through strengthened coordination and planning at the provincial level in Angola. We will also be contributing 19.7 per cent. of the €6 million which the EC has recently made available for mine action in Angola. This includes 5 million for a variety of mine-clearance agencies.

Nigeria

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the fairness of political party registration in Nigeria; and what impact the registration of political parties in Nigeria has made on the country's transition to democracy. [87173]

Clare Short: The Supreme Court ruling of 21 November 2002 upheld the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) right to set guidelines for the registration of political parties, but held that these guidelines could not impose requirements in excess of those set out in the constitution. As a result, 22 new political parties have now been registered, bringing the total to 28. Though the initial ruling by INEC was exclusive, the court system was used to good effect by the excluded parties to ensure a much broader participation. Thus, while the courts ruled that INEC was not 'fair' to have excluded parties in the first place, the system as a whole can be judged to have been fair.

The registration of the additional parties will cause administrative difficulties, but it could have a beneficial impact, allowing more people to become involved in politics, and could increase the likelihood that parties will form on issue-based platforms. However the full impact of the registration of 22 new parties is yet to be felt. My Department is working closely with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to monitor developments.

Primary Education

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries increased

funding for primary education over the next five years will be spent and how; and how much of this will be spent in World bank Fast Track countries. [87569]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Clydebank and Milngavie on 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 15–16W).

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list for her Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87698]

Clare Short: My department publishes progress against all our outstanding Public Service Agreement targets in our Departmental Report (published in April 2002) and our Autumn Performance Report (published in October 2002). These are available at www.dfid.gov.uk.

Sub-Saharan Africa (Health Care)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money was spent on healthcare services per person last year in sub-Saharan Africa. [87088]

Clare Short: Latest figures available in the World Bank's publication "World Development Indicators 2002, Table 2.15 Health expenditure, services and use" shows $41 of health expenditure per capita in Sub Saharan Africa. This includes public and private health expenditure, plus for some countries, external sources (mainly foreign assistance).

DEFENCE

Ambulances

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many ambulances are available to each armed service; and how many of these are air conditioned. [87685]

Dr. Moonie: The Army and the Royal Marines have 768 battlefield ambulances (BFA) and 68 armoured ambulances. At present, all the armoured ambulances, and 43 of the BFA are fitted with air conditioning units (ACU). Units are also able to convert the FV 432 and BV 206 vehicles for use as ambulances as and when appropriate. These are not air conditioned.

The RAF has 28 BFA and 55 trauma management vehicles for crash rescue on airfields. These are not air conditioned.

In addition to ambulances, the Ministry of Defence has 109 coaches with an ambulance role, which are not air conditioned.

Ammunition

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what types and tonnage of ammunitions were brought into the United Kingdom by his Department in the last 12 months. [86564]

Dr. Moonie: During the past 12 months, the following types of ammunition have been brought into the United Kingdom as a result of overseas procurement:

7.62 mm BALL, 21 mm Rocket System, 21 mm Training System, 0.5 4B/IT, 338 inch (various), 12.7 mm IMP, 5.56 mm AP, 9 mm (various), 66 mm, Goalkeeper FMPDS, 14.5 mm Artillery Training L21A1 (Charge), 40 mm Grenades (various), Enhanced Performance Grenade, 60 mm Mortar Bombs.

I am withholding information regarding the tonnage of ammunition brought into the United Kingdom in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Cyprus (Christmas Mail)

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what delays he expects to occur with the forces' Christmas mail to Episcopi in Cyprus. [87637]

Dr. Moonie: No delays are expected to any mail posted by the published "latest posting" dates, which were 6 December for parcels and 16 December for letters and packets.

D-Day

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for UK involvement in celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of D-Day in Normandy; and if he will make a statement. [87036]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 31 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 881W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Dalton Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 19 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 36W, what the regular staff complement of officers and ranks at the Dalton Barracks in Oxfordshire is; how many deaths have been reported in and around the barracks since 1990; and what is the numerical breakdown of these deaths by cause. [86050]

Mr. Ingram: There are some 1,500 military personnel currently based at Dalton Barracks, Abingdon, with three Close Support Regiment and 4 General Support Regiment Royal Logistic Corps. Available records indicate that there have been four deaths at Abingdon since 1990. I am unable to release details of the cause of death in each case, as this may lead to the identification of individuals and compromise service personnel confidentiality. I am therefore withholding the information under Exemption 12 (Privacy of an Individual) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

Defence Diversification Agency

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many inquiries have been received by the Defence Diversification Agency since its inception; how many of these were received through its Scottish office; how many led to a successful outcome; and if he will make a statement. [86386]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Diversification Agency, now in its fourth year of operation, has received some 2,653 inquiries, of which 198 were from Scotland. All inquiries were successfully processed with about 50 per cent. leading to follow-up technology/knowledge transfer.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which Scottish firms have had negotiations with the Defence Diversification Agency in each year since its inception; and if he will make a statement. [86393]

Dr. Moonie: The Defence Diversification Agency has had dealings with some 200 companies through its Scottish offices. The listing of these companies by date of inquiry, where we have such a record, is set out in the table.

Company	*Inquiry date*
360pano Ltd.	30 April 2002
Accuscene Corporation Ltd.	4 September 2002
Acuid Corporation Ltd.	7 June 2001
Acuid Corporation Ltd.	10 August 2001
Adam Smith Ltd.	—
Ademco Michrotech Ltd.	6 February 2001
Advanced Biometric Systems Ltd.	30 November 2001
Alacom Dundee	—
Alcan	10 January 2001
Allenwest Wallacetown Ltd.	23 August 2001
Appledore Shipbuilders Ltd.	—
AROS Developments Ltd.	30 May 2002
Artifactus Ltd.	23 January 2001
Ascom IT Ltd.	17 April 2001
B.A. Aviation and Marine	18 September 2001
Babcock International BES Division	30 July 2002
BAE Systems	—
Biotrix International Ltd.	1 November 1999
Bitwise	26 March 2002
BMT Cordah Ltd.	22 September 2002
Bob Cameron	1 August 2002
Bonnybrae Ltd.	26 September 2000

Company	Inquiry date
Capt. Bruce Hitchings	8 February 2001
CCI Engineering Ltd.	25 July 2002
Central Science Laboratory	8 January 2001
Chilton International	23 June 2000
Clariant	13 March 2002
Cleenbore	11 November 2002
CoDrive Technologies Ltd.	7 June 2001
Collaborative Technology Ltd.	18 July 2002
Computer Training and Business Support	24 November 2002
Covus Engineering Steels, Aerospace and Energy Products	26 October 2001
CS Tendering Services Ltd.	1 April 2002
Cyberline International Ltd.	1 March 2001
David Burns	25 February 2000
De-Mining Systems UK Ltd.	27 October 2000
DenMac Medical International Ltd.	22 October 2001
Diagnostic Potentials	30 April 2001
Digital Animations Group plc.	12 October 2002
DNA Interactive Ltd.	24 February 2000
Donnie McDonald	—
Dovetail	19 September 2000
DSM Geodata	1 October 2002
Dynamic Knowledge Corporation	11 December 2002
ECom Scotland Ltd.	17 October 2001
Ectopharma Ltd.	17 July 2001
Edengene	—
Electronic Aromas Ltd.	16 April 2002
Electro-Mechanical Assembly Ltd.	10 February 2001
Electronic Arts	—
Enfocast Ltd.	1 June 2001
Engineering Services (Paisley) Ltd.	10 February 2001
Environmental Technology (Scotland) Ltd.	27 August 1999
Evolon	7 August 2001
Ezeeark Ltd.	18 July 2001
Ferranti Photonics Ltd.	23 November 2001
Fisher Powerware	25 March 2002
Footle	18 October 2001
Forth Ports plc	18 April 2002
Frankipile S. Africa	—
Free Aqua	14 January 2002
FreeForm Technology Ltd.	31 May 2001
Frio Cooling Products/GPN Thermoelectrics	11 September 2000
Fugro Structural Monitoring	24 October 2002
Futo Ltd.	8 July 2002
Fyne Diagnostics	27 November 2001
Gemini Corrosion Services Ltd.	19 June 2001
Gentech International	—
Glasgow Caledonian University	29 October 2002
Gorham and Partners Ltd.	15 August 2001
Greenhouse Ventures	—
Gulf Coast Seal (UK) Ltd.	28 August 2000
Harris Hynd Ltd.	23 November 2000
HCS Fluid Power Ltd.	—
Heriot-Watt University	7 November 2001
Hi Cad Technical Services	4 February 2002
I vision	9 March 2002
Ian Dean	7 January 2002
Iatros Ltd.	13 April 2000
IceRobotics Ltd.	20 September 2001
ICM Fortronics Ltd.	9 January 2001
Image Fusion Systems Ltd.	16 October 2000
Infinite Data Storage Ltd.	9 November 2000
Innovative Engineering Systems Ltd.	31 August 2000
Intelligent Earth	—
IRC Executive, Targeting Technology Ltd.	3 May 2002
John Rae	—
Johnstone Castings and Engineering Ltd.	14 August 2002
KOGG Caledonia	13 February 2001
Kongsberg Simrad	23 August 2002
KSMsuperclean	11 November 2001
Kvaener Oil and Gas	20 March 2002
LandRover/David McWha	28 March 2000
Laplace	11 December 2002
Leading Edge Advantage International Ltd.	31 May 2001
Link Scotland	17 September 2002
Linn Products Ltd.	26 February 1999
Lux Biotechnology Ltd.	18 September 2002
MacDuff Ship Design Ltd.	—
MacFarlane Packaging Ltd.	1 December 2000
MacGregor Traders and Consultants Ltd.	1 December 2000
MacTaggart Scott and Co. Ltd.	8 October 2001
Malcolm Stevenson	15 September 2002
Marketing Management Services International	5 October 2002
MB Aerospace Ltd.	15 September 2002
McCrindle Group Ltd.	25 October 2002
Meiklewall Ltd.	7 December 2000
Metron Technology	—
Milestone International Ltd.	21 November 2000
Miller Methil Ltd.	—
Mine Ordinance Ltd.	—
Mission Technology Ltd.	22 August 2000
MMC Marketing Consultants	13 August 2002
MoTech Software Private Ltd.	—
Motherwell Bridge Group	15 August 2002
Motorola	26 April 2000
Mr. Ian Robertson	13 September 2001
Murrell Dynamics Ltd.	1 September 1999
NERAC	8 October 2000
New Medical Technology Ltd.	—
New Product Technologies Ltd.	5 November 2001
Newlands Technology Ltd.	7 December 2000
Nickleby	28 October 2002
NOI Scotland	19 July 2002
NTTU Ltd.	14 June 2002
Nutrior Ventures	23 October 2002
NXT	3 December 1999
Occo Nolf/Charlie Nolf	10 July 2002
Ocean Power Delivery	9 November 2001
Optima Enclosures Ltd.	18 July 2001
Optimat	1 August 2002
Orcam Engineering Ltd.	27 August 2001
Oxley Systems	—
Partnerships UK	11 October 2002
Peter Bradley	26 March 2002
Photonic Materials	5 April 2002
Plade Ltd.	11 September 2001
Polaroid (UK) Ltd.	14 October 2001
Prosyst Ltd.	—
Proven Engineering Ltd.	23 August 2001
Psymetrix Ltd.	—
Qdos Media Ltd.	—
Q-One Biotech Ltd.	23 October 2001
Quad Techns/University of Strathclyde	16 October 2002
Randak Design Consultants	—
Raytheon	28 February 2002
ReacTec Ltd.	9 November 2001
Reactivise Ltd.	24 July 2002
Realise e-Security Ltd.	15 May 2001
Red Box Recorders	23 October 2002
Reign of Sound	14 November 2001
RIVIVO Ltd.	28 August 2000
Robert McAnnanay	24 October 2002
Rolls Royce	—
Root2 Ltd.	20 September 2002
Scotlearn	—
Scottish Enterprise Edinburgh and Lothian	7 November 2002
Scottish Enterprise Network/Proof of Concept Fund	29 November 2001
Scottish Mountain Rescue/University of Strathclyde	25 January 2002
Sericol Ltd.	14 March 2002
Shady Lady	25 July 2002
Shell International Exploration and Production B.V.	11 February 2002
Shell Live Wire	—
Simclar International Ltd.	18 October 2001
Smartfloor UK Ltd.	1 August 2002
Stenmar Sonavision Ltd.	9 July 2002
Strathclyde Personal Alarm Company Ltd.	10 November 2002
Sub Post-Office Initiative	16 June 2000
Sustainable Technologies Group	29 January 2002
Tannoy Ltd.	—
Tazco Ltd.	14 January 2002
The Backload.com Ltd.	29 September 2001
The Peak Group	30 October 2001
The R.E.L.A. Invention	—
Thought Storm	10 January 2002
TRAK Microwave Ltd.	1 June 1999
Trevor Baylis Foundation	—
Triton Developments (UK) Ltd.	19 March 2002
UKAEA	26 August 2002
UltraTape	—
University of Stirling	26 October 2001
University of Strathclyde	11 April 2002
University of Strathclyde/Industrial Control Centre	10 March 2002

Company	Inquiry date
Valentine Audio Visual	8 December 2000
VeriSIM Ltd.	21 February 2002
Version 7	3 August 2001
Viscotest	17 May 2001
Walker Precision Engineering Ltd.	13 August 2002
Weidlinger Associates Ltd.	15 July 1999
Westica Ltd.	16 May 2001
Whiland Press Gratings	25 February 2002
William Prestsell	10 January 2002
Willie Gorman	18 October 2002
Willmot and Associates	16 August 2000
Wood Group	—
WSP Communications	26 February 2002
Xantac Chemicals Ltd.	—
Zygomatics Ltd.	13 January 2002

Defence Procurement

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure was on procurement by each of the services in the last year for which figures are available; and how much of the procurement budget for each was spent in Scotland. [86001]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 1 February 2002, *Official Report*, column 601W. The latest figures for "Sea", "Land", "Air" and "other" are still those for 1998–99. Ministry of Defence systems have been changing following the introduction (inter alia) of Smart Acquisition (formerly Smart Procurement) and the move from cash accounting to resource accounting and budgeting (RAB). Consideration has moved from recording and analysing inputs to the armed forces to providing capability. The latest DPA Accounts (HC13 dated 28 November 2002) show that under RAB in the financial year 2001–02, the following resources were expended:

FY 2001–02	£ million
Total expenditure	4,766
Strategic deployment	1,376
Strike	1,587
Manoeuvre	1,134
Information superiority	669

In addition to these sums, the Defence Logistic Organisation provides support to the front line.

These categories are not broken down into spend in regional areas.

Departmental Staff

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* military personnel and *(b)* civil servants there are in his Deparment, broken down by region. [87152]

Dr. Moonie: The available information is given in table 1 below showing the position for the United Kingdom Regular Forces as at April 2002. For consistency table 2 shows Civilian Personnel as at April 2002 and in addition the latest information as at October 2002.

Table 1 UK regular forces[2] by country and Government office region (GOR) as at April 2002 (all services)

	Number
United Kingdom	171,340
By Government Office Region	
England[1]	141,720
North East	1,310
North West	1,520
Yorkshire and the Humber	13,760
East Midlands	7,510
West Midlands	6,710
Eastern	18,460
London	6,670
South East	49,990
South West	35,790
Wales	2,290
Scotland	14,250
Northern Ireland[4]	7,660
Unknowns[4]	5,420

Notes:

[1] All figures have been rounded to the nearest 10.

[2] Figures are for UK Regular Forces, both trained and untrained, located in the UK. They therefore exclude Gurkhas, Full-time Reserve Service personnel, the Home Service battalions of the Royal Regiment and mobilised reservists.

2,291 Gurkhas deployed in the United Kingdom at 1 April 2002.

1,986 Full-time Reserve Service Personnel at 1 April 2002

3,645 Personnel in the Home Service battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment at 1 April 2002.

[3] Naval Service personnel on sea service are included against the local authority containing the home port of their ship.

[4] The detailed figures have been compiled from unit statistics related to unit postcodes. For some units postcode information is either unavailable or inappropriate. These units include personnel who are known to be in Northern Ireland, so these have been added to the Northern Ireland total. The others are in the 'Unknowns' row.

El Alamein Memorials

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial support was given to UK veterans attending memorials in North Africa for the 60th anniversary of the battle of El Alamein; and if he will make a statement. [87037]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence provided support to the Eighth Army Veterans' Association (EAVA) to commemorate the battle and a service of thanksgiving was held in Westminster Abbey on 30 October; the MOD organised and funded the service. Two other events were also supported by the Department: a Commonwealth service to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the battle (held at the Commonwealth War Cemetery, El Alamein) and an international service (at the Italian War Memorial, near El Alamein). No financial assistance was given to veterans to visit Egypt.

Executive Agencies

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the expenditure was of each defence agency *(a)* in total and *(b)* in Scotland in the last available year; how many staff were employed by each agency (i) in total and (ii) in Scotland in that year. [86385]

Dr. Moonie: Information on expenditure by Defence agencies is contained in the annual report and accounts of each agency, copies of which are available in the Library of the House.

Information on the number of staff employed by each agency is set out in the table:

Staff employed by each agency (April 2002)

Agency	*Total strength*	*Staff in Scotland*
UK Hydrographic Office	882	4
Meteorological Office	2,091	146
Service Children's Education	726	—
Duke of York's Royal Military School	106	—
Queen Victoria School	70	70
Defence Analytical Services Agency	145	—
British Forces Post Office	340	7
Army Base Repair Organisation	2,019	82
Defence Secondary Care Agency	593	4
Ministry of Defence Police	3,262	818
Naval Recruiting and Training Agency	1,003	11
RAF Training Group Defence Agency	2,049	45
Army Training and Recruitment Agency	4,250	104
Defence Communications Service Agency	3,054	107
Defence Estates	1,363	105
Disposal Services Agency	78	3
Defence Transport and Movements Agency	314	—
Defence Science and Technical Laboratory	2,825	45
Defence Dental Agency	158	9
Medical Supply Agency	—	—
Pay and Personnel Agency	665	—
Defence Bills Agency	581	—
Naval Manning Agency	106	—
Defence Intelligence and Security Centre	135	—
Army Personnel Centre	754	680
Warship Support Agency	7,682	2,497
RAF Personnel Management Agency	236	—
Armed Forces Personnel Administration Agency	229	109
Defence Vetting Agency	262	3
Defence Medical Training Organisation	169	—
Defence Aviation Repair Agency	4,343	317
Defence Storage and Distribution Agency	2,753	25
Defence Housing Executive	935	88
Defence Procurement Agency	3,726	134
Defence Geographic Imagery Intelligence Agency	690	1
Veterans Agency	879	14

Firefighters' Strike

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make an assessment of the range of equipment and clothing held by his Department to determine whether it enables it to *(a)* provide cover for services withdrawn by the fire brigades and *(b)* conduct firefighting operations for which it is responsible. [87859]

Mr. Ingram: The Armed Forces have been supplied with suitable and adequate equipment and clothing to provide the agreed level of fire cover in the event of industrial action being taken by local fire brigades. When not in use the responsibility for such equipment rests with the Office of my right hon Friend the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Defence Fire Services are also supplied with and maintain all the necessary equipment and clothing to conduct those operations for which they are primarily responsible.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what his present estimates are for *(a)* the full costs and *(b)* the additional costs incurred by his Department in planning for and providing military personnel and equipment to cover for services withdrawn by the fire brigades; and what elements his Department has taken into account in calculating its costs incurred in providing such services; [87856]

(2) what the arrangements are for his Department to recover from the authorities responsible for the provision of such services its costs in providing services withdrawn by the fire brigades; and when he expects his Department to receive the repayments due to it from other authorities in respect of its costs in providing services withdrawn by the fire brigades. [87857]

Mr. Ingram: It is too early to make even the broadest of estimates of how much the military assistance will cost at this stage, because the costs incurred during the actual strike periods have yet to be fully captured through the Ministry of Defence's central cost reporting system, and because we have no relevant historical examples to predict from. This prevents the Department from making any accurate costs estimates beyond those associated with the initial purchase of the urgent operational equipment necessary to equip the services.

In that regard, in the run up to the strike we incurred costs of around £8 million on purchasing major items of equipment such as protective clothing, breathing apparatus and hydraulic cutting equipment.

Under the rules that apply to operations of this sort, the Ministry of Defence will recover from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) the additional costs that are incurred in providing military assistance, ensuring that the operation is cost neutral so far as the defence budget is concerned.

We expect to receive repayment for the additional costs incurred thus far by the defence budget on this operation once they have been reported, scrutinised and notified to the ODPM.

Iraq

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role of the Common European Security and Defence Policy in the conflict with Iraq. [87311]

Mr. Hoon: As the Government have stressed repeatedly, no decisions have been taken with regard to military action in Iraq. Military action there is neither imminent nor inevitable. The European Security and Defence Policy allows the EU to launch military operations where NATO as a whole is not engaged. Any European Security and Defence Policy operation would be within the scope of the Petersberg tasks, which are defined in the EU Treaty as: "humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking".

Kuwait

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many troops have been deployed in Kuwait in each month since September 2001; and if he will make a statement. [85372]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The number of armed forces personnel serving in Kuwait undergoes regular minor fluctuations as working practices and establishment requirements are generated or reviewed, and deployments start or finish for training, liaison and defence diplomacy purposes. The figures given are taken on or near the mid-month point.

Year	*Number*
September 2001	471
October 2001	525
November 2001	497
December 2001	482
January 2002	501
February 2002	517
March 2002	502
April 2002	494
May 2002	504
June 2002	497
July 2002	480
August 2002	470
September 2002	588
October	493
November	626

The numbers for September and November this year are higher than average because in both months Royal Engineers deployed to Ali Al Salem air base to undertake various necessary building works.

Networked Capabilities

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what consultations have been made with the US Department of Defense on the development of network centric capabilities compatible with those being developed by the US. [85657]

Dr. Moonie: We are continuously engaged in consultation and co-operation with the United States to support the development of compatible (both technically and doctrinally) networked capabilities. Consultation takes place at a departmental level, between United Kingdom and US services and at individual project level.

Naval Procurement

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much *(a)* has been spent on naval procurement in each of the last five financial years and *(b)* is scheduled to be spent on naval procurement in each of the next five years. [84379]

Dr. Moonie: Figures for the amount the Ministry of Defence spent on defence equipment procurement for the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 were published by the Defence Analytical Services Agency (DASA) in "UK Defence Statistics" (copies of which are available in the Library of the House).

Until 1998–99, this publication contained a split of the equipment procurement total by amount spent in each of four environments entitled "sea", "land", "air" and "other". This division did not however necessarily match the particular end destination of the equipment; for example not all "sea" equipment was for use by the Navy—programmes such as the Nimrod Maritime Aircraft came under "sea". "Other" referred to equipment not specific to a particular environment.

Changes in accounting practice meant that it was not been possible to produce an environment split on a consistent basis after 1998–99. However, for the two years 1999–2000 and 2000–01, it has been possible to produce illustrative estimates of the split for the "sea" environment using data from the MOD (cash) central ledger. Comparable data are not available beyond 2000–01 due to the introduction of resource accounting and budgeting.

Equipment procurement expenditure and that for the "sea" environment— VAT inclusive at current prices

million

	Net equipment procurement	*Of which: Sea equipment procurement*
1996–97	9,100	2,190
1997–98	9,003	2,142
1998–99	9,889	2,319
1999–2000	9,715	*2,233
2000–01	10,008	*2,211

Notes:

1. All figures are inclusive of VAT, which cannot be recovered by the Department.
2. Sea equipment is not only used by the Navy.

Source:

UK Defence Statistics 2002 apart from those marked with a *, which are illustrative estimates drawn from the MOD (cash) central ledger.

The Ministry of Defence does not use categories such as "naval procurement" when producing plans as to possible future spend on equipment for the armed forces. Focus is instead on capability. Some information, including the estimated cost, of a number of major projects, including the future carrier, astute submarine and the Type 45 destroyer, is however published each year in the National Audit Office's "Major Project Report". The 2002 report was published on 4 December.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many former British service people and military medical auxiliaries have been identified from *(a)* research conducted by or on behalf of his Department and *(b)* medical statistical data compiled by the former medical division of the Department of Social Security as suffering from the conditions (i) duodenitis and (ii) duodenal ulcer associated with or caused by exposure to irradiation from British atmospheric nuclear tests. [87581]

Dr. Moonie: No specific analysis of the incidence of these medical conditions among those who participated in the British atmospheric nuclear tests has been carried out on behalf of the Ministry of Defence. In the 1993, National Radiological Protection Board report NRPB-R266, entitled "Mortality and Cancer Incidence 1952–1990 in UK Participants in the UK Atmospheric Nuclear Weapon Tests and Experimental Programmes", deaths from duodenal ulcer and duodenitis were included in the category, "other diseases of the digestive

system", and are shown in Table 6.10 of the report. The table shows a total of 46 deaths in this category in the cohort of test participants up to the end of 1990.

No medical statistical data have been compiled by the former medical division of the Department of Social Security of nuclear test veterans suffering from these conditions associated with, or caused by, exposure to irradiation from British atmospheric nuclear tests.

Overseas Personnel

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many military personnel are serving overseas; and if he will make a statement. [87686]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to tri-service publication 6: "Global Location of Service Personnel" (TSP 6), a copy of which is held in the Library of the House and is updated on a quarterly basis.

Far East Prisoners of War

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations he has received from the children of the Far East Prisoners of War (COFEPOW) in respect of the wish of the COFEPOW organisation to promote a memorial and cultural building at the National Arboretum in Staffordshire. [87498]

Dr. Moonie: I have responded to a number of letters from hon. Members whose constituents, as members of COFEPOW, have expressed an interest in this subject.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make an ex gratia payment to far eastern ex-civilian prisoners of war whose great grandparents were born in the UK. [87779]

Dr. Moonie: The eligibility criterion for the ex gratia payment scheme in relation to former civilian internees held by the Japanese during World War II is that either they, or at least one of their parents or grandparents, should have been born in the United Kingdom. We have no plans to extend the criterion back another generation.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what major *(a)* variations and *(b)* delays there have been to the Private Finance Initiative contract for (i) the Electronic Messaging Service (Armymail) and (ii) TAFMIS (IT), since the contracts were signed; what has been the cost of the changes and delays; whether the partners in the PFIs were required to meet these costs; and if he will make a statement; [87579]

(2) what major variations and delays there have been to the Private Finance Initiative contract for *(a)* the RAF Fylingdales (power), *(b)* RAF Lyneham Sewerage, *(c)* the medium support Helicopter Aircrew Training facility, *(d)* the DFTS, *(e)* the Electronic Messaging Service (Armymail) and *(f)* the Joint Services Command and Staff College, since they were signed; what has been the cost of the changes and delays; whether partners in the PFI were required to meet these costs; and if he will make a statement. [87799]

Mr. Ingram: As this information is not held centrally, officials are working with the individual project teams to collate the data required, which may take some time to complete. I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

QinetiQ

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the proposed savings over 25 years by QinetiQ in respect of test and evaluation services are broken down by *(a)* site and *(b)* expense category. [87135]

Dr. Moonie: The total savings contractually agreed with QinetiQ for the duration of the Test and Evaluation contract are expected to be in the order of £685 million at current prices. QinetiQ's plans for Aberporth, Llanbedr and West Freugh have already been announced and the associated savings are provided in the table. The figures cannot be broken down by each individual expenditure category without disproportionate costs being incurred.

£ million

	Saving		
Site	*Manpower*	*Other*	*Total*
Aberporth	86	41	127
Llanbedr	60	90	150
West Freugh	93	70	163

Information on savings at other sites is currently commercially sensitive.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 5 December, Official Report, column 85WS, on QinetiQ, if he will set out the calculation of the adjustments made in the assets and liabilities of QinetiQ prior to setting its sale price; if he will set out the final conditions to which reference is made; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the Carlyle Group bid to become a strategic partner in QinetiQ. [87551]

Dr. Moonie: As outlined in my statement of 5 December, *Official Report*, column 85WS, the transaction values QinetiQ at around 500 million. As is conventional, this valuation was done on a debt-free/cash-free basis. The actual receipt to the Ministry of Defence will therefore be adjusted to take account of a number of factors including: any debts owed by the company, any liabilities for which provision currently exists in the accounts, any cash held by the company and working capital to the extent this is above/below the company's normal level. The precise details of the adjustments are commercially sensitive.

As is normal in any major transaction there are a number of conditions that must be satisfied between signing and formal completion. These include: laying before Parliament of a Departmental Minute describing any contingent liabilities from the transaction; receipt of EC commission merger clearance; local authority searches and other legal issues relating to property and confirmation of the purchaser's financing arrangements. Certain other conditions exist but as these are commercially sensitive I am withholding them in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

I am also withholding a copy of The Carlyle Group bid in accordance with Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

RAF (Flying Charges)

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the hourly RAF charge is to Government Departments for flying with 32 (The Royal) Squadron in *(a)* BAe 125 and *(b)* BAe 146 aircraft, broken down into (i) engineering and airframe costs, (ii) costs incurred for handling, landing and navigation services at civil airports, (iii) fuel and (iv) crew subsistence costs. [86953]

Mr. Ingram: The following table shows the breakdown of the hourly charge to Government Departments for flying with the BAe 125 and BAe 146 aircraft of 32 (The Royal) Squadron:

£ per hour

	BAe 125	*BAel46*
Engineering and airframe	374	681
Handling, landing and navigational services at civil airports	122	91
Fuel	196	559
Crew subsistence	27	197
Other	21	46
Total	740	1,574

Note:
VAT is added to the BAe 125 charge for internal United Kingdom flights.

Since 1999, this Government has published on an animal basis the overall cost of all Ministers visits overseas and a list of Cabinet Ministers' visits overseas costing more than £500. The list makes clear when RAF flights have been used and the cost of such travel is included in the published overall annual cost. Copies of the lists are in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is conducted in accordance with the requirements of the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Management Code.

RAF Fylingdales

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment was made in the preparation of the analysis of the security of an upgraded RAF Fylingdales, in paragraphs 80–83 of his Department's discussion paper on missile defence, of whether an enhanced Fylingdales facility would present a more attractive terrorist target. [87539]

Mr. Hoon: We keep the terrorist threat to all military installations under constant review. We do not consider that the upgrading of RAF Fylingdales for missile defence purposes will significantly change any terrorist threat to the facility.

RAF Reserve

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 9 December, *Official Report*, column 17, what plans he has to bring the training and mobilisation of the RAF reservists together with those of the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Marines at the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre, Nottingham. [87220]

Dr. Moonie: Although opportunities for harmonisation are kept under review, there are currently no plans to bring the training and mobilisation of RAF reservists together with those of the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and Army at the Reserve Training and Mobilisation Centre, Nottingham. Volunteer members of the Reserve Air Forces are mobilised as individuals through the RAF station on which they are based, and where the necessary personnel and pay documentation is already held. In this way, mobilisation and the task of additional training, if required, is absorbed within existing resources. This also allows the reservist to be trained alongside any regular RAF personnel deploying on the same operation.

Recruitment (Health Criteria)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which health conditions automatically disqualify applicants for a career in the armed services; what the recruitment criteria are for those with poorer eyesight; whether glasses are permitted as correctional treatment; what proposals there are to change the recruitment criteria so that people with a non-serious or mild asthma condition can have a career in the armed services; and if he will make a statement. [87369]

Dr. Moonie: The principle applying to health conditions is that new entrants must be fit to serve anywhere in the world, in all environments and in locations where medical care may be limited or remote and medical resupply uncertain, or impossible. Many conditions, especially those controlled by medication or other intervention, which may not limit civilian employment are, nonetheless, incompatible with military service.

The following conditions make a person unsuitable for enlistment:

Chest disorders

Asthma, wheeze or asthma symptoms (and treatment) during the previous four years. Chronic lung disease (e.g. emphysema, bronchiectasis and cystic fibrosis). Active tuberculosis (TB).

Back problems

Spinal surgery (including internal fixation or fusion). Recurrent low back pain. Spina bifida.

Bone or joint problems

Meniscectomy within the last year. Surgical repair of a knee cruciate ligament. Lower limb fractures with internal fixation still in place. Loss of a limb. Complete loss of a thumb. Total loss of either big toe. Any degree of clubfoot (including past surgery). Chronic joint diseases (e.g. ankylosing spondylitis, psoriatic arthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and gout). Reiter's disease in last five years. Osteochondritis dissecans.

Eye disorders

Chronic eye diseases (e.g. glaucoma, keratoconus, retinitis pigmentosa). Squint surgery in last six months. Corneal problems (e.g. corneal graft and recurrent corneal ulcers). Loss or dislocation of eye lens. Cataract or cataract surgery. Detached retina.

Ear disorders

Presence of eardrum ventilation tubes or grommets. Current perforation of eardrum. Chronic ear diseases (e.g. cholesteatoma).

Abdominal problems

Chronic abdominal diseases (e.g. Crohn disease and ulcerative colitis). Kidney disorders (e.g. horseshoe kidney, polycystic kidney disease and kidney stones). Donation of a kidney in last two years. Kidney disease in last two years.

Neurological disorders

Epilepsy or more than one seizure/fit after the age of five. Single seizure/fit in the last four years. Multiple sclerosis.

Skin problems

Malignant melanoma or skin cancer within last two years. Active skin disease (e.g. eczema and widespread psoriasis).

Pregnancy

Current pregnancy or childbirth in the last three months.

Chronic blood disease

Sickle cell disease. Congenital spherocytosis. Thalassaemia. HIV seropositivity/AIDS. Carriers of hepatitis B or C. Past history of leukaemia or malignant lymphoma.

Psychiatric problems

Schizophrenia. Obsessive-compulsive disorder. Alcohol or drug dependence. Post-traumatic stress disorder.

Other conditions

Loss of spleen (splenectomy). Transplanted organs. Severe allergic reactions and/or anaphylaxis requiring adrenaline injection precautions. Nut allergy. Circulation problems (e.g. raynaud's phenomenon or disease). Diabetes. Diseases (e.g. glandular or hormonal) requiring long-term medication or replacement therapy.

This list is not exhaustive. An application may be rejected due to other medical conditions which are subject to the discretion of Service Medical Authorities.

Applicants with vision corrected by glasses or contact lenses are generally acceptable. However, certain trades and professions require more stringent standards. For example, drivers requiring a Type 2 licence have to meet DVLA standards. Higher standards still are applied to pilots and other technical military roles.

As detailed in the list only individuals who have been free of asthma symptoms for a minimum period of four years will be able to join the armed forces. Notwithstanding this, medical entry standards are continuously reviewed against any new developments within medicine with supporting evidence and/or research being considered. Nevertheless, we have no plans to change the present medical entry standards relating to asthma.

The armed forces are responsible employers and aim to meet the requirements of the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. This means that they must ensure that recruits are not put at increased risk of injury or illness during their service due to a pre-existing medical condition.

Reserves Hardship Fund

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to increase the monetary ceiling of the Reserves' Hardship Fund. [87060]

Dr. Moonie: Reservists called out into permanent service may apply for financial assistance in the event that their military salary is less than their earnings in civilian life. This assistance is paid in the form of a Reserve Standard Award (RSA). RSA is paid in banded rates that are related to a Reservist's rank. The current rates are set out in the Reserve Forces (Call-out and Recall) Financial Assistance Regulations (Statutory Instrument 1997/309). Work is in progress to raise the current bands to reflect the increases in inflation since these were brought into effect, and provide for automatic adjustment in line with inflation. It is currently planned to introduce the revised regulations early in 2003. Reservists are also eligible to apply for a Reserve Hardship Award (RHA) if the RSA alone would cause his/her dependents hardship. There is no ceiling for RHA payments.

Sponsored Reserves

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the role will be of the sponsored reserves; and if he will make a statement. [87687]

Dr. Moonie: The sponsored reserves concept involves a service normally provided in peacetime under contract by civilian staff employed by a contractor being provided on operations by staff drawn from the contractor's civilian workforce who have volunteered to become sponsored reservists. It envisages letting contracts for services on condition that the contractor maintains in his workforce an agreed element of staff who will have volunteered to become sponsored reservists. Should it be necessary to do so, these sponsored reservists would be called-out and serve alongside the armed forces. Their role as sponsored reservists is to continue to provide the contracted support services to the armed forces in an operational environment. They receive appropriate military training in peacetime to equip them to deliver the support required when called out for operations. The details of the individual roles of sponsored reservists will be reflected in their civilian employment contract and the contracts between the employer and the Ministry of Defence.

Submarines

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total spending has been on the programme to re-fit Britain's nuclear submarines; and how much has been spent on each submarine. [87584]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to my hon. Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what action he plans to take in response to the National Audit Office report on submarine refitting at Devonport. [87765]

Mr. Ingram: The report, while acknowledging that lessons for future projects have been identified by the Ministry of Defence, made a number of further recommendations. These are being considered in detail and, where appropriate, will be applied to MOD projects.

West Freugh Airfield

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many employees at West Freugh Airfield and Range were employed by *(a)* the Ministry of Defence, *(b)* QinetiQ and *(c)* other contractors on 24 July. [87136]

Dr. Moonie: The following staff were employed at West Freugh on 24 July 2002: 24 from the Ministry of Defence; 141 from QinetiQ; and five from another contractor (SERCo Aerospace).

Wind Farms

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many objections to *(a)* offshore and *(b)* onshore wind farms his Department has lodged with relevant planning authorities. [86639]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has lodged four formal objections with planning authorities for onshore wind farms and no formal objections for offshore wind farm development.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Anti-TNF Drugs

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many rheumatoid arthritis patients in Northern Ireland are on consultants' waiting lists to assess their condition for the prescription of anti-TNF drugs; and how much funding is available for the prescription of anti-TNF drugs in Northern Ireland. [86949]

Mr. Browne: There is no waiting list for rheumatoid arthritis patients awaiting assessment for anti-TNF drugs. However, as of December 2002, there are approximately 260 patients who have already been assessed as likely to benefit from anti-TNF therapy, but have not yet begun this form of treatment.

Currently, some £1.14 million is employed by health and social services boards and trusts specifically for anti-TNF drugs. An extra £3 million was recently made available to boards and has been made recurrent, in recognition of the exceptional cost of new, effective but highly expensive drug therapies including anti-TNF drugs. Following the Secretary of State's budget announcement on 11 December 2002, further funding will be made available when requirements have been agreed with service providers.

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what assessments are being carried out to ascertain the effectiveness of anti-TNF drugs; and what the timetable is for anti-TNF drugs to be made more widely available. [86950]

Mr. Browne: All patients on drug treatments are regularly monitored and treatment regimens are reviewed to assess effectiveness and possible side effects. Further funding for acute services was announced in the Secretary of State's Budget statement on 11 December 2002. Some of this will be made available for patients who could benefit from anti-TNF and other specialist drugs treatments and also for the infrastructure required to support these treatments. I expect anti-TNF drugs therefore to become more widely available next year.

Asbestos Leakage (SEELB Building)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when the Health and Safety Executive statement of fact and the full report into asbestos leakage at the SEELB HQ building, Dundonald will be published. [86924]

Jane Kennedy: I have been advised that the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland (HSENI) will communicate the findings of its investigation directly to all parties involved in this incident before the end of December 2002.

Armed Forces (Welfare Support)

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures the Government have introduced to support the families of *(a)* UDR and *(b)* RIR soldiers murdered by terrorists. [85683]

Dr. Moonie: I have been asked to reply.

There are a number of measures to support the families of members of the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) and the Royal Irish Regiment (R IRISH). Widows/widowers may be compensated under two schemes, the Armed Forces Pension Scheme (AFPS) and the War Pensions Scheme (WPS). In addition, the R IRISH have a unique, stand alone Regimental Welfare Organisation that is specifically structured to provide dedicated welfare support to its bereaved families. This welfare structure, which is directly funded by the Ministry of Defence, links into the various agencies that provide support to the rest of the Army.

Apart from Government support, there are two regimental benevolent funds in operation, the UDR Benevolent Fund and the R IRISH Benevolent Fund. The aims of both funds are the same, namely to provide help and support to the families and soldiers of the regiment, former soldiers and their families and the bereaved families of those soldiers or former soldiers killed as a result of terrorist action.

Rates

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will calculate what revenue would be generated in Northern Ireland by increasing *(a)* domestic regional rate, and *(b)* non-domestic regional rate by one percentage point above current levels. [86647]

Mr. Pearson: The revenue generated by increasing the domestic regional rate by 1 per cent. would be £1.2 million and the revenue generated by increasing the non-domestic regional rate by 1 per cent. would be £2.1 million.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87699]

Mr. Pearson: All targets set in the context of the 1998 CSR relate to responsibilities devolved to the Northern Ireland Executive in December 1999. The CSR targets were superseded from 2001–02 onwards by the

Executive's Programme for Government which sets priorities, objectives and targets for the Northern Ireland departments.

Wind Farms

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the grid references are of the location of the landfall for the proposed offshore wind farm at Tunes Plateau; if Coleraine, Limavady, Londonderry and Moyle local authorities will be consulted on the proposed development of the wind farm; and if he will make a statement on the planning process for the proposed development. [87305]

Mr. Pearson: It is not possible to provide grid references of the location of any landfall for the Tunes Plateau offshore wind farm because a wide range of potential options are still being considered from an engineering and environmental perspective. No decision on any potential landfall can be made until completion of the following studies:

NIE's wind farm connection feasibility studies;

Ornithology and ecology studies (covering both marine and onshore elements);

Geotechnical and geophysical studies (covering both marine and onshore elements);

Marine and onshore archaeology studies; and

Coastal processes and seabed assessments.

Coleraine, Limavady, Londonderry and Moyle councils were fully consulted during completion of the scope for the environmental impact assessment and will continue to be consulted as further information about the impact of this project comes to light.

Any developments relating to wind farms which require planning permission will be processed in accordance with current planning procedures; and policies in relation to public advertisement, neighbour notification and council consultation will apply. To date the Department of the Environment has not received such an application.

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the source and amount of grants provided to the proposed offshore wind farm development at Tunes Plateau; and what the expected long-term savings to the electricity consumer in Northern Ireland through the proposed development of a wind farm at Tunes Plateau will be. [87288]

Mr. Pearson: A private sector consortium comprising B9 Energy, Renewable Energy Systems and PowerGen are carrying out, at their own expense, extensive feasibility studies into the possible development of an offshore wind farm at Tunes Plateau. The project has pre-qualified with the Department of Trade and Industry to be considered for assistance from the UK offshore wind Capital Grant Scheme to ensure that grant aid could be provided from that fund if the development proceeds and it proves necessary.

The precise nature and size of any offshore wind farm will emerge following the conclusion of the feasibility assessment that is currently ongoing. Until the completion of the feasibility assessment no precise calculations can be made about the volume of electricity that might be generated from the project. Calculations of long-term savings in electricity costs could only be made in the context of certainty regarding the final design of, and output from, the project and taking into account factors such as the costs of grid connection, the alternative costs of electricity from other sources and fossil fuel prices (which are subject to fluctuation).

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the *(a)* life span, *(b)* financial costs and *(c)* environmental impact of decommissioning offshore wind farm sites. [87289]

Mr. Pearson: The design life of offshore wind turbines and infrastructure assets is typically considered to be 20 to 25 years.

Capital costs for offshore wind farms are of the order of £1,000,000/megawatt (MW) installed. This will vary considerably from site to site according to the foundation designs employed, the depth of water at the site and other aspects of the nature of the project site. The report, "Assessment of Offshore Wind Energy Resources", commissioned jointly by the Department of Enterprise Trade and Investment and the Department of Public Enterprise in the Republic of Ireland, estimated that costs per installed megawatt (MW) (excluding decommissioning) for typical projects around the island of Ireland ranged from £840,000 to £1,080,000.

There has not yet been an off-shore wind farm decommissioned anywhere in the world, it is not therefore possible to accurately determine the costs of decommissioning.

The environmental impact of decommissioning an offshore wind farm is very site-specific and directly related to the foundation options employed during construction.

However the actual environmental impacts of offshore wind farms including impacts associated with decommissioning have been assessed in the report "An Assessment of the Environmental Effects of Offshore Wind Farms" completed by the Environmental Technology Support Unit in 2000 for Metoc (ETSU/W35/00543/RP, 2000).

TREASURY

Customs and Excise (Agency Agreements)

Mr. Hammond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a list of the agency agreements in place between HM Customs and private companies. [83450]

John Healey: HM Customs and Excise hold and maintain a list of agency agreements with Intellectual Property Right holders to fulfil their obligations under EC Regulation 3295/94 as amended by EC Regulation 241/1999.

The disclosure of this information would prejudice the enforcement operations of HM Customs and Excise in tackling groups and organisations committed to

counterfeit, pirating or patent infringing activities. Exemptions 4 and 7 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information apply.

Annuities

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to change his policy on annuities; and what plans he has to give people buying annuities more *(a)* choice and *(b)* flexibility. [86943]

Ruth Kelly: As promised in the pre-Budget report, the Inland Revenue consultation document on simplification of the taxation of pensions published today, alongside the pensions Green Paper, contains proposals to expand choice and flexibility in the annuities market.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 26 November, reference 81821, what information he estimates is necessary in order to make an estimate of the cost. [84489]

John Healey *[holding answer 2 December 2002]*: To estimate the cost of tax relief information would be needed about the amount of the user charges incurred for each year which qualified for tax relief and about the tax position of those claiming relief.

Inflation Target

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he intends to review the Monetary Policy Committee's inflation target. [86674]

Mr. Boateng: Under the Bank of England Act 1998, the Treasury is required to specify the inflation target each year. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer last reviewed the remit for the Monetary Policy Committee at the time of the Budget in April.

Inland Revenue (Large Business Office)

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the revenue collected by the Large Business Office in each of the last five fiscal years was *(a)* tax, *(b)* interest and *(c)* penalties; and if he will make a statement. [87210]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue does not keep a separate record of the total revenue attributable to taxpayers whose affairs are handled by the Large Business Office.

National Insurance Records

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 315W, on CR74, why *(a)* 3.5 million national insurance records were no longer needed, and *(b)* 1.3 million records required further checking; and how long the 3.5 million national insurance records that were no longer needed were in circulation after the date on which they should have been withdrawn. [86706]

Dawn Primarolo: The Inland Revenue keeps more than one record for a customer when the circumstances warrant it, but processes are in place to check and keep records updated as part of normal customer service. National insurance records were not affected by CR74. The exercise simply brought together the information on separate tax records relating to individual taxpayers and created a single tax record for them. As a result, a total of 3.5 million records were no longer needed. 1.3 million records require further checking to confirm that the correct National Insurance Number is being used. It is not possible, except at disproportionate cost, to find out how long records existed before being brought together as part of CR74.

Savings Directive

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, pursuant to his answer of 12 December 2002 (Ref. 87201), if he will give the reasons why Bermuda was not included in the list of dependent or associated territories agreed at the Feira European Council for the purposes of the Savings Directive. [87853]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my reply to the hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr. Evans) on 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 475W).

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87703]

Mr. Boateng: The Department publishes progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its departmental report (Cm 5425 June 2002) and autumn performance report (Cm 5665 Dec 2002) published after the announcement of the Spending Review.

Tax Credits (Leigh)

Andy Burnham: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people will be eligible to claim *(a)* child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit in the Leigh constituency; and what he estimates the total annual financial budget will be to Leigh of each of these measures. [87243]

Dawn Primarolo: Nine out of 10 families with children will be eligible for the child tax credit, to be introduced in April 2003.

Estimates of the number of families with children expected to benefit from *(a)* the child tax credit and *(b)* working tax credit by Government Office Region are shown in the table below.

Thousands

Government Office Region	*Number of families expected to benefit from the child tax credit*	*Number of families expected to benefit from the working tax credit*
North East	290	70
North West and Merseyside	750	210
Yorkshire and the Humber	540	150
East Midlands	380	90
West Midlands	500	130
Eastern	460	90
London	700	130
South East	670	140
South West	470	130

Thousands

Government Office Region	*Number of families expected to benefit from the child tax credit*	*Number of families expected to benefit from the working tax credit*
Wales	320	80
Scotland	430	90
Northern Ireland	220	50
Total	5,750	1,350

Thalidomide

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many beneficiaries of the Thalidomide Trust live in *(a)* West Midlands and *(b)* the Dudley MBC. [87375]

Dawn Primarolo: The information requested is not available.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Animal Rights Activists

Mr. Tom Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, what steps the Government have taken to protect medical research companies against the actions of animal rights activists. [87984]

Ms Hewitt: The Government are determined that animal rights extremists will not prevent companies carrying out legitimate business in the UK and that these companies will be protected from intimidation and harassment. In recognition of the exceptional circumstances Huntingdon Life Sciences Group plc have found themselves in, the DTI has previously agreed to provide banking facilities for Huntingdon Life Sciences Group plc. The DTI is now extending its support to facilitate the provision of insurance services to Huntingdon Life Sciences Group plc on a worldwide basis. Both these actions have been taken to secure Huntingdon Life Sciences Group plc from the harm caused by the criminal intimidation and assault being directed at its employees, including their families and friends, and also those of its suppliers, customers and other companies. Huntingdon Life Sciences Group plc is a world-leading provider in the highly regulated area of essential research, development and toxicological testing services for the pharmaceutical, biotechnology and chemical industries. Any commercial damage to these industries or their supporting services, like Huntingdon Life Sciences, would have a very serious impact on UK scientific and medical research. The DTI is not using commercial insurance companies or brokers at this time and is providing insurance through its own resources.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of the New Electricity Trading Arrangements on the CHP sector. [86198]

Mr. Wilson: The most recent data on CHP output can be found in the DTI and National Statistics Publication, the "2002 Digest of United Kingdom Energy Statistics". This states that 'good quality' CHP electricity output in 2001 had declined by 17 per cent. on the level recorded in 2000 and that the annual growth rate of installed capacity slowed to about 0.8 per cent.

May I also refer my hon. Friend to the Government's response of 4 April 2002 to the consultation on NETA and smaller generators and to Ofgem's review of the first year of NETA, where the impact of NETA on CHP is discussed in the chapter concerning smaller generators.

I am also concerned about the impact on manufacturing investments to the energy sector. The forthcoming Energy White Paper will give the opportunity to discuss these issues in more depth.

Consumer Credit Act

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual cost was in England and Wales of trading standards activity on consumer credit and finance and the enforcement of the Consumer Credit Act 1974 in each year since 1997. [86971]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The trading standards activities of local authorities are funded through the revenue support grant, and the allocation of resources to individual trading standards functions is a matter for each local authority to determine. It is therefore not possible to state the annual cost in England and Wales of trading standards activity on consumer credit and finance and the enforcement of the Consumer Credit Act.

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the annual costs of the OFT were in relation to the implementation of its activities under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, in each year since 1997; [86973]

(2) what the annual income generated for the Office of Fair Trading was from licensing of organisations under the Consumer Credit Act 1974, in each year since 1997. [86972]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Office of Fair Trading's income from its licensing activities under the Consumer Credit Act 1974 for each of the last five financial years was:

1997–98: £4,116,713
1998–99: £4,088,375
1999–2000: £3,801,851
2000–01: £3,406,593
2001–02: £3,846,120

During the same period, the annual costs to the OFT of its functions under the Act were:

1997–98: £3,829,503
1998–99: £4,063,273
1999–2000: £4,128,732
2000–01: £4,565,000
2001–02: £5,379,415

Debt

Mr. Colman: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the annual costs to public funds were of *(a)* Citizens Advice Bureaux and *(b)* money advice centres, in relation to individuals in debt in (i) England

and Wales and (ii) the UK in each year since 1997; what proportion of these costs relate to (A) consumer credit and finance and (B) creditor organisations licensed under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. [86974]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Individual Citizens Advice Bureaux (CABx) are not funded by Central Government. Each local CAB is a separate independent charity funded usually by local authorities, charitable trusts etc.

DTI funds both the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux (NACAB) and Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS). NACAB and CAS provide both focus and support for the work of the CAB Service in England, Wales and Scotland. NACAB and CAS also provides training services and IT support to CABx, and is responsible for setting the standards of membership for the service. DTI expects to provide NACAB with grant-in-aid funding of £17.1 million, and CAS with grant-in-aid funding of 2.8 million in this financial year.

In addition, £14.55 million is paid for money advice to individuals in debt in the UK.

DTI (jointly with Treasury, Scottish Executive and the Lord Chancellor's Department) provide £1.15 million to fund the National Debtline Pilot. Between 1 March and 10 December 2002, it has helped 18,403 clients. Of these, 90.9 per cent. of calls were from England and Wales, with the remainder being from Scotland and Northern Ireland;

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) spent £9.9 million in 2001-02 on payments to not-for-profit organisations providing money advice in England and Wales; and

The Scottish Executive are supplying £3 million per annum to provision front line specialist money advice across Scotland. They are also providing an additional £500,000 per annum for provision of central support for the sector (i.e. training/ secondary advice/common standards etc).

Due to the way in which the figures are collected, it is impossible to give a meaningful breakdown of what proportion of funding is used in relation to consumer credit and finance, and creditor organisations licensed under the Consumer Credit Act 1974.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what action the Government is taking outside the UN to ascertain information regarding the alleged breaches of the OECD guidelines on multinational enterprises by UK companies referred to in the UN Panel of Experts' report on resource exploitation in the DRC; [85630]

(2) what the response was from the UN to the Government's request for information from the UN Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources of the DRC regarding the alleged breach of OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises committed by UK companies; [85748]

(3) what information has been requested by the Government from the UN Panel of Experts of resource exploitation in the DRC regarding the alleged breach of OECD guidelines by United Kingdom companies; and on which *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies information has been requested; [85749]

(4) when the Government first requested information from the UN Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources of the DRC regarding alleged breaches of the OECD guidelines for multinational enterprises committed by United Kingdom companies as listed in Annex III of their report; and to whom this request was made. [85747]

Miss Melanie Johnson: We are seeking more information from the UN panel before considering what action we might want to take.

The UK, along with other members of the Security Council, has asked for more information on the claims made in the Panel's latest report. We have asked specifically for information on the allegations made against UK companies and nationals. We have yet to receive this material.

The current Panel's mandate expired when it submitted its last report (18 October 2002). There is currently no mechanism or process in place to take forward the Panel's work. We are pressing, through discussions at the UN, for a speedy resolution to this administrative problem.

We have asked for details of the basis for designating the 12 British companies appearing in Annex III. Annex III is a list of all the entities the Panel considers to be in breach of OECD guidelines. None of these entities are individuals.

The United Kingdom Mission to the United Nations requested additional information from the UN Panel of Experts about companies allegedly in breach of OECD guidelines in Security Council consultations on 24 October 2002.

DRAX Power Station

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for what reason Ofgem arranged for National Grid Transco to purchase 25 per cent. of the output of the DRAX power station; whether *(a)* she and *(b)* her officials were consulted about these arrangements; and if she will make a statement. [87109]

Mr. Wilson: I understand that as part of its contingency planning associated with the financial difficulties experienced by TXU Energy, NGC assessed the risk to security of supply in the very short term of a significant volume of generation becoming unavailable to the electricity system.

On this occasion, NGC considered that it was appropriate to enter into contractual arrangements to ensure that there was sufficient contingency reserve. I understand that NGC has explained its actions at its recent Operational Forum for market participants.

Steel Industry (Future Aircraft Carrier)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the ability of the UK steel industry to meet the demands of the future aircraft carrier project. [87122]

Alan Johnson: The UK steel industry produces a range of products for use in marine applications, including naval vessels. However the exact specification

of the steel required for the future aircraft carrier project is not known at present. This will be a matter for the prime contractor, when appointed.

Care Homes

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry from when the regulations introducing a VAT concession for commercially-provided home care will apply. [86681]

John Healey: I have been asked to reply.

Commercially provided care for people in residential and nursing homes has been exempt from VAT since the introduction of the tax in 1973. The Government have no plans to change this exemption.

Newspaper Distribution

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she expects to receive the Office of Fair Trading review of the Code of Practice on Newspaper Distribution. [86592]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Office of Fair Trading published its review of the Code of Practice on newspaper distribution on 12 December. Its provisional recommendation, that selling-on should be fully liberalised, is now open to a further period of public consultation until 14 March 2003.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84793]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the 'Ministerial Code' and 'Travel by Ministers', copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the total budget of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84939]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 3 December 2002]*: Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 was published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the 'Ministerial Code' and 'Travel by Ministers', copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Post Office Card Accounts

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the PIN numbers to be used by post office cards will be on a number pad on the counter; and how partially sighted and blind people will be able to use the new system. [86562]

Mr. Timms: The matters raised by this question fall within the day to day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the Chief Executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to promote the use of post office card accounts; and when she expects information on the accounts to be available in post offices. [87404]

Mr. Timms: The post office card account is one of a range of accounts which people will be able, from next year, to receive benefit payments into. Our aim is that people should be able to choose the option which suits them best. Information about all the options is being supplied to customers by the Department for Work and Pensions and the Inland Revenue. When it is their turn to change the method of benefit and pension payments, the Government will be writing to customers with information which clearly sets out their account options and enables them to freely choose the account that is right for them. The migration programme will last two years beginning in 2003.

Mrs. Lawrence: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what banks and building societies have registered as Post Office banking partners; and what other banks are expected to become partners by April 2003. [87610]

Mr. Timms: All the major banks and the Nationwide Building Society have signed contracts with Post Office Ltd. to make their own basic bank accounts accessible at post offices. The Post Office already provides banking services on behalf of Girobank/Alliance and Leicester, Barclays, Lloyds TSB, the Co-operative Bank and the Internet banks smile and cahoot. This (paper based) service enables customers of these banks to make deposits and cash cheques at post offices free of charge.

Postcodes

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what new postcode areas have been introduced in each decade since 1972. [87341]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: The first postcodes were introduced on a trial basis in Norwich in 1959. The Postcode Address File (PAF) owned by Royal Mail contains over 27 million addresses with over 1.7 million postcodes.

There are currently 124 postcode areas, 3,000 postcode districts and 9,700 postcode sectors.

In 1972 there were 120 postcode areas. Since that time Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man have been postcoded (JE, GY and IM) respectively. The IM and GY postcodes date from 1993 and the JE ones from 1994. The only other new postcode area to be added since 1972 was HS for the Hebrides which was introduced in 1995 to overcome specific quality of service problems.

Postcomm

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what representations she has made to Postcomm on their recent proposals. [87522]

Mr. Timms: The Government has a clear interest as the shareholder in Royal Mail Group. The Department therefore made a response to Postcomm's recent consultation document on the proposal for a second price control. The response concerned the financial package that the Government is putting in place to enable the mails business to implement its renewal plan.

Recruitment Consultants

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria she uses to assess the performance of the recruitment consultants employed by her Department. [86200]

Ms Hewitt: Recruitment consultants are appointed, through a competitive tendering process, for all my Department's major external recruitment campaigns. This enables the Department to choose the most appropriate contractor for each specific situation. A call-off arrangement, negotiated by Cabinet Office, exists for recruitment consultants who specialise in appointments into the Senior Civil Service.

The specification for the recruitment services to be provided is announced at an early stage, which provides a basis for assessing the performance of the contractor, and regular project meetings enable problems to be identified and solutions found. Performance is also assessed at the end of each campaign, and any lessons learned are carried forward to the next.

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what targets have been set for regional development agencies in respect of encouraging innovation. [87839]

Alan Johnson: Targets for each Regional Development Agency (RDA) in respect of encouraging innovation are set through the corporate planning process. Targets set for 2002–03 and 2003–04 are available in the Libraries of the House.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support since 1997 her Department has provided to facilitate the development of *(a)* geothermal, *(b)* wave, *(c)* tidal and *(d)* solar energy technologies. [84730]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The table provides data on the financial support given by the Department to the technologies specified since 1997. No support is given, at present, to the development of geothermal technologies; however, funding is available for grid-connected early pre-commercial wave and tidal stream projects and innovative solar photovoltaic schemes. This is, in addition, to the funding that is also available under my Department's New and Renewable Energy Programme, which calls for proposals for research and development projects that align with the long-term technology strategies developed in partnership with industry, academia and other key stakeholders.

£ million

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Geothermal	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Wave	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.33	0.66
Tidal	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.03	0.31
Solar	1.66	0.98	1.73	1.40	2.70

The figures for support for wave and tidal in 2000–01 and 2001–02 have been revised recently.

Royal Mail

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how much the accumulated surpluses of Royal Mail Holdings were and how much were paid *(a)* in and *(b)* out of the surplus in each year since its formation. [86451]

Ms Hewitt: The company that is now known as Royal Mail Holdings plc was incorporated on 20 September 2000. It acquired all the shares in what was then Consignia plc on 26 March 2001. Movements in the accumulated surpluses during financial periods since that date are shown in the table.

	Reduction in surplus (reserves)	*Accumulated surpluses (reserves)*
26 March 2001		3,299
	953	
31 March 2002		2,346
	478	
29 September 2002		1,868

Note:
The reductions in the accumulated surpluses were due to exceptional items.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Class Sizes

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidelines her Department has laid down for class sizes in practical subjects. [87150]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My Department's safe practice guidance for practical subjects does not set down maximum pupil numbers. Sizes of practical groups and pupil teacher ratios are matters for local education authorities and schools. They are required to assess risks to health and safety and should take account of potential hazards; the ages and abilities and special

educational needs of the pupils; and relevant safety regulations in relation to the accommodation, equipment and activities.

Construction Industry Training Board

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the judgment by Mr.Justice Keith on 23rd November 2001 in respect of the future of the construction industry training board levy. [86532]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The judgment by Mr Justice Keith has shown clearly that the definition of "Contractors' Plant" as defined in the Industrial Training (Construction Board) Order of 1964 is clear and unambiguous and that the Construction Industry Training Board had acted in accordance with the provisions of the legislation.

Sangatte

Mr. Portillo: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how far the education of children from Sangatte admitted to the UK under special arrangements will be the responsibility of local education authorities; what estimate he has made of the cost; and how local education authorities will be compensated by central government. [87511]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Local education authorities will be responsible for the education of children from Sangatte as they would for any other child. They have a legal duty to ensure that education is available for all children of compulsory school age in their area, irrespective of a child's immigration status or rights of residence.

No estimate has been made of the cost, but the number of children is likely to be small, so local education authorities will be able to meet the cost of educating these children from their current budgets. Furthermore, as was announced on 5 December, there is to be an increase in education funding for the next financial year.

Grammar Schools

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the *(a)* secondary modern schools and *(b)* other non-selective schools in local education authority areas where there are grammar schools which have been awarded (i) beacon school status and (ii) specialist school status since 1 May 1997. [87832]

Mr. Miliband: The information requested has been placed in the Libraries.

HIV/AIDS

Mr. Wood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps his Department plans to take to improve awareness of HIV and the need for better sexual health practices among younger people. [85671]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Teaching about safer sex remains one of the Government's key strategies for reducing the incidence of HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Strategies for teaching about HIV/AIDS are covered by our Sex and Relationship Education Guidance which was sent to all schools in July 2000. These include helping pupils to clarify their knowledge and enabling them to become effective users of services that help prevent and treat STIs and HIV.

A report earlier this year by the Office for Standards in Education recommended that coverage of HIV and AIDS in schools is enhanced. We have responded to the report by commissioning practical guidance for teachers on HIV and STIs.

Language Teaching

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when his Department will publish its policy on language teaching in primary schools. [87229]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The Department will shortly be publishing its National Language Strategy. The strategy will set out how we will drive forward our agenda, outlined in the 'Language learning' pamphlet published earlier this year, to reverse the cycle of underperformance and transform this country's capability in languages.

Specialist Subject Teachers

Stephen Hesford: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures he is taking to support and develop the skills of teachers in specialist subjects. [82736]

Mr. Miliband: These skills are supported and developed through several funded programmes. The Key Stage 3 strategy is focused on developing the skills of teachers in the national curriculum core and foundation subjects in all secondary schools. Generally, higher education institutions and other providers, including some subject associations, are funded to run postgraduate professional programmes in a number of priority areas, including secondary core and foundation curriculum subjects and specialist teaching in Key Stages 1 and 2. In partnership with the Wellcome Trust we are creating a national network of science learning centres to support the professional development of science teachers and science technicians.

The Department's Continuing Professional Development Strategy also funds schemes that support the professional development of individual teachers in areas of their choice. The strategy includes: 500 bursaries, available to all teachers in their fourth and fifth years in the profession; Best Practice Research Scholarships of up to £2,500 a year for around 1,000 teachers who submit proposals of appropriate quality; six-week sabbaticals for teachers with more than five years experience in challenging schools; a pilot Early Professional Development scheme—in 12 LEAs—which offers up to £3,000 for professional development to teachers during their second and third years in the profession. Teachers can, and often do, choose to spend their bursaries and scholarships on activities that develop their subject specialist knowledge and skills.

We will be producing a consultation paper in the New Year on strengthening support for subject specialism.

Spending Statistics

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average spending is on each child in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools in (i) England and (ii) Devon. [87312]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the latest available information:

Average net current expenditure (after recharges) per pupil in maintained primary and secondary schools

LEA/area name	*Primary*	*Secondary*
Devon	2,300	2,930
England	2,440	3,060

Standards Fund

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the elements of the standards fund for the current financial year, showing the total *(a)* spent and *(b)* budgeted under each heading. [87193]

Mr. Miliband: Budgets for each of the Standards Fund grants for 2002–2003 are shown in the following table. Information about the total spent for each grant is not available.

The Standards Fund	
School Improvement	136,709,004
Social Inclusion: Pupil Support	84,549,663
Special Education Needs	42,119,994
Sick Children and Children in Public Care	5,193,316
Teenage Pregnancy	4,999,999
Drug, Alcohol and Tobacco Prevention	10,438,860
Study Support (National)	28,637,894
Study Support (Excellence in Cities)	18,999,999
Child Protection Co-ordinators	1,325,000
Behaviour and Improvement Programme	50,003,000
National Literacy Strategy	38,888,251
National Numeracy Strategy	38,850,044
Key Stage 3 Strategy	96,464,450
Ethnic Minority Achievement	81,057,034
Traveller Children Achievement	8,135,041
Year 6 Booster Classes	52,677,620
Education Health Partnerships	9,819,993
Qualifications	1,521,724
LEA Music Services	59,633,546
Playing for Success	1,813,365
Early Years Training and Development	7,020,009
Early Excellence Centres (Recurrent)	8,194,327
Early Excellence Centres (Capital)	3,347,208
Adult: Pupil Ratios in Reception Classes	10,985,930
School Achievement Awards	58,900,210
Nursery Schools Project	4,906,484
Training for Educational Visits Coordinators	2,355,600
Children of Asylum Seekers	2,050,500
Excellence in Cities (EiC) and Excellence Clusters	174,542,990
Gifted and Talented Summer Schools	3,816,000
Specialist Schools (Recurrent)	109,184,260
Specialist Schools (Capital)	20,350,000
Beacon Schools	40,168,850
Pupil Support Allowances	8,988,00
Pupil Learning Credits	19,637,587
Partnerships between Grammar and non-selective Schools	308,477
City Learning Centres (Recurrent)	17,165,477
City Learning Centres (Capital)	21,800,000
Excellence Challenge	17,230,556
Small Education Action Zones	27,456,891
Diversity Pathfinders	920,150
Extended Schools	5,000,000
Induction of newly qualified teachers	35,510,699
Teacher Recruitment Incentives	26,288,585
Training Schools	4,189,000
Advanced Skills Teachers (ASTs)	23,421,468
Performance Management and Threshold Assessment	14,474,890
Teaching Assistants	102,757,478
Small Schools Fund	41,082,080
Teacher Recruitment and Retention Fund	44,001,000
Teacher Sabbaticals	9,762,000
Early Professionals Developments Pilot Programme	6,056,182
Welcome Back Bonuses	680,702
Transforming School Workforce (TSW) Pathfinder	3,784,311
Fast Track Payments	318,000
National Grid for Learning (NGFL)	181,524,946
Infant Class Sizes (Capital)	1,527,402
Infant Class Sizes (Recurrent)	143,899,459
NDS Devolved Formula Capital	363,336,677
Seed Challenge Capital	60,000,000
Staff Workspaces	11,999,998
Learning Support Units (Non EiC)	9,987,269
New School Security Projects	9,999,996
Fresh start and new partnerships (Recurrent)	7,562,157
Fresh start and new partnerships (Capital)	11,683,362
Condition Funding	349,412,444
Information Management Strategy	7,039,908
Key Stage 2 class size recurrent funding	6,906,229
Key Stage 2 class size capital funding	18,630,026
Capital funding for nursery education in disadvantaged areas	19,938,691
Capital Projects	58,999,102
Laptops for teachers	59,846,307
Electronic registration systems in secondary schools	9,678,140
e-Learning Credits	29,929,186

TEC Assets

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the disposition of TEC assets. [87115]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department's accounts have now been audited by the NAO and are due to be laid before the House in January 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Adoption

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children were allowed into the United Kingdom from overseas countries for adoption by United Kingdom residents during the last 12 months, broken down by country. [86823]

Beverley Hughes: Information on the number of children admitted to the United Kingdom from overseas countries for adoption is not currently available.

The most up to date information that is available covers the number of children given indefinite leave to remain in the United Kingdom on the basis of adoption. This number excludes those children given limited leave to remain and who are subsequently adopted through the UK courts, becoming British citizens on the date that the final adoption order is made.

A total of around 25 adopted children were given indefinite leave to remain in 2001. The nationalities of the children were:

Australia
Brazil
Canada
Cyprus
Ghana
Guatemala
India
Malawi
Mexico
Morocco
Pakistan
Philippines
St. Vincent and the Grenadines
South Africa
Thailand
Turkey
United States of America
Yemen
Zambia
Zimbabwe

There were fewer than 10 cases for each nationality.

Animal Experiments

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications made under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 were rejected in each year from 1991. [85842]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Our central database only holds the requested information for the last two years. This shows that two applications were formally refused, both in 2001. One was for a project licence and the other for a personal licence. Over the same period 115 project licence applications, 54 personal licence applications and one application for a certificate of designation have so far been recorded as not proceeded with.

A feature of the regulatory regime under the 1986 Act is the discussion that often takes place at an early stage between applicants (or prospective applicants) and the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Inspectorate. This means that proposals unlikely to meet the Act's stringent requirements are revised or withdrawn before formal refusal becomes necessary.

Cannabis

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the survey conducted by the Schools Health Education Unit on cannabis use by younger teenagers. [85101]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The survey suggests many 14 to 15-year-olds thought cannabis was 'safe' to use. Most young people are aware of the enormous dangers involved in using Class A drugs but they often overlook the longer-term damage to health caused by smoking cannabis, particularly when it is smoked on a regular basis. We will be making sure that the harm it causes is communicated—young people need to know the dangers that all drugs cause.

This is one of the reasons why reducing the frequent use of any illicit drug has been included within the updated drug strategy target for young people. Government Departments are now looking at how best to convince young people about the health risk associated with cannabis use.

The Department for Education and Skills will be revising its guidance to schools on the delivery of drug education and the revised guidance will be available in September 2003. We will also be working with youth media and health organisations to make sure the health risks associated with smoking cannabis are much more widely understood.

Correspondence

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to his answer of 7 November, *Official Report*, columns 824–25W, when he will write to the hon. Member for Reading, East. [87216]

Beverley Hughes: A letter was sent on 16 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 28 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mohammad Delowar Selinan. [87656]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon Friend on 16 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 24 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Nisar Ahmed. [86656]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 December 2002.

Criminal Records Bureau

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the staffing levels are at the Criminal Records Bureau. [86721]

Hilary Benn: There are 1,158 staff employed in the Criminal Records Bureau at its Liverpool and Darwen sites, comprising staff employed by the agency, Capita and sub-contractors.

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications to the Criminal Records Bureau from addresses in postcode areas CO1, CO2, CO3 and CO4 are awaiting processing; what is the average time the applications have been delayed; and if he will make a statement. [86058]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* As at 9 December, there are 562 Disclosure applications awaiting processing from applicants who live in postcode areas C01, C02, CO3 and C04. The average delay is estimated to be eight weeks, although this includes a significant number of applications which have been returned to the applicant for more

information which is still awaited. On average, recent correctly completed applications are taking five weeks to process.

Delays in the Disclosure process continue to be a subject of some concern. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary's independent review team are taking a fundamental look at all aspects of the Criminal Records Bureau's (CRB's) operation with a view to identifying medium to long term improvements. They will report to the Home Secretary shortly.

The CRB has already implemented a range of improvements to processes and working practices and the intensive focus on improvements is already yielding results. Over the last two weeks the CRB has been averaging around 43,500 Disclosures per week, which is double the weekly output issued by the police under the previous arrangements. Since 11 March the CRB has received 1,023,000 applications and issued over 755,000 Disclosures.

Smuggling

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many convictions there have been *(a)* in Nottinghamshire and *(b)* in the United Kingdom for the smuggling of (i) heroin, (ii) cigarettes and (iii) cannabis, in each of the last three years. [82938]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The information requested is not available in the form requested. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise figures show that the number of persons sentenced for all offences of smuggling tobacco within the United Kingdom was 884 in 2000–01 and 431 in 2001–02. Figures are not available on a comparative basis for such offences before 2000–01, and there are no figures available by county or police force area.

Such information as is currently available on drug 'trafficking' offences in Nottinghamshire and Great Britain is given in the table. Drug 'trafficking' offences normally include the illicit production of drugs and the illicit cultivation of cannabis plants, but these are outside the definition of smuggling and have been excluded.

Table: Persons convicted of 'trafficking' offences involving heroin and cannabis, Nottinghamshire and Great Britain, 1998–2000

	Nottinghamshire			Great Britain[1]		
Drug and offence	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*
Heroin						
Unlawful supply	12	68	69	1,378	1,760	1,832
Possession with intent to supply unlawfully	24	38	55	1,311	1,454	1,502
Unlawful import/export[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	38	34	[3]110
Cannabis						
Unlawful supply	48	55	40	3,038	2,701	1,886
Possession with intent to supply unlawfully	86	61	60	4,898	4,206	3,282
Unlawful import/export[2]	n/a	n/a	n/a	313	315	[3]451

[1] Conviction data from 1997 onwards are not currently available for Northern Ireland.
[2] Data from Her Majesty's Customs and Excise are only available at a UK level.
[3] Estimated from court appearance data for England and Wales.
Sources:
Her Majesty's Customs and Excise, Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Court Proceedings Database and Drugs and Alcohol Research Unit

Ethnic Minority Women's Voluntary Organisations

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will estimate the number of ethnic minority women's voluntary organisations in the UK; and how many of these have benefited from regeneration programmes such as health action zones. [86497]

Beverley Hughes: Government statistics are not kept on the number of ethnic minority women's voluntary organisations in the United Kingdom. However the Council for Ethnic Minority Voluntary Organisations (CEMVO), an umbrella organisation funded by the Home Office to provide services to the black and minority ethnic (BME) voluntary and community sector had 444 BME women's organisations run by women on their database as of 9 December 2002.

Information for the number of ethnic minority women's voluntary organisations which have benefited from Health Action Zones or other regeneration programmes is not available centrally. Many programmes do however support marginalised groups and have strategies in place to increase their participation. In 2001 for instance, 560 (36 per cent.) of the 1,555 community champions funded by the Community Champions Fund were from BME communities, a success attributable to strategies such as simple application form and positive role models.

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) makes a vital contribution to tackling deprivation and promoting community cohesion. We are working across Government to further increase our support for the sector. Race equality has been placed in the mainstream of all areas of neighbourhood renewal and regeneration. We are also raising awareness of the Compact, the framework for effective partnership working between Government and the VCS, and are developing a more robust evidence base for marginalised sectors such as BME women's groups so that all parts of Government can better respond to the VCS's requirements.

Extradition Applications (France)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications have been received from France for extradition of persons to face terrorist charges, in each of the last 5 years; when

each application was received; what progress has been made; what the reasons are for delay in process; and if he will make a statement. [85718]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* In the past five years, France has made requests for the extradition of three persons accused of charges relating to terrorist activity.

One request made in March 1996 led to the fugitive's surrender to France in March 1998.

In another, a request made in April 2001 has just completed its judicial stages. The fugitive now has a statutory opportunity to make representations to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary as to why his surrender should not take place. Those representations are awaited.

In the remaining case, there are two outstanding requests. The first covers three separate requisitions made in November and December 1995 and in February 1996. Following lengthy proceedings, a decision in October 2001 to order surrender was quashed in June 2002 by the courts. We are awaiting a response from French authorities on matters raised by the judgment in order that the case may be reviewed. A further request for extradition, involving additional charges, was made in the same case in October 2001. That matter is still before the courts.

A Bill to streamline and modernise current extradition procedures is now before parliament.

Immigration Officers (Waterloo Station)

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether immigration officers based at Waterloo station will be permitted to continue to work at Waterloo in the event that they decline to work in France or Belgium. [86860]

Officers of all grades will continue to be deployed at Waterloo International while there is a continuing business and operational need.

There will be opportunities for staff who are not willing to work overseas in France or Belgium to transfer to other locations.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of the working month of immigration officers based at Waterloo station who undertake work in France and Belgium will be spent at either venue; and what extra allowances or salaries will be paid. [86861]

Beverley Hughes: Officers of all grades undertake juxtaposed immigration control duties on a voluntary basis. On average officers currently perform one such duty per week. In early 2003 local management at Waterloo will commence trials which will test a four night and a nine night package in France. These trials will last six months. We are unable to comment on the frequency that staff will be expected to carry out these duties until the results of these trials have been evaluated.

In addition to their salary, staff receive overtime payments for excess hours worked and a locally agreed subsistence allowance to cover additional out of pocket expenditure. The Department meets hotel costs.

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if immigration officers based at Waterloo station will be obliged to agree to undertake work in *(a)* France and *(b)* Belgium. [86862]

Beverley Hughes: Officers of all grades based at Waterloo undertake juxtaposed immigration control duties in France and Belgium on a voluntary basis. At present officers stay one night overseas.

In early 2003, local management at Waterloo will trial a range of options to determine a more efficient means of staffing juxtaposed controls in France and Belgium. A trawl seeking volunteers to take part in these trials will be published early in the new year. We will evaluate the trial after six months and do not rule out compelling staff to work in France and Belgium should there be insufficient volunteers.

Iraqi Asylum Seekers

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Iraqi asylum seekers he estimates had their applications refused during the 1997 to 2001 Parliament. [86908]

Beverley Hughes: There were 12,550 initial decisions on Iraqi asylum applications during the period 1 May 1997 and 31 May 2001. Of these 6,175 were refused. There are no reliable data available in this period for the number of Iraqis who subsequently appealed, and the decisions of those appeals.

Information on asylum applications and initial decisions is published quarterly. The next publication will cover the period October to December 2002, and will be available from 28 February 2003 on the Home Office Research Development and Statistics Directorate website at http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1 .html.

Wormwood Scrubs (Max Glatt Unit)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effectiveness of the Max Glatt Unit at Wormwood Scrubs prison in increasing health standards. [87442]

Hilary Benn: There has been no research into the effectiveness of the Matt Glatt Unit in increasing health standards.

Passports (Children in Care)

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many passports were issued to children in *(a)* the care of UK local authorities and *(b)* long-term foster care during each of the last five years. [87123]

Beverley Hughes: This information is not held by the United Kingdom Passport Service.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he plans to review procedures for issuing passports to children in long-term foster care with birth parents who are not contactable. [87125]

Beverley Hughes: No. The UK Passport Service requirements that parental consent is given before a passport is issued to a child and that evidence of an

appropriate court order be produced before accepting consent form a local authority social services department, are based on sound principles and are correct in law. It would be wrong for the UK Passport Service to attempt to decide whether or to whom parental rights have transferred in these circumstances; these are matters for the courts. The UK Passport Service is drawing up a guidance note for social services departments to clarify requirements for passport applications.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on procedures used to issue passports to children in long-term foster care; and what assessment has been made of the extent of delays in the process. [87218]

Beverley Hughes: British passports are issued to children only when parental consent is given. If an application for a child's passport is made by anyone other than the child's parents, the United Kingdom Passport Service (UKPS) must establish either that the applicant has parental rights or that a person with parental rights has given consent. In most cases where a child is in foster care parental rights are not transferred to the foster parent. The UKPS therefore advises the local authority to make the application in such circumstances and give details of the care order or other court order which deals with the issue of parental rights. Applications in which this information is provided are not delayed.

Prison Population

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the need to revise *(a)* short-term and *(b)* long-term predictions of growth in the prison population in light of the Criminal Justice Bill; upon what information such an assessment was made; what action his Department intends to take to meet changes in the growth of the prison population; and if he will make a statement. [84248]

Hilary Benn: We have not made final decisions about implementation of the measures in the Criminal Justice Bill, but on the basis of the modelling which has been undertaken to estimate the impact of the sentencing reforms and the cost of the Bill, we do not expect them to generate significant increases in the prison population. On current assumptions, the impact on the prison population of implementing the sentencing reforms would be broadly flat with a small reduction in places in late 2004 and early 2005, followed by a modest increase of up to 1,000 places between mid-2006 and early 2009, levelling out once the reforms have bedded in.

The Review of Correctional Services is addressing a wide range of questions regarding effectiveness and value for money and is developing a strategy for managing prison population pressures and containing its future growth. The impact of proposals in the Criminal Justice Bill are being considered in the context of the review. The prison population projections will be revised when firm implementation dates for new policy initiatives have been set. The prison service will then be in a position to work up plans for delivering the capacity needed to meet the revised projections.

Prison Visits

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he has concluded his review of the guidance PSO 440, relating to visits by close relatives to prisoners; and if he will make a statement. [86859]

Hilary Benn: It is assumed that the hon. member is referring to Prison Service Order (PSO) 4400 and not 440 as set out in the question. The Prison Service is reviewing its child protection measures as set out in PSO 4400 as part of an overall long-term review of the management of dangerous offenders. A new Prison Service Instruction on public protection is likely to be complete in late summer 2003. There are no plans to abandon the policy disallowing visits to child sex offenders by children other than close relatives.

Prisoner Status

Annabelle Ewing: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if UK citizens, regardless of domicile within the UK, have the same status and rights when held in prisons located in England; [83581]

(2) what the status is of Scottish domicile prisoners held in prisons in England. [83582]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 27 November 2002]*: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 28 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 428W.

Prisoners (Hospital Treatment)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prison inmates have been taken to *(a)* Chorley Hospital and *(b)* Preston Hospital for treatment in the last 12 months. [87026]

Hilary Benn: The information is not held centrally and I will therefore write to my hon. Friend.

Race Discrimination

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many race discrimination cases against the Home Office have been received in the last three years. [86722]

Beverley Hughes: Details of race discrimination claims brought against the Home Office are not maintained centrally. However, the Treasury Solicitor's Department maintains a record of claims against the Home Office in which it is involved. It is not likely that there is a significant number of such cases in which the Treasury Solicitor's Department is not involved, and therefore the statistics from that office represent the most accurate estimate of claims against the Home Office. The table shows the number of race discrimination cases brought against the Home Office, including Her Majesty's Prison Service and the Immigration and Nationality Directorate, in the last three years, in which there was Treasury Solicitor's Department involvement:

Year	*Number of race discrimination cases*
2000	38
2001	28
2002[1]	27

[1] Up to and including 10 December 2002

Marsham Street Building (Redundant Concrete)

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what consideration was given to requiring redundant concrete from the former Department of Environment building in Marsham Street to be transported to Dagenham by water. [85843]

Beverley Hughes: Arrangements for removal of redundant concrete from the former Department of Environment building in Marsham Street are the responsibility of the contractor, Annes Gate Property Plc (AGP), dealing with the demolition and then, on this site, construction of the new Home Office headquarters building. AGP, whose arrangements were approved under the planning permission given by Westminster city council, have commented that the current waste disposal routing via the road network, instead of by barge, is more environmentally compatible. The waste is loaded into the transport vehicles once only and is then transported to the recycling centre approximately six miles from the site. This procedure is much less complicated and involves much less loading and re-loading of waste than transportation by water. Moreover, currently there are no recycling centres with the capacity that AGP require situated along the river.

Community Cohesion

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what measures he is taking to reduce the extent of segregation between richer and poorer communities within UK cities. [87007]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office plays a key role in the delivery of the Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy. One of the key long term aims of the strategy is to narrow the gap between the most deprived areas and the rest of the country. The Home Office intends to meet this aim through the activities and programmes it is putting in place to meet its own floor target to:

> "reduce crime and the fear of crime; improve performance overall, including by reducing the gap between the highest Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership areas and the best comparable areas; and reduce:
>
> —vehicle crime by 30 per cent from 1998–99 to 2004
>
> —domestic burglary by 25 per cent from 1998–99 to 2005
>
> —robbery in the 10 Street Crime Initiative areas by 14 per cent from 1999–2000 to 2005; and maintain that level".

The Community Cohesion Unit (CCU) and Race Equality Unit in the Home Office work closely with the Neighbourhood Renewal Unit (NRU) and the Urban Policy Unit on community cohesion and faith issues. For example, the CCU and NRU are jointly funding a two year Community Cohesion Pathfinders programme launched by myself in October. The programme will target 15 local authority areas—providing funding for the local authority, voluntary and community sector and (through the community champions scheme) for individuals in the locality. Bids are due in January.

The Home Office is developing an action plan to put in place recommendations made in a Social Exclusion Unit report on ex-offenders published in July.

Visa Regime (Slovakia)

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to lift the visa requirement for visitors from Slovakia in advance of EU accession. [87315]

Beverley Hughes: Visa regimes are maintained only where they contribute to effective immigration control. The visa regime has proved effective in reducing the numbers of inadmissible passengers travelling to the UK from Slovakia. Following Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004, all categories of Slovak nationals will enjoy rights of free movement and will not require a visa to come to the UK. In the meantime, the visa regime on Slovak nationals, as with all visa regimes, will be kept under review and will be lifted when we consider that the threat to our immigration control is at an acceptable level.

Woodhill Prison

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what funding his Department provided to Woodhill Prison in *(a)* 2001–02, *(b)* 2000–01 and *(c)* 1999–2000 to ensure prison health services meet the targets set jointly with Milton Keynes PCT in their health action plan. [86969]

Hilary Benn: Funding for health services was not separately identified within the overall budget allocated to Woodhill prison in the years in question.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Al-Qaeda

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on links between the Al-Qaeda terrorist group and representatives of the Iraqi regime. [87587]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) on 10 December, 2002, *Official Report*, column 143. We believe that there are Al-Qaeda operatives in Iraq. We do not know their links to the Iraqi regime. Obviously in the circumstances it is difficult to establish this issue with clarity.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the *(a)* countries of origin and *(b)* background of the alleged Al-Qaeda terrorists who carried out the terrorist attacks on the USA on 11 September 2001. [87588]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The terrorists who carried out the 11 September attacks were from Egypt, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Lebanon. They were all male, ranged in ages from 20 to 33, and came from a variety of social backgrounds. Of the 19, the majority had links with Al-Qaeda. A senior Bin Laden associate claimed to have trained some of the hijackers in Afghanistan.

Arms Control and Disarmament Experts

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many Arabic-speaking arms control and disarmament experts he has *(a)* on his staff and *(b)* on secondment to his Department. [87562]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There is one Arabic speaking official currently working in the arms control and disarmament field in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He is not a secondee.

Border Guarantee Agreements

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what commitments the UK has made to the protection of the Belize state border; what level of co-operation there is between UK and local security forces; and what discussions have taken place with Belizian authorities regarding border protection. [87370]

Mr. MacShane: Our commitment to Belize is to consult internationally in the event of a threat to Belize's security and to play an appropriate part in any response. This has been the UK's position since the withdrawal of the British garrison from Belize in 1994. We have a close relationship with the Belize Defence Force. The Ministry of Defence maintains an important jungle training school in Belize. The Governments of Belize and Guatemala are working closely under the auspices of the Organisation of America States (OAS) both to settle their long-standing territorial dispute and to agree on measures to build confidence on the border. We strongly support the OAS process.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs with which countries the UK has a border guarantee agreement; what proposals there are to extend these treaties; and what commitments the Government have made to the preservation of democracy in those countries. [87371]

Mr. Straw: 127 bilateral treaties have been identified which refer to boundaries or borders to which the United Kingdom is or has been a party, concluded with 30 separate bilateral partners. Any obligation to guarantee an international border could only be determined by reference to each individual treaty.

We are not aware of any impending treaties containing this provision.

The United Kingdom has an historical and abiding interest in the maintenance of internationally-recognised and agreed borders, and is committed to the promotion of democracy and international stability.

EU Legislation

Mr. Bryant: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many legislative measures have been enacted in the UK to implement European Union legislation in each year since 1992. [86478]

Mr. MacShane: It would entail disproportionate cost to research and compile the number of legislative measures enacted each year in the UK directly implementing EC legislation.

The picture is complicated. Some EC measures are directly applicable in the member states. Others require incorporation into national law. This is sometimes done by legislation, but on other occasions by administrative means. In yet other situations, domestic legislation which is being amended for other purposes, may also incorporate changes to reflect EU directives. This makes it extremely difficult to determine how many legislative measures have been introduced in the UK as a result of EC measures.

EU General Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the outcome was of the General Affairs Council held on 9th December; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [86925]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I represented the UK at the General Affairs and External Relations Council in Brussels on December 9 and 10. Conclusions were agreed by consensus and no formal votes were taken.

General Affairs Session

Progress of work in other Council Configurations

The Council took stock of proceedings in other Council settings on the basis of the customary Presidency report. Regarding Justice and Home Affairs, particular attention was drawn to the Council's approval on 28 and 29 November of four negotiating mandates on readmission agreements with Albania, Algeria, China and Turkey and the EU Plan for Return to Afghanistan. The ECOFIN Council's approval of the 2003 draft budget was also highlighted.

Preparation for the European Council in Copenhagen

Enlargement

The Council discussed the way forward for concluding accession negotiations with the candidate countries at the Copenhagen European Council on 12 and 13 December. The Presidency presented the results of informal consultations with the candidate countries, which, aided by the Commission, had led to 'packages' being put together for each country. The Council decided that negotiating issues concerning the global amount (including the financial consequences of the agricultural quota proposals) as well as the question of direct income support in agriculture, be submitted to the European Council in Copenhagen, with a view to finalising the Union position. Solutions proposed by the Presidency on all other matters were accepted by the Council. Member states considered the Presidency's offer extremely generous and noted that the Council could go no further.

Use of languages in an enlarged Union

The Council noted a Presidency report on the use of languages in the Council, in the context of an enlarged Union. The Council agreed that the report would be forwarded to the European Council in Copenhagen and that work would continue on the basis of the conclusions set out by the Presidency in the report.

Annotated draft agenda of the European Council

The European Council will focus on two items: enlargement (the completion of the first stage of the enlargement process and the conclusion of negotiations with ten candidate countries; the adoption of an enhanced accession strategy for Bulgaria and Romania including revised roadmaps and increased pre-accession assistance; and the next steps concerning Turkey's candidature); and the functioning of the Council in view of enlargement (with a discussion on the initial report by the Danish Presidency on the Presidency of the Council).

Kaliningrad

The Council adopted conclusions on Kaliningrad, as a follow-up to the EU/ Russia Summit of 11 November 2002. The Council reiterated its commitment to adopting necessary steps to implement the new arrangement on the Facilitated Transit Document (FTD) and the Facilitated Rail Transit Document (FRTD) before the signature of the Accession Treaty. This will be decided and developed in close consultation with Lithuania. The EU stands ready to provide financial assistance to Lithuania to cover additional costs of implementing the measures.

Turkey

Ministers discussed the next steps of Turkey's candidature for membership over dinner, noting the new government's orientation and reform agenda, taking into account the Copenhagen criteria.

Annual operational programme of Council activities

The Council discussed its draft operation programme for 2003, submitted jointly by the forthcoming Greek and Italian presidencies and contributed to by the Commission and European Parliament. The programme comes as a result of measures decided at the Seville European Council to improving the efficient functioning of the Council. Member states broadly welcomed the new initiative which identifies the following priority areas: enlargement and reform; reinvigorating Europe's economy; social cohesion while promoting sustainable development; and developing the European areas of freedom, security and justice.

Inter-Institutional Agreement on better regulation

The Council noted the Presidency's report on the state of negotiations between the Council, Commission and European Parliament, on an Inter-Institutional Agreement to improve the quality of Community legislation. (Issues addressed include improved co-ordination of the legislative processes, better programming regarding co-decision, greater transparency and publicity of work and the exploration of alternative instruments such as co-regulation and self-regulation by economic operators, social partners, NGOs and European associations.)

So far, a broad common approach on the main parts of the Agreement has emerged. Work will continue at a technical level on other areas. The Greek presidency has been tasked with pursuing negotiations with a view to concluding the Agreement as soon as possible.

External Relations Session
Middle East

SG/HR Solana and Commissioner Patten briefed the Council on the current Middle East situation in advance of ministerial discussion at both the Copenhagen European Council and the 'Quartet' meeting in Washington on 20 December.

Western Balkans
Federal Republic of Yugoslavia

The Council welcomed recent progress on the draft Constitutional Charter and looked forward to early parliamentary approval. It registered concern at the outcome of the Serbian Presidential elections on 8 December and requested that the matter be resolved by all parties, constitutionally, transparently and democratically, safeguarding institutional stability and continued reform.

FRY/Kosovo

The Council welcomed the extension of UNMIK's direct administrative authority to Northern Mitrovica and commended the UN's Special Representative, Michael Steiner, and the Belgrade authorities for their efforts in achieving this encouraging result.

Arms sales

The Council reiterated its grave concern regarding arms sales that breached UN sanctions. It requested speedy and effective investigation into these matters and that responsible parties be brought to account. The Council reaffirmed the crucial importance it attaches to maintaining civilian control of military operations and urged all countries concerned to implement decisive legal and administrative measures to this effect.

London conference on organised crime

The Council welcomed the successful conference of 25 November, fully supported the priority actions identified by the conference and called for urgent implementation of the commitments subscribed to. The Council will draw on the Stabilisation and Association Process review mechanism and a wide range of regional initiatives to follow up on its commitments.

Afghanistan

Following discussion and briefing on the Petersberg conference, the Council adopted conclusions. These reiterated the Council's strong commitment to contributing to the full implementation of the Bonn Agreement and outlined existing challenges. Security continues to be a priority concern; the Council commended the 'Decree on the National Army' issued by the Afghan Transitional Authority (ATA). It also welcomed the declaration 'Rebuilding Peace in Afghanistan' adopted at the Petersberg conference on 2 December, and reiterated the importance of democratic values, pluralism and respect for human rights. It restated its commitment to working with other international bodies to eliminate the opium trade.

Migration and development

Commissioner Patten presented the Commission's communication on integrating migration issues in the EU's external relations policies, as a follow-up to the Seville European Council decisions. The

Communication consists of an analysis of migration and development issues generally, and a report on the effectiveness of financial resources available at Community level. The Commission proposed that migration issues should be more adequately integrated into existing external relations policy and that supplementary financial effort should be made to accommodate this. COREPER has been tasked to examine the Communication and prepare a substantive debate for the Council early next year.

EU/ Africa relations

Ministers discussed EU/ Africa relations and, in particular, preparations for the next EU/Africa Summit due to take place in Spring 2003, over dinner. The troika will visit Africa to discuss further.

Cyprus

Ministers assessed the current state of play in negotiations on the UN Secretary General's settlement plan for Cyprus.

ESDP

The Council discussed EU/Nato relations and mandated SG/HR Solana to forward to NATO the text on the implementation of the Nice provisions, agreed at the Brussels European Council on 24 and 25 October. The Council also noted a draft Presidency report.

Greenland: fisheries

The Council heard a Commission presentation on the mid-term review of the fisheries protocol between the EU and Greenland. The Council noted that a decision on the proposals to adjust the protocol in the short term and to secure political commitment between the EU, Greenland and Denmark must be reached by the end of February 2003.

AOB: WHO

The Belgian delegation informed the Council of Dr. Peter Piot's (current Executive Director of UN AIDS programme) candidature for the position of Director General of the World Health Organisation.

Items approved without debate
EUPM

The Council noted that in less than a month the EU Police Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina will undertake its first crisis management operation under ESDP and welcomed the double-hatting of the High Representative as EU Special Representative and his role in the EUPM chain of command. The UN Security Council has welcomed EUPM's succession to the UN's International Police Task Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

European Union Special Representatives

The Council extended the mandates of the five existing special representatives in the Middle East, African Great Lakes, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Afghanistan and Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, until June 2003.

Cuba: 12th evaluation of common position

The Council acknowledged the continuation of an open and constructive dialogue with Cuba on all issues of common interest. The Council noted that the Cuban Government had made no significant steps towards meeting the aims of the Common Position since the previous evaluation. EU policy objectives toward Cuba will remain encouraging Cuba's transition to a pluralistic and democratic system, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, lasting economic recovery and an improvement in the living standards of the population. The Council also strongly urged the Cuban Government to ratify the UN Covenants on Political and Civil Rights, and those on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

Colombia

The Council welcomed President Uribe's efforts to reform his country's institutions and to develop a fully functioning democratic state throughout Colombia, based on respect for human rights and the welfare and safety of all its citizens. The Council reiterated its support for seeking a negotiated solution to the conflict in Colombia and expressed the EU's readiness to assist in these areas. It expressed deep concern at the deterioration of human rights in the country and urged the Colombian Government to take effective action against impunity and collusion.

Restrictive measures against Somalia

The Council adopted a Common Position concerning restrictive measures against Somalia, prohibiting the sale or supply of arms and related material to Somalia by the member states. Technical, financial or other advice related to military activity is also prohibited.

Mano River Union Region

The Council noted that despite significant recent progress towards peace, democracy and reconciliation in Sierra Leone, instability in the sub-region is still of grave concern. The current situation in Liberia threatens the stability of the sub-region.

The Council welcomes the regional peace process within the Mano River Union framework, facilitated by Morocco, but regrets that progress achieved so far is limited. The Council also welcomes the strengthening of the EU's political dialogue with the countries of the Mano River Union, through the appointment of its Special Representative in 2001. The EU is one of the key development partners for the region. Its main objective in the region is to contribute strategically to peace, security and stability as preconditions for sustainable development.

Ukraine—common strategy

The Council approved a report on the implementation of the Common Strategy on Ukraine, adopted in December 1999. The report addresses the main objectives of the EU's policy toward Ukraine as set out in the Common Strategy.

European Union's activities in the Fight against terrorism

The Council took stock of a Presidency report on the EU's anti-terrorism activities and directed its competent bodies to bring forward work on the report's recommendations. The main areas covered include: enhancing justice, security and protection of EU citizens; the fight against the financing of terrorism; and the EU's external action in the fight against terrorism.

EU-Canada Summit

The Council took stock of preparations for the Summit to be held on 19 December, in Ottawa.

Gibraltar

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what powers the Gibraltar Government has to *(a)* regulate financial services, with specific reference to pensions and *(b)* initiate referenda. [86850]

Mr. MacShane: In relation to financial services, the Gibraltar Financial Services Commission, established by the Financial Services Commission Ordinance of 1989, is charged with the responsibility of supervising institutions carrying out financial business in or from within Gibraltar. The Commission is appointed by the Governor with the approval of my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary.

Providing the Government of Gibraltar is acting consistent with the Gibraltar Constitution, they are able to initiate local referenda if they so choose. We have made clear that Her Majesty's Government would, in consultation with the Government of Gibraltar, expect to oversee any referendum on a change in sovereignty, since any such change could trigger primary legislation in the UK.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list those responsibilities of HM Government and the Crown to Gibraltar which are not devolved to the Gibraltar Government. [86852]

Mr. MacShane: The Despatch to the Gibraltar Constitution Order of May 1969, a copy of which is in the Library of the House, sets out responsibilities which are devolved to the Government of Gibraltar.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which EC laws and regulations, other than those excluded by the 1972 Act of Accession, do not apply to Gibraltar. [87038]

Mr. MacShane: Other than those areas of Community policy from which Gibraltar is excluded by virtue of the UK's Act of Accession, EMU does not apply, since the UK is not a member. Gibraltar airport is suspended from the scope of the following measures:

Regulation 87/602: 1st Package—Market Access;

Directive 89/463: Scheduled Inter-Regional Air Services;

Regulation 2343/90: 2nd Package—Market Access;

Regulation 294/91: Operation of Air Cargo Services between Member States;

Regulation 2408/92: 3rd Package—Market Access;

Regulation 95/93: Slots;

Directive 96/67: Access to Ground Handling Market;

Regulation 925/99: Hushkits; and

Protocol of accession of the European Community to the European Organisation for the Safety of Air Navigation (EUROCONTROL).

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on pension regulation in Gibraltar. [86851]

Mr. MacShane: The Gibraltar Commissioner for Income Tax is responsible for the regulation of pension schemes. The Financial Services Commission supervises businesses carrying out investment and asset management and administration.

Indonesia

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Government of Indonesia regarding *(a)* the imprisonment of Lesley McCulloch and *(b)* human rights in Aceh province. [87430]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We have raised Lesley McCulloch's case on a number of occasions and at a high level with the Indonesian authorities; most recently on 2 December when my noble Friend the Baroness Amos raised concerns about the delay in the court proceedings with the Indonesian Charge d'Afaires in London.

We welcome the recent signing of a peace agreement between the Government of Indonesia and Free Aceh Movement (GAM) on 9 December. We urge both sides to implement all terms of the agreement and hope this will lead to a lasting peace in Aceh. Separately, we continue to raise the issue of human rights with the Indonesian Government particularly the accountability of security forces for committing human rights abuses.

Iraq

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs who made the decision that the United States should be *(a)* in charge of the translation and distribution of and *(b)* given permission to edit the Iraqi dossier to the United Nations of its weapons of mass destruction capacity. [87414]

Mr. MacShane: The President of the UN Security Council decided that the Iraqi Declaration should first be given to members of the Security Council with the expertise to assess the risks of proliferation: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. His decision followed consultations with all other members of the Security Council.

It is open to these five states to pass on any concerns they have about the risks of proliferation to UNMOVIC and the IAEA. But UNMOVIC and the IAEA alone will judge what material needs to be excised before it distributes the Declaration.

UNMOVIC will distribute the version of the Declaration that will be given to all members of Security Council. And UNMOVIC, not the United States, is in charge of translation of the Declaration.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which countries will receive an unedited version of the Iraqi dossier of its weapons of mass destruction. [87415]

Mr. MacShane: As states with the expertise to assess the risks of proliferation, China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States have received unedited versions of the Iraqi Declaration. UNMOVIC and the IAEA will decide

what, if any, parts of the Declaration need to be excised before it distributes the report to all members of the UN Security Council.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will publish the names of the United Kingdom-based and registered companies named as suppliers of equipment to Iraqi military industries, as listed in the Iraqi submission made to the United Nations Security Council on its military programmes; and if he will list the number of companies listed as suppliers to Iraq, broken down by country. [87497]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: The task of analysing the Iraqi declaration is continuing. It would be premature to make any substantive comment on its contents at this stage.

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs for what reason the non-permanent member states on the United Nations Security Council have not been provided with the full text of the Iraqi declaration on its programme of military equipment and infrastructure submitted pursuant to UNSC resolution 1441. [87582]

Mr. MacShane: The President of the UN Security Council decided that the Iraqi Declaration should first be given to members of the Security Council with the expertise to assess the risks of proliferation: China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. His decision followed consultations with all other members of the Security Council.

UNMOVIC and the IAEA will judge what material needs to be excised before it distributes the declaration to all Security Council members.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87355]

Mr. Straw *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: The information is as follows:

Foreign Secretary

January 2000 (Robin Cook)

6 Lisbon

16 Chevening House, Kent (Dinner)

18–20 Jordan and Egypt

24 General Affairs Council, Brussels

26 International Forum on the Holocaust, Stockholm

27 Chevening House, Kent (meeting with German Foreign Minister and others)

28 Burns Supper, Boldon

January 2001 (Robin Cook)

11 Brussels and Paris

22 General Affairs Council, Brussels

January 2002 (Jack Straw)

20–23 Paris, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and DRC

28 General Affairs Council, Brussels

31 Washington

Minister for Europe

January 2000 (Keith Vaz)

14 British/French Colloque, Hanbury Manor, Herts

16–17 Rome

19–20 Athens

22 Paris 'Your Future of Europe Student Seminar'

24 General Affairs Council, Brussels

25 Brussels (NATO)

January 2001 (Keith Vaz)

22 General Affairs Council, Brussels

24 Prague

January 2002 (Peter Hain)

8–9 Ljubljana

28–29 General Affairs Council, Brussels

Minister of State

January 2000 (Peter Hain)

9–14 Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Ghana

24–25 New York

28–31 South Africa

January 2001 (Peter Hain/Brian Wilson)

1–9 South Africa (Peter Hain)

January 2002 (Baroness Symons)

11 South Yorkshire

14–16 Santa Monica

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

January 2000 (John Battle)

None

January 2001 (John Battle)

18 Athens

24–30 Mexico

January 2002 (Ben Bradshaw)

14–17 Israel and Palestinian Authority

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

January 2000 (Baroness Scotland)

None

January 2001 (Baroness Scotland)

15–16 Bradford

19 Oxford

22–31 British Antarctic Territory

January 2002 (Baroness Amos)

7–9 Kenya and Tanzania

28–29 New York

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State

(new post created in June 2001)

January 2002 (Denis MacShane)

1–6 Switzerland

25–28 Japan.

Mr. Ian Hook

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what discussions he has had with the Israeli authorities concerning the legality of the killing of Mr. Ian Hook; and if he will make a statement; [87110]

(2) what steps the Government have taken to establish the circumstances of the killing of Mr. Ian Hook; and if he will make a statement on the results of these inquiries. [87111]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to the Israeli Foreign Minister, Mr. Netanyahu, on 22 November 2002. Mr. Netanyahu promised an immediate investigation and gave an undertaking to share the results as soon as he had them. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister raised the matter with the Israeli Prime Minister, Mr. Sharon, on 29 November 2002. I also raised it with the Israeli Ambassador, Mr. Shtauber, on 4 and 5 December 2002. There has also been frequent contact between our embassy in Tel Aviv and the Israeli authorities, and our Chargé d'Affaires discussed the IDF inquiry with a senior IDF officer on 3 December 2002, at the IDF's request.

We have made our concerns clear at the highest levels, and received assurances that the IDF inquiry would be rigorous and comprehensive.

We are also in touch with the UN about the investigation they are carrying out into Mr. Hook's death.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps are being taken by the Government to assist the UN Panel of Experts on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the Democratic Republic of Congo to identify the ultimate owners and beneficiaries of Tremalt Ltd. [87611]

Mr. Straw: The UN Panel of Expert's mandate expired on 18 October 2002. Discussions are under way at the UN on how to renew its mandate. The UK will maintain a dialogue with the Panel, once its mandate is renewed. We will continue to comment on information the Panel wishes to discuss with the UK, as requested.

Overseas Territories

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs under whose direction Governors of overseas territories act on *(a)* matters devolved to overseas legislation and *(b)* other matters. [87039]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Governors of overseas territories act under the direction of the Foreign Secretary. The extent to which the Foreign Secretary may instruct a Governor as to the exercise of his functions depends on the terms of the Constitution and legislation in force in each territory.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what his policy is on the representation of *(a)* overseas territories outside Europe and *(b)* crown dependencies in the European Parliament; [87040]

(2) if he will make a statement on the distinction between Gibraltar and other overseas territories and the crown dependencies in respect of their European parliamentary representation. [87041]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Gibraltar is the only UK overseas territory inside the European Union. Following a 1999 European Court of Human Rights judgment, the UK is required to ensure that Gibraltarians can vote in European Parliament elections. The Government introduced the European Parliament (Representation) Bill in November 2002 in order to provide for Gibraltar's enfranchisement in time for the 2004 European Parliamentary elections.

The other overseas territories and the crown dependencies are not part of the European Union. They have their own elected governments and no direct representation in the European Parliament. Their constituents are free to raise with UK MEPs any concerns they may have with regard to EU legislation or other EU matters, and their governments are free to raise with HMG any such concerns they may have.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87695]

Mr. MacShane: Progress against the FCO's targets agreed under the 1998 Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR98) for the period 1999–2002 was reported in Appendix K of the FCO's 2002 Departmental Report, which was published in June 2002, and is available on the FCO website (www.fco.gov.uk). CSR98 targets were superseded by targets agreed under the 2000 Spending Review (SR2000) for the period 2001–04. SR2000 targets and the new targets agreed under the 2002 Spending Review (SR2002) for the period 2003–06 are also available on the FCO website.

Surface-to-air Missiles

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with allies about dealing with the proliferation of surface-to-air missiles; and what actions he proposes to take. [87845]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The states participating in the Wassenaar Arrangement, including the United Kingdom, recognising the special danger posed by such weapons, adopted specific export control guidelines for Man-Portable Air Defence Systems in December 2000.

All military listed arms exports are strictly licensed under the EU Consolidated Code of Conduct.

The Government continue to work with other parties to strengthen regulation of the arms trade and stop illegal proliferation, particularly where there is a danger that arms might leak to terrorists.

Syria

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he plans to have with the President of Syria. [86899]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We will discuss the full range of bilateral and international issues with President Bashar al-Assad including reform, human rights, Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process and the fight against terrorism.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether he will discuss support for terrorist organisations with the President of Syria during his forthcoming visit to the UK; [87641]

(2) if he will make a statement about the reasons for the visit of the President of Syria to the UK; [87643]

(3) whether he will discuss the fate of Israeli missing servicemen with President Bashar Al-Assad of Syria during his forthcoming visit to the United Kingdom; and if he will make a statement. [87642]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: President Bashar Al-Assad is visiting the United Kingdom, at the invitation of Her Majesty's Government, as a follow-up to the Prime Minister's visit to Syria in October 2001. Discussions during the visit will cover the full range of bilateral and international issues, including reform, human rights, Iraq, the Middle East Peace Process and the fight against terrorism, including terrorist organisations in Syria and the fate of missing Israeli servicemen.

UN Resolutions

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which United Nations *(a)* Security Council resolutions and *(b)* General Assembly resolutions the United Kingdom has voted on in the current session; how the United Kingdom voted in each case; what steps his Department takes to maximise media coverage of United Nations resolutions and debates; and if he will make it his policy to make a written statement in the Official Report on the United Kingdom voting record at the United Nations. [87586]

Mr. MacShane: Voting records of all resolutions of the UN Security Council and the UN General Assembly since 1983 can be accessed via the internet at http://unbisnet.un.org.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the UK Mission to the United Nations in New York and other British embassies and high commissions frequently issue press releases and have information on their websites which publicise UN activities.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what arrangements there will be for pensioners to get documents verified for the purposes of claiming benefits without posting them to regional Pension Service centres. [86883]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: We expect that the vast majority of pensioners will continue to prefer to deal with The Pension Service by post as they do now. However where a pensioner requires it we expect to be able to verify documents via the local service.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to ensure that women will continue to receive their benefits payment independent of men when the new payment method for benefits is introduced. [87103]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: The Department for Work and Pensions is providing customers with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to payment directly into bank accounts. All customers including women will have the option to open an account in their name only if they want independent access to their benefit payments.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent discussions his Department has had with *(a)* pensioner groups and *(b)* poverty groups as part of the project to change payment systems from one of benefit books to direct bank account payments. [87104]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: Special interest groups including those that represent pensioner and poverty groups have been involved throughout the development of the move to direct payment. Regular meetings are held with these groups to discuss progress. The most recent meeting was held on 28 November 2002.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what research the Department has undertaken into the advantages of moving to paying benefits to bank accounts only; and if he will make a statement. [87107]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: Payment directly into accounts is a safe, convenient, more modern and efficient way to pay benefits and pensions. More people are already choosing to be paid this way. The Department conducted research of benefit recipients who were not already paid this way to provide an overview of their characteristics, experiences and attitudes. Some people indicated that they wanted to be able to continue to access their money from post office branches and also to be able to continue to collect it weekly. Both of these options will be available when this payment method becomes the normal way we pay benefits from April 2003.

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* research and *(b)* risk assessment has been undertaken by the Department on the number of customers who do not have bank accounts in which to receive their benefits; and what contingency plans the Department has for those without bank accounts for the payment of benefits. [87108]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: Benefit customers are increasingly choosing direct payment as the way they want their benefit or pension paid. Research has shown that around 85 per cent. of benefit customers already have access to bank accounts. The introduction of universal banking services (which consist of two elements: access to a basic bank account and the post office card account) will open up a wider

range of banking and financial services. We have always recognised that there will be a small group of people who we cannot pay directly into an account. We will develop an alternate method to pay this group of people.

Benefit Take-up

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if his Department has received the figures from the Office for National Statistics on the take-up of income-related benefits for 2000–01; and when they will be published. [86735]

Malcolm Wicks: The National Statistics bulletin Updates, recently pre-announced a release date of March 2003 for the 2000–01 financial year estimates of take-up of income-related benefits. The Office for National Statistics have delivered to the Department research that will be incorporated in the production of these statistics. On evaluation of these research findings a precise date of release will be pre-announced in Updates.

Child Poverty

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the baseline data was on which his Department's target to reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least 25 per cent. by 2004 was based; and what progress has been made. [87163]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding reply 16 December 2002]:* The target to reduce the number of children in low-income households by at least aquarter by 2004–05 is measured by the number of children below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income as reported in Households Below Average Income (HBAI) statistics. Baseline for the target is 1998–99 with 3.1 million children in low-income households before housing costs (BHC) and 4.2 million after housing costs (AHC). HBAI statistics show a fall of around 400,000 children between 1998–99 and 2000–01 (3.1 million to 2.7 million) BHC, and 300,000 (4.2 million to 3.9 million) AHC.

The Public Service Agreement target technical note, available on the internet, contains full details of how the target will be monitored.

Combined Pension Forecasts

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many combined pension forecasts have been issued in each month since his Department's current forecasting scheme came into operation. [87164]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The combined pension forecast service was piloted from October 1999, and is now operational. Throughout the pilots the Department has worked with employers and pension providers to ensure they can issue combined pension forecasts to their employees and pension scheme members. Now the service is operational, we are continuing to recruit employers and pension providers in order to build up the service so that is can be made available to as many people as possible. To date, 348 schemes have expressed an interest in using this voluntary service.

The complete process from recruitment to the time the employer or pension scheme provider provides combined forecasts, can take around 12 to 18 months, and as the private sector partner issues the statement, precise issue dates are their responsibility.

The Department has, however, worked in partnership with a number of providers to facilitate the issue of combined pension forecasts on the following dates:

Year 2002	*Number of CPF's issued*
April	14,602
May	88
June	467
July	10,049
August	—
September	6,380
October	2,600
November	—
December	7,500
Total	75,186

EU Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the outcome was of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council held on 3 December; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including their voting record; and if he will make a statement. [87252]

Malcolm Wicks: This was a very busy Council with business split over two days. My right hon. Friend attended the Employment and Social Policy part, held on 3 December, accompanied by the Minister for Employment Relations and the Regions, Alan Johnson. The agenda covered a wide range of employment and social policy issues. Council agreed an orientation toward political agreement on a Regulation to replace Regulation 1408/71 which coordinates social security for people moving within the EU. The issues covered at this Council were sickness benefits, benefits for work injury and illness, and death grants. Work will continue on simplification of this regulation under the forthcoming Greek Presidency.

The Council reached political agreement on a Regulation extending provisions of Regulation 1408/71 to nationals of third countries. This Regulation will be adopted at a future council.

The Council also agreed to minor revisions to the objectives agreed at Nice in 2000 for the next round of National Action Plans on social inclusion.

The Council agreed a number of Resolutions: on e-accessibility for disabled people, ahead of the European year for disabled people in 2003; on social inclusion through social dialogue; and on corporate social responsibility.

This Council also produced Conclusions on gender mainstreaming within the Council and Council Conclusions on a series of indicators concerning violence against women.

There were three substantive discussions at this Council. Council adopted a joint report with ECOFIN on the streamlining of the annual co-ordination of economic and employment policies after some discussion. The report is in line with the UK's desire to see reform of the employment processes to emphasise outcomes and ensure that all work is geared to achieving the Lisbon objectives.

There was also an orientation debate on the Commission's proposed Directive on improving working conditions for temporary agency workers. Amongst other issues, the UK continued to argue for a longer derogation than the six weeks proposed in the Commission paper. The Greek Presidency will continue to seek a compromise on this dossier when they take over the Presidency next year.

The Council agreed a Decision establishing a Tripartite Social Summit after discussion. This will be forwarded as a Report from the ESPHCA to the General Affairs and External Relations Council, and recommends continuing the current informal arrangements.

The Council adopted joint conclusions with ECOFIN on the structural indicators for the 2003 Synthesis report.

The Commission presented its draft of the Joint Employment Report at this Council. The draft was remitted to the Employment Committee for consideration.

The Presidency announced that it would shortly be bringing forward a revised proposal for a Directive protecting workers from the risks of exposure to electromagnetic fields and waves.

No votes were taken on any of these issues.

Fairground Safety

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many fairground rides have been surveyed in each year since 1990; and by how many surveyors. [85727]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: The Health and Safety Executive does not hold this information. The industry, in consultation with the Health and Safety Executive, is however developing a system that will be able to supply this information in the future.

Guidance produced by the Health and Safety Executive in consultation with the industry "Fairgrounds and Amusements Parks, Guidance on Safe Practice", requires that every fairground ride, and any ancillary parts of the ride which may affect the safety of the ride are subject to thorough examination at least annually, or within any shorter period specified by the manufacturer or appointed inspection body.

Once the inspection body that carried out the examination is satisfied with the safety of the ride, a Declaration of Operational Compliance, (DoC) is issued to the operator to allow him to continue to operate this fairground ride.

The number of registered inspection bodies (excluding those registered to inspect coin operated children's rides) was 27 as of 4 December 2002. This information is available on the NAFLIC web page http://www.naflic.org.uk/adips-2002.htm. Further details can be obtained from NAFLIC, PO Box 752, Sunderland SR3 1XX. Tel/Fax 0191–5239498.

Fraud

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many telephone calls were made to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline in *(a)* January, *(b)* February and *(c)* March in (i) 1999, (ii) 2000, (iii) 2001, and (iv) 2002. [86994]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: The information requested is in the table.

Number of calls to the National Benefit Fraud Hotline

Year	*January*	*February*	*March*
1999	13,925	13,798	16,901
2000	14,272	19,285	23,118
2001	17,340	18,191	28,093
2002	18,621	12,809	15,013

Source:
National Benefit Fraud Hotline

Health and Safety Executive

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Band 6 administrative staff have resigned from the North West Division office in Manchester since its relocation in January 2001. [84774]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The North West (Manchester) office relocated on 8 January 2001. There have been 17 Band 6 resignations (nine female and eight male) between 8 January 2001 and 30 November 2002.

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what expenditure was made in 2001–02 on casual staff supplied by Reed Employment in the North West Division of the Health and Safety Executive. [84783]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Expenditure in 2001–02 on casual staff supplied by Reed Executive plc to NW Division was £56,337.

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions which division of the HSE is the largest employer of casual staff in the FO Division. [85059]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: HSE does not directly employ casual staff. Temporary vacancies in the administrative, typing and mail/messenger disciplines are filled by the use of employment agency staff under an HSE contract with Reed Executive.

The East and South East division is currently the largest user of this service within the Field Operations Directorate of the HSE.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of the

New Deal starts in his Department and its agencies have resulted in sustained, unsubsidised employment; and if he will make a statement. [85970]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: This information is not available for all of the Department and its agencies. However, in the former Employment Service and Jobcentre Plus[1], up to October 2002, 825 people have been taken on under the New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus. 302 (37 per cent.) of these people have gained permanent employment with Jobcentre Plus and 98 (12 per cent.) have left to take up employment elsewhere. A further 200 (24 per cent.) people are still employed in Jobcentre Plus on the New Deal programme.

[1] Jobcentre Plus was launched in April 2002. The Employment Service and Benefits Agency ceased to exist at the same time.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many persons received new deal photocards between May 1998 and October 2002; how many new deal participants were eligible to receive such cards during this period; what assessment he has made of the reasons for the difference in these figures; and if he will make a statement. [85973]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: On 6 November, 2002 we announced the extension of half price rail fares to up to 125,000 more people on three additional new deal programmes, making it cheaper for them to get to job interviews and cheaper to get to work in the first few months of employment.

The new deal reduced rail fare scheme has been in existence in England and Wales since May 1998 and, to the end of August 2002[1], Jobcentre Plus has issued 127,254 photocards. During the period 24 May 1998 to 31 August 2002, a total of 1,038,623 new deal participants were eligible to use the card.

The reduced rail fare scheme is brought to the attention of all new deal participants at the initial interview with their personal adviser. Where transport is not considered to be a barrier to the client finding work or training, they may not take up the offer. Jobcentre Plus is currently working to further increase awareness of the scheme through targeted publicity, and expect to see a marked increase in take-up as a result.

[1] Latest available figures.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of those leaving the new deal for the long-term unemployed left the new deal for unsubsidised sustained jobs; and how many did not return to claim jobseeker's allowance within *(a)* 26 weeks and *(b)* one year. [85971]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: Up to the end of September 2002, 80,640 new deal 25 plus leavers had gained unsubsidised sustained jobs. Of these, 64,780 did not return to claim jobseeker's allowance within 26 weeks, and 57,090 had not re-claimed the benefit within one year after leaving the new deal.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Pensioners

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to increase the take-up rate of means-tested provision for pensioners. [86283]

Mr. McCartney: We have introduced a range of initiatives designed to encourage pensioners to take up their entitlements. For the minimum income guarantee (MIG) we have undertaken a national advertising campaign, which resulted in almost 140,000 successful claims, with an average gain of £20 per week. We have also reduced the MIG claim form from 40 to 10 pages, introduced a MIG specific leaflet, and we are identifying potential beneficiaries through key events, such as claiming state pension.

A key priority, for both Government and The Pension Service is the successful take-up of the new pension credit, which will enhance and replace the MIG. It has been specifically designed to be easy for pensioners to claim and to be less intrusive. The weekly means test will be abolished for the over-65s and be replaced by a statement of their circumstances every 5 years. Capital rules will be relaxed and the upper capital limit abolished.

Our take-up plan for pension credit is extensive and makes use of a range of channels. We will transfer existing MIG recipients to pension credit, ready for payments to be made from October 2003; write to all pensioners not already receiving MIG by June 2004 to alert them to possible pension credit entitlement, supported by a national publicity campaign; work with local partners to help support the communications to pensioners, and tailor marketing and communications activity accordingly.

The Pension Service pension centres are backed up by local services delivered in partnership with local authorities and voluntary sector organisations provided in locations accessible to pensioners. There will be appointment surgeries and, in time, drop-in surgeries to meet pensioners in places where they visit.

Outreach activity will be an important part of local service work. Staff will be meeting people in partner and other locations accessible to customers offering general advice and guidance and taking part in benefit take-up initiatives.

We are planning to introduce a network of Internet access points, telephone points and hard copy information (displaying leaflets, posters, claim forms and other materials) points based in Government and partner locations: and a benefits information service for partners, care workers, volunteers etc. to raise awareness of The Pension Service, pensioner entitlements and how to apply for them.

We have also set up the Partnerships Against Poverty group, and are undertaking negotiations with partners at a national level to agree the scope for partnership working.

All of the above demonstrate the importance that my Department attaches to encouraging pensioners to take up their entitlements.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the number of stages in the process of setting up a Post Office customer card account. [87106]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions will be writing to customers over the next two years when it is their turn to change to Direct Payment into an account. Customers will be provided with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the different types of accounts available, so that they can choose the account which best meets their needs and circumstances.

Customers who wish to open a post office card account will need to contact the Department to discuss their account options with an adviser. They will then be issued with a personal invitation document. This document should then be taken to a post office branch where the customer will be given a post office card account application form to complete.

Overall the process of applying for a post office card account is straightforward and no more onerous than that of applying for a basic (or other) bank account.

SERPS

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 21 November, to the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb), *Official Report*, column 282W, on SERPS, if he will place examples of *(a)* the original letter, *(b)* the follow-up estimate letter and *(c)* the most recent letter in the Library. [86688]

Mr. McCartney: The original letter and the follow up estimate were placed in the Library on 11 March 2002. The most recent letter will be placed in the Library after it has been approved by the Secretary of State.

Social Security Fraud Act

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had their benefit reduced because they have been convicted of benefit fraud for a second time under the terms of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001. [86734]

Malcolm Wicks: The 'two-strikes' provision of the Social Security Fraud Act 2001 came into force from 1 April 2002. The provision applies to people who are convicted of benefit fraud on two separate occasions after 1 April 2002; it cannot be applied retrospectively. No individuals so far have had their benefit reduced under this provision.

Stakeholder Pensions

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his oral statement of 25 November, *Official Report*, column 12, on stakeholder pensions, if he will set out the basis for his estimate that more than one million people who did not have a pension 18 months ago have one now. [84484]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* There has been an increase in the number of people who save for their retirement through private pensions since the introduction of stakeholder pensions. Although not all stakeholder pension sales will be to new pension savers, it is widely acknowledged that stakeholder pensions have had a beneficial effect on the provision of pensions more generally. For example, as an alternative to designating a stakeholder pension scheme employers have broadened access to their occupational pension schemes to the whole of the workforce, or have opened group personal pension schemes to which they contribute. What is clear is that for a very large number of people stakeholder pensions have provided a route into pension provision that they had never had before.

Winter Fuel Payments

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many eligible people have not received backdated winter fuel payments for the first three years of the scheme, and what the value was of such payments. [87598]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* According to our estimate around 1.9 million people could have been eligible for backdated payments for the first three years of the scheme and about 1.2 million people have now been paid. There is no cut off dates for these retrospective payments.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the numbers who have not claimed because the estimate of those newly eligible was based on sample data. It is up to the individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the total cost of the winter fuel payments has been in each year since they were established, including *(a)* payments made on time, *(b)* backdated payments and *(c)* administration costs; and what the full value is of potential future payments to eligible recipients who have not yet applied for the benefit, but who are still free to do so. [86738]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. Such information as is available is given in the table.

The Department now accounts for its administration and benefit expenditure by Strategic Objective, as set out in its Public Service Agreements (PSA), and by individual Requests for Resources (RfRs) as set out in the Departmental Estimates and Accounts.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the value of unclaimed Winter Fuel Payments. It is up to an individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

Caseload and expenditure on winter fuel payments

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*
Expenditure on WFPs (£ million)	191	194	759	[1]1,749	1,692	1,710
Number of WFP recipients	9,759,000	9,953,000	10,084,000	11,123,000	11,202,000	11,322,000

[1] Includes £94 million retrospective payments

Notes:
All figures are for Great Britain.
Costs are in cash terms.
Expenditure figures prior to 2001–02 are from the published Social Fund Account and from 2001–02 are DWP's latest published forecast.
Caseload figures prior to 2001–02 are based on estimates from administrative data and from 2001–02 are DWP's latest published forecast.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate how many people became newly entitled for the *(a)* 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02 winter fuel payment; who needed to make a claim, but failed to do so before the cut-off dates; and what the value was of such payments. [87599]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* We estimate that around 1.5 million people became entitled to winter fuel payments in 2000–01 for the first time, as a result of a change in the rules in 2000. So far, about one million have been paid. Additionally, for the winter of 2000–01, we estimated that a further 500,000 people could have been newly entitled as a result attaining age 60 and satisfying the other entitlement conditions.

Similarly for the winter of 2001–02, we estimated that some 500,000 people could have been newly entitled as a result of attaining age 60 and satisfying the other entitlement conditions. Around half of these were paid automatically. Some 245,000 claim forms were received by end of March 2002, although some of these would have been from people entitled to automatic payments. It is up to the individual to decide whether or not to claim.

In 2000–01, expenditure on winter fuel payments was £1,749 million and in 2001–02, it was £1,692 million.

Work-related Ill Health

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with other Ministers to develop a rehabilitation strategy to tackle work-related ill health in order to reduce the number on invalidity benefit. [85705]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Improved vocational rehabilitation services are a key element of our strategy for enabling people with health problems and disabilities to move into employment, and so become and remain independent.

Ministers and officials from this Department, the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills, the Scotland Office and the Wales Office have held discussions concerning the impact of ill health and disability on both individuals and employers, and specifically the role of vocational rehabilitation.

Our Green Paper "Pathways to Work—Helping people into employment", published on 18 November, proposes more intensive support for people who move onto incapacity benefits. One element of this involves the establishment by Jobcentre Plus in conjunction with the NHS of new rehabilitation programmes, combining support to find work with management of an individual's health condition. These will be piloted in six areas across the country starting from late 2003.

In addition, the Job Retention and Rehabilitation Pilot, a joint initiative with the Department of Health which also starts next year, will explore ways in which we can support people faced with losing their employment through prolonged sickness or disability.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Housing

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the number of new employees needed in the housing sector over the next five years to meet Government targets on new house building in London and the South East; and if he will make a statement. [86905]

Mr. McNulty: The Government has made no specific assessment for new house building in London and the South East. However, the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) has estimated that 76,000 new employees will be required each year in the construction industry between 2002 and 2006 and the Strategic Forum for Construction estimates that 300,000 qualified staff will need to be recruited to the construction industry by the end of 2006. CITB predicts that over 40,000 new recruits will be needed between now and 2006 in the Greater London area and that over 77,000 will be required in the South East.

However, these figures are based on moderate growth levels in the construction industry. They do not take into account the step change in housing and regeneration activity that the Deputy Prime Minister will outline early in the New Year. In 2003 the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister aims to produce an analysis of the impact on the industry of the level of construction work generated by the planned step change in housing investment.

We will continue to work with the Department of Trade and Industry and Department for Education and Skills to ensure that there is sufficient capacity and the right skills in the construction industry to meet the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's ambitious targets.

Local Government Finance Consultation

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities he met, and on what dates, in connection with the local authority grant formula consultations. [86893]

Mr. Leslie: Tabled below are the meetings that the Ministers of Office of the Deputy Prime Minister had with local authorities or local authority representative groups, which were requested within the time scale of the Consultation on the Local Government Finance Formula Grant Distribution.

Local Authority / Representative Group	Date
York City Council	29/07/02
Worcestershire County Council	10/09/02
F40	17/09/02
County Councils Network	24/09/02
Association of North East Councils	24/09/02
Special Interest Group of Municipal Authorities	26/09/02
AC A Cliff Edge Group	26/09/02
Northern Alliance Group of County Councils	26/09/02
London Borough of Sutton	26/09/02
Town and Country Finance Issues Group	09/10/02
Shire Districts Liaison Group	09/10/02
Local Government Association	09/10/02

Mobile Phones

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what reports he has received on the compliance of *(a)* mobile phone companies in general and *(b)* T-mobile in particular with 'The Code of Best Practice in Mobile Phone Development' (i) in the London Borough of Southwark and (ii) across London; if he will call for up-to-date reports on the issue; and if he will make a statement. [86531]

Mr. McNulty: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Winchester (Mr. Oaten) on 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 269W.

Section 28

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 20 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 627, in what way he proposes to take forward the statement in the Labour Manifesto in connection with the repeal of Section 28. [86527]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is still considering how best to do so.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list for his Department *(a)* those comprehensive spending review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the comprehensive spending review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87689]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister publishes progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its annual report and autumn performance report.

Progress against comprehensive spending review 1998 targets that apply to theOffice of the Deputy Prime Minister and that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Spending Review 2002 was last reported in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Autumn Performance Report 2002, published on 29 November.

The Report is available from the House Library, or can be accessed on the Office's website at the following address: http://www.odpm.gov.uk/about/aims/pdf/autjperf.pdf

HEALTH

GM Food

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations have been received since 1999 asking for full *(a)* traceability and *(b)* labelling of GM food. [86172]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency conducted a written consultation on the European Commission's two proposals for new genetic modification legislation, issued in July 2001. 128 representations were received. 17 called for the labelling of all foods produced with, or made from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). 14 supported the concept of full labelling, but recognised the practical difficulties this presented. 22 responses supported the general concept of traceability. A further 16 supported full traceability, but expressed concerns over its implementation in practice. 19 representations expressed significant concerns over the reliability of traceability for foods and feeds derived from GMOs.

Anaemia

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the basis is of his policy not to treat cancer patients with anaemia-related fatigue until their haemoglobin drops to 7 g/dl equates. [86267]

Ms Blears: The Department does not operate the policy referred to. It is for individual clinicians to decide, in consultation with their patients, the most suitable treatment for their condition or for any side effects, such as anaemia-related fatigue, resulting from treatment.

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to ensure that patients with chronic anaemia should not be treated with red cell transfusions where effective alternatives exist. [86269]

Ms Blears: The publication of guidelines from the British Committee for Standards in Haematology in 2001 provides specific advice to clinicians. The type of treatment offered to chronic anaemia patients is a matter of individual clinical judgment and discussion with the patient concerned. The Department encourages the production of local protocols, which use existing guidance produced from a sound evidence base and clinical consensus.

Blood Transfusion

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is producing the information on blood transfusion and its alternatives, which after April 2003 NHS trusts will be required to make available to patients; and whether this information will provide specific guidance for cancer patients. [86270]

Ms Blears: The National Blood Service is producing an information leaflet which is intended to be of use and interest to all patients who may need a blood transfusion. It will not provide specific guidance for cancer patients. The leaflet will be issued to all national health service hospitals early in 2003.

Breast Cancer

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died of breast cancer in 2001; and what percentage of the cancer research budget is spent on breast cancer research. [86575]

Ms Blears: There were 10,924 deaths from breast cancer in England in 2001. The recent National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) report, Strategic Analysis 2002, analysed most of the directly-funded cancer research of Government and charity funders. The analysis revealed that 60 per cent. of research spend was relevant to all tumour sites. The other 40 per cent. was relevant to specific tumour sites. Approximately 18 per cent. of the site-specific research was on breast cancer.

Emergency Hospital Readmissions

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the maximum number of days is between discharge and emergency readmission for a patient to be considered to be in the same episode of care. [84097]

Mr. Hutton: A decision has not yet been taken on the cut-off point for the maximum length of a discharge from hospital and subsequent readmission.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the basis is of his calculation of the baseline figure for 2001–02 and 2002–03 emergency readmissions. [82967]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* The baseline rate for both years was calculated as the number of patients readmitted to hospital within 28 days of discharge, divided by the number discharged from hospital. The baseline is derived from the outturn figures for the previous year.

The baseline for 2001–02 was a rate of 7.3 per cent., and related to over 75s only. The 2002–03 target is for all ages, with a baseline rate of 5.4 per cent.

Drug Misuse

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responses to the Audit Commission report, 'Changing Habits', have been received from *(a)* the National Treatment Agency, *(b)* individual drug action teams and *(c)* individual drug reference groups. [82267]

Ms Blears: This Department has received no responses. The Audit Commission is an independent body and responses on its reports will normally be sent to the Commission itself.

Chiropody

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chiropodists were working in the NHS in each year from 1997 to 2001; and how many were working in the NHS on the most recent date for which figures are available. [87680]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Between 1997 and 2001, the number of chiropodists employed in the national health service increased by 270, or eight per cent.

Staff employed in chiropody/podiatry in England as at 30 September each year

	Qualified chiropody/podiatry staff
1997	3,290
1998	3,320
1999	3,370
2000	3,470
2001	3,560

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Due to rounding, totals may not equal the sum of component parts.

Source:
Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chiropodists completed training in 2001; and what proportion of these have commenced employment within the NHS as chiropodists. [87681]

Mr. Hutton: Information on chiropodists completing training and what proportion joined the national health service is not collected centrally. Information on the number of chiropodists employed in the NHS and chiropodists entering training is given below.

The number of chiropodists entering training in 1998–99, who would normally have completed training in 2001–02, was 409.

Between September 2000 and 2001, the number of chiropodists employed in the NHS increased by 90, or 2.6 per cent., from 3,470 to 3,560.

CJD (Lamb)

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what advice he gives to the public on *(a)* eating lamb and *(b)* the possible link between scrapie and CJD. [86906]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency is responsible for giving advice on food issues. The agency informs me that it is continuing not to advise consumers against eating sheep meat or sheep meat products. Earlier this year, consumers were advised that, if BSE were present in sheep, their risk would be significantly reduced by avoiding sausages made with sheep intestine.

Epidemiological evidence does not suggest a link between scrapie and CJD.

Acute Hospitals (Computer Viruses)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many incidents of damage to computer systems in acute hospitals resulting from computer viruses there have been in each of the past five years. [85779]

Ms Blears: Figures for computer virus incidents throughout the national health service are not currently available.

Correspondence

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he will reply to the letter of the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton of 21 June 2002,

in respect of Dr. Roger Stephenson, acknowledged by the Department on 1 July 2002 under reference PO 1011562. [82528]

Ms Blears: A reply was sent on 10 December 2002.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many letters to him from *(a)* hon. Members and *(b)* members of the public remain unanswered, broken down by those which are *(i)* over six months, and (ii) over one year. [83279]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* At 11 December 2002, there were eight letters from hon. Members dated before 10 June 2002, which had not received a reply, and none over a year. Accurate information is not currently available for letters from members of the public, but this should be available in the new year.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 7 November 2002, from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Mary Allcock. [86659]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 16 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 29 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Miss J Robson. [87655]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 16 December 2002.

Diabetes

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to publish the full National Service Framework for diabetes. [87850]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks.

Diagnostic Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS acute hospitals offer round-the-clock diagnosis and test results. [87527]

Mr. Hutton: This information is not collected centrally. However, acute hospitals will provide 24-hour diagnostic services for emergency cases.

Drug Treatment

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients are in residential rehabilitation in their own drug action team area. [86692]

Ms Blears: Information is not available in the form requested.

Information on whether individuals live within the health authority delivering treatment, for drug users presenting to residential rehabilitation, in the six month period ending 31 March 2001, is given in the table. Whether health authority (HA) of treatment and health authority and/or NHS Regional office (RO) of residence were the same for drug users presenting to residential rehabilitation during the period 1 October 2000 to 31 March 2001.

Health authority of residence—data for England

	Numbers	*Percentages*
Number of users	810	100
Same HA of treatment	256	32
Different HA of treatment but same RO	339	42
Resident outside RO of treatment	105	13
Not known	110	14

Notes:
1. The data are from the Department of Health Regional Drug Misuse Databases
2. Percentages do not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Foundation Hospitals

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if hospital trusts with deficits will be entitled to *(a)* apply for foundation status and *(b)* obtain foundation status. [86936]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* National health service foundation trust status will only be made available to high performing three-star acute and specialist NHS trusts. The application process will entail an independent financial review in which applicants will need to clearly demonstrate a track record of good financial management and be financially viable.

Genetic Testing

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what representations have been received from consumers and patient organisations as part of the HGC consultation on regulation of genetic testing services supplied direct to the public; and whether these organisations favoured *(a)* statutory regulation and *(b)* a voluntary industry code; [85203]

(2) how many responses the HGC received during their consultation on the regulation of genetic testing services supplied direct to the public; and how many were in favour of *(a)* no action being taken, *(b)* a voluntary code being established, *(c)* a code plus statutory restrictions and *(d)* statutory restrictions; [85206]

(3) when the HGC will be making recommendations to Government as a result of the consultation on regulation of genetic testing services supplied direct to the public; [85207]

(4) if he will place in the Library the responses of the *(a)* Advertising Standards Agency, *(b)* British Embassies from Canada, Holland, Japan and the US, *(c)* DTI Policy Advisor on Internet Regulation, *(d)* Information Commissioner, *(e)* Medical Devices Agency, *(f)* Medical Research Council and *(g)* Occupational Health Advisory Committee to the HGC consultation on genetic testing. [85205]

Ms Blears: The Human Genetics Commission (HGC) consultation on genetic testing services supplied direct to the public closed in October 2002. HGC is analysing the responses and is conducting additional public surveys. HGC plans to publish its report and recommendations to Ministers early in 2003. It will also

publish all of the non-confidential responses received during consultation and copies will be placed in the Library.

HGC has now received written responses from 42 organisations and 22 individuals. Approximately 14 written responses and four oral evidence sessions were from consumer and patient groups. Of these, six favoured statutory regulation for at least some tests and three favoured voluntary codes. Of the written responses from all sources that expressed a view, none favoured no action, 11 favoured voluntary codes for some types of tests, 24 favoured a mixture of voluntary codes and statutory restrictions and 13 favoured statutory restrictions for some types of test.

Genito-Urinary Clinics

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of genito-urinary medicine clinics are able to see urgent cases within 24 hours; [86567]

(2) if he will make a statement on access to genito-urinary open access clinics and waiting time for genito-urinary clinics. [86568]

Ms Blears: Central data on genito-urinary medicine (GUM) clinic waiting times are available only for patients referred by general practitioners. GUM is an open access service and the vast majority of patients self-refer and therefore these data do not provide an accurate picture of waiting times for these services. One of the action points in the sexual health and HIV strategy implementation action plan is to develop a waiting times indicator for GUM and work on this is already under way. However, we are aware that there are pressures on GUM clinics which have led to long waiting times for some services. We have therefore invested over £5 million this year to improve capacity and reduce waiting times.

Health Authority Chief Executives

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many chief executives of former health authorities have taken *(a)* redundancy and *(b)* early retirement since April. [84590]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Over 20,000 national health service staff were involved in the 'Shifting the Balance of Power' (StBOP) reorganisation. 95 health authorities were replaced by 28 strategic health authorities, and in order to keep valuable skills and experience in the NHS, all staff involved in the reorganisation were given a 12-month guarantee of employment up to 31 March 2003.

However, due to a variety of factors, it was recognised that some staff might not be able to gain suitable alternative employment in the NHS. These staff have been allowed to take early retirement or redundancy prior to 31 March 2003. Since April 2002, there has been one redundancy and 20 early retirements that have taken place among the former health authority chief executives.

Health Services (East Kent)

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to make a decision about the reconfiguration of health services in East Kent. [87094]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* A decision on the reconfiguration of acute services in East Kent could not be made while the Judicial Review of the process was under consideration. Now the judgment has been made Ministers are in a position to consider Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority's recommendation. I cannot, at this time, give the hon. Member an indication of when that decision will be made.

Herbal Remedies

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on amendments 9 and 11 to the Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products Directive. [85798]

Ms Blears: Amendments 9 and 11 proposed by the European Parliament in relation to the draft Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would have the effect of allowing applications for traditional use registrations where individual active herbal ingredients had had traditional use but there was not evidence of traditional use of that particular combination. Elsewhere, within the proposed Directive, applicants are required to supply evidence of the traditional use of the specific combination and member states may refuse applications if the data on traditional use is insufficient. The amendments would therefore probably have limited effect.

Our overall view on this issue is that active medicinal ingredients, herbal or otherwise, can interact causing adverse reactions and we would have concerns on public health grounds about combinations where safety was supported neither by tests and trials (as would apply in the case of a marketing authorisation) nor by evidence of long usage. In some cases one or more herbal ingredient in a combination could reasonably be regarded as non active, for example where included for taste or colour, and in that situation non active ingredients need not have been used as part of the traditional combination.

It is likely to be possible to demonstrate traditional use of a great many herbal combinations. During continuing negotiations, and subsequent implementation if the Directive is agreed, we will look for ways to ensure that the regulatory impact of demonstrating traditional use of combinations is contained to the necessary minimum.

Amendments 9 and 11 also follow through a concept introduced in Amendment 6 which has the effect that classification of a product as a herbal medicinal product would depend on the active ingredients being present at a pharmacologically active level.

We have some concerns about the proposal as drafted. There is an existing definition of a medicinal product in Directive 2001/83/EC. We would not wish to change that definition in relation to one category of medicinal product only (herbal medicines), in relation to an issue, (levels of pharmacological activity) that is a generic one, relevant to all medicines. Second, the amendment does not address the regulatory position of products which, under the existing definition, are classified as medicinal products by virtue of their presentation. Third, the dividing line between

pharmacologically active and non pharmacologically active levels may be difficult to determine for many herbal substances.

Our top priority in relation to the definition of a medicinal product in the ongoing negotiations on the review of Directive 2001/83/EC is to resist the provision, originally proposed by the European Commission, that would give precedence to medicines legislation for any product which fell within the definition of a medicinal product, even if that product was already regulated under other sectoral legislation. This proposal could have lead to many more products being classified as medicines. From the outset of negotiations we have argued vigorously against this proposal, seeking to enlist the support of other member states and Members of the European Parliament. We are therefore pleased that the European Parliament has not supported the Commission's original proposal and we will continue to argue for its deletion from the proposals.

We also recognise that there are differences in member states' interpretation of the current definition of a medicinal product in relation to products close to the borderline of medicines and other regulatory regimes. We are therefore open to constructive dialogue, whether domestically or in a European forum, on this issue. We intend to discuss further the implications of these proposed amendments with the United Kingdom herbal sector in order to inform our negotiating position.

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the supply of unregulated herbal medicinal products via the internet. [85799]

Ms Blears: Any website reported to the Medicines Control Agency, which appears to be in breach of regulations regarding advertising, sale and supply of medicines is investigated. The agency works closely with other Government Departments and law enforcement authorities, both in the United Kingdom and abroad, in an effort to identify and take action where appropriate.

There is evidence that some unlicensed herbal medicinal products, whether sold via the internet or in other ways, may be of poor quality and in some cases may pose a threat to public health. Subject to the successful conclusion of negotiations, the proposed directive on traditional herbal medicinal products would provide a regulatory regime which should allow the public to choose from a wide range of herbal remedies made to assured standards of safety, quality and information. In turn this would make it possible for the public to be given much clearer advice than is currently possible about how to avoid unregulated herbal medicines which may pose a risk to health.

Hospital Meals

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per hospital meal was *(a)* before and *(b)* after implementation of the Government's Better Hospital Food programme; and if he will make a statement. [86881]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The better hospital food programme is designed to improve the quality, availability and access to food in hospitals and is a long-term programme. An additional £38.5 million has been made available to support this programme.

The costs of providing meals varies, depending both on the particular dish involved and the method of production. Typically, a traditional system produces meals more cheaply, while a delivered meals service is more expensive. A report by the Audit Commission in September 2001 found average spending on food and beverages was £2.20 for a cook-serve system, £2.40 for a national health service operated cook-chill/freeze service, and £3.70 for a delivered meals service. However, there are a number of other issues such as overheads and capital replacement charges, which also vary according to the production system in use and which affect overall costs. There is therefore no average per meal cost.

As part of the better hospital food programme, acute hospitals have been asked to include in their menus each day three of the dishes designed for the NHS by the 'leading chef' team. These dishes encompass main meals, desserts, salads and sandwiches. There are now 200 'leading chef' dishes included in the NHS dish selector and average costs for these dishes is no greater than those for other dishes currently in use in NHS hospitals.

Hospital Trusts (Performance Ratings)

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the hospital trusts which have had their star rating increased following the publication of the national tables in July. [86937]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* One trust, The Royal National Hospital for Rheumatic Diseases, NHS trust, Bath, has had its performance rating reassessed since the publication of the national tables in July resulting in three stars being awarded.

Mr. Dobson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many hospital trusts which previously had a three star rating lost one or more stars in the tables published in July. [86938]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* 16 of the acute trusts awarded three stars in the 2000–01 performance ratings lost one or more stars in the 2001–02 performance ratings, published in July 2002.

Stem Cell Research

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if it is necessary to obtain a licence from the HFEA before conducting research into stem cell lines from human embryos, with particular reference to derivation and characterisation of such stem cells. [86523]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* A licence from the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is required to bring about the creation of embryos in vitro and to keep or use embryos for the purposes of a project of research. All applications for a licence to use embryos to source embryonic stem cell lines will be required to justify why embryonic stem cells

are to be used and will be required to provide detailed information on the fate of the stem cells throughout the process.

Furthermore, it will be a condition of all these licences that a sample of all cell lines is placed in the Medical Research Council's (MRC) national stem cell bank. The subsequent use of any stem cell lines derived from embryos will be subject to a code of practice to be produced by the MRC stem cell bank steering committee.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the HFEA was given authority to issue research licences to conduct research involving stem cell lines from human embryos. [86524]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Any research project involving the creation, keeping or using of human embryos outside the body must be licensed by the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA). To grant a research licence, the HFEA must be satisfied that the research is "necessary or desirable" and that the use of human embryos is essential. Before 2001, the HFEA could grant licences for research projects only for the following specified purposes (Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 Schedule 2, para.3(2):

a) promoting advances in the treatment of infertility;

b) increasing knowledge about the causes of congenital disease;

c) increasing knowledge about the causes of miscarriages;

d) developing more effective techniques of contraception; or

e) developing methods for detecting the presence of gene or chromosome abnormalities in embryos before implantation.

In January 2001, Parliament passed regulations extending the purposes for which research licenses may be authorised to include:

f) increasing knowledge about the development of embryos;

g) increasing knowledge about serious disease;

h) enabling any such knowledge to be applied in developing treatments for serious disease.

Before 2001, the HFEA could, therefore, grant a licence for research projects involving the use of embryos to create stem cell lines if the research was for one of the purposes listed in *(a)* to *(e)* above.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what authority the HFEA gave a research licence to Professor Austin Smith at the Centre for Genome Research in Edinburgh to derive and characterise stem cell lines from human embryos in 1997. [86525]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority issued a licence to the assisted conception unit at the Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh, later varied to the Centre for Genome Research, in 1996 for the purposes specified in paragraph 3(2)*(a)*, *(b)* and *(e)* of Schedule 2 to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990.

Learning Disability Services

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what was the net health and social services expenditure on learning disability services over the past five years on a constant value basis; and what it will be in the next three years, adjusted for inflation at current values. [86314]

Jacqui Smith: Local authorities deliver services for people with learning disabilities within the framework of the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001, and its associated advice and guidance. Within that framework it is for councils to decide on the level of current and future expenditure.

The overall level of funding for social services, including that for learning disability, will increase by, on average, 6 per cent. per annum in real terms over the next three years.

Information on net expenditure is not available in the form requested. Details of gross expenditure are in the table.

Table 10.2 Gross expenditure on services for people with learning disabilities

£ million

	1995–96	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*[5]	*2000–01*
HCHS expenditure						
Total expenditure, 2000–01 prices[1,2]	28,172	26,387	26,975	27,760	28,793	30,099
Expenditure on people with learning disabilities	1,370	1,460	1,499	1,486	1,481	1,486
Percentage of total expenditure	4.9%	5.5%	5.6%	5.4%	5.1%	4.9%
In-patient	954	966	943	898	890	889
Out-patient	12	24	25	23	22	20
Day patients	49	64	63	67	65	62
Community	355	406	468	498	504	514
PSS expenditures						
Total expenditure, 2000–01 prices[1]	9,602	10,271	10,739	11,356	12,315	12,848
Expenditure on people with learning disabilities	1,235	1,340	1,424	1,565	1,669	1,752
Percentage of total expenditure	12.9%	13.0%	13.3%	13.8%	13.6%	13.6%
Adults[4]	1,130	1,236	1,316	1,459	1,561	1,647
Assessment and care management[4]	105	103	108	107	108	105

[1] Adjusted to 1999–2000 prices using HCHS deflator for NHS expenditure and 2000–01 prices using GDP deflator for PSS expenditure. Figures shown for 1999–2000 are not directly comparable with previous years due to estimations used and changes to the calculation methods.

[2] The HCHS expenditure information is based on profiles of expenditure provided by trusts but scaled to match health authorities' total expenditure. Thus, there is a possibility that the figures under estimate the expenditure on services purchased by health authorities from the private and voluntary sectors. It may be the case that hospital expenditure is over estimated and community expenditure is under estimated. These figures exclude health authority overheads.

[3] Includes administrative and clerical overheads.

[4] Adults aged 16–64. Excludes expenditure on mental health provision for children which cannot be separately identified.

[5] Figures shown for 1999–2000 are not directly comparable with previous years due to estimations used and changes to the calculation methods.
Source:
Health Select Committee (FPA-PES) and RO3 return (PSS EX1 from 2000–01)

Lung Cancer

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people died of lung cancer in 2001; and what percentage of the cancer research budget is spent on lung cancer research. [86574]

Ms Blears: There were 26,922 deaths from lung cancer in England in 2001. The recent National Cancer Research Institute (NCRI) report, "Strategic Analysis 2002", analysed most of the directly-funded cancer research of government and charity funders. The analysis revealed that 60 per cent. of research spend was relevant to all tumour sites. The other 40 per cent. was relevant to specific tumour sites. Approximately 3 per cent. of the site-specific research was on lung cancer.

The NCRI has identified lung cancer as an area that might need more attention. We will be working with our research funding partners through the NCRI to fully understand the reasons for this and consider any actions that might be required.

Maidstone Hospital

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to her answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 157W, regarding Duplex Scans at Maidstone hospital, who Kent and Medway SHA consults on whether a scan is clinically necessary, in cases where patients are referred by a general practitioner. [87232]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: Decisions on the clinical necessity for duplex scans are made by clinicians at Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells Trust, not Kent and Medway Strategic Health Authority. The strategic health authority, as part of its management function, advised me on the practice at the trust in respect of duplex scans.

Psychiatry

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many doctors per 100,000 people were in training in each year since 1997 for *(a)* child and adolescent psychiatry, *(b)* forensic psychiatry, *(c)* general psychiatry, *(d)* old age psychiatry, *(e)* psychotherapy and *(f)* psychiatry of learning disability. [85638]

Mr. Hutton: The table shows the number of doctors in training within the psychiatry specialties from 1997 to 2001 and a per population figure for 2001 only. Population figures are due to be updated shortly following publication of results from the 2001 population census. This will include a revised set of estimates for the years 1997 to 2000, but these figures are not yet available.

Hospital medical doctors in training[1] within the psychiatry specialties—England, 30 September

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*Number per 100,000 population*
Child and adolescent psychiatry	240	230	230	270	250	0.5
Forensic psychiatry	110	140	120	140	140	0.3
General psychiatry	1960	1990	2030	2040	2010	4.1
Old age psychiatry	220	230	240	240	260	0.5
Psychiatry of learning disability	80	90	100	100	100	0.2
Psychotherapy	50	40	40	40	40	0.1

[1] Doctors in training includes the Registrar Group, Senior House Officers and House Officers
Source:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census
Office of National Statistics, 29 April 2001 population census

MRSA

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many MRSA patients were recorded in NHS hospitals in each of the last eight years; how many and what proportion of NHS hospitals recorded MRSA outbreaks; and how many and what proportion of NHS hospitals have full-time staff dedicated to the prevention and control of MRSA and related infections. [86683]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: These data are not collected centrally and I refer the hon. Member to the reply he received on 14 October 2002, *Official Report* column 521W. This provides the available data on methicillin resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) blood stream infections until April 2001 when mandatory MRSA bacteraemia surveillance was introduced. Data from the new surveillance system are available for every acute national health service hospital trust and the first year's results were published in the Communicable Disease Report Weekly on 20 June 2002 and are on the Public Health Laboratory Service website at www.phls.co.uk/publications/cdr/PDFfiles/2002/cdr2502.pdf. Information on the composition of infection control teams is not collected routinely.

NHS Administrative Staff

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the ratio of administrative staff to total number of beds operating in the national health service was in each of the last 10 years. [83287]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

NHS Hospital and Community Health Services (HCHS): Ratio of senior managers and managers in Administration and Estates to the daily average number of NHS beds in England, 1991 to 2001

	Senior managers and managers in Administration and Estates (headcount)	Total daily average number of beds	Ratio
1991	13,500	258,550	0.05
1992	16,860	246,080	0.07
1993	20,320	236,170	0.09
1994	23,350	224,380	0.10
1995	20,840	217,510	0.10
1996	21,260	212,680	0.10
1997	22,170	210,520	0.11
1998	22,690	206,410	0.11
1999	24,290	203,340	0.12
2000	25,260	199,730	0.13
2001	27,420	199,670	0.14

Notes:
1. Figures referred to are the overnight beds i.e. beds in wards open overnight.
2. Beds data are collected on a financial basis each year.
3. Senior managers and managers figures were collected on 30 September each year.
4. A new classification of the non-medical work force was introduced in 1995.
5. Information based on this classification is not directly comparable with earlier years.
6. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
7. Ratios are rounded to two decimal places.

Sources:
1. Department of Health Non-Medical Workforce Census.
2. Bed figures are taken from the annual Körner return KH03 'bed availability and occupancy'.

Orthopaedic Treatment

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the longest current NHS waiting time is for orthopaedic treatment. [86036]

Mr. Hutton: Data on waiting times is collected by specialty. The relevant specialty is trauma and orthopaedic.

The latest published commissioner data for England in September 2002 show there were 11 patients waiting between 15 and 17 months for inpatient admission in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty.

Overseas Nurse Advice Line

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 909, on the overseas nurse advice line, how many whole-time equivalent staff are employed by the advice line; and what the budget for the advice line is for each of the next three years. [87239]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service overseas nurses advice line is operated in conjunction with NHS careers. There is a pool of NHS careers staff employed as call operators, who handle calls in addition to a team with health careers expertise advising on supervised practice and NHS careers.

Decisions on the future financing of the advice line have not yet been made.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 4 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 909W, on the Overseas Nurse Advice Line, how many calls were received on 08458 50588 in each month since the line was set up. [87240]

Mr. Hutton: Over the three months that the national health service Overseas Nurses Advice Line has been operating it has received a total of 63 calls.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 4 December, *Official Report*, column 909W, on the Overseas Nurse Advice Line, how he plans to inform *(a)* NHS organisations, *(b)* overseas governments, *(c)* overseas nurses and *(d)* other interested parties, of the Overseas Nurse Advice Line. [87241]

Mr. Hutton: National health service organisations, overseas governments and overseas nurses have been informed of the NHS Overseas Nurses Advice Line through various means.

Quarterly briefing meetings held by the chief nursing officer for the strategic health authorities has brought the advice line to the attention of nursing directors and primary care trust lead nurses throughout the NHS. In addition, the advice line was featured in the chief nursing officer's bulletin in October.

Overseas governments with an interest in the recruitment of nurses have been informed about the NHS overseas nurses advice line through the issue of a card advertising the advice line.

Cards advertising the advice line have been produced and distributed by organisations including the Royal College of Nursing and Unison, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration and Independent Healthcare Association. The Nursing and Midwifery Council will be distributing cards to overseas representatives in the New Year.

Quat

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has undertaken to examine the effect on health of using Quat. [82237]

Ms Blears: No research is currently being funded by the Government to examine the effect on health of using Quat. The advisory council on the misuse of drugs' research committee is now actively looking into commissioning research to gain an increased understanding of the risks associated with chewing Quat.

Radiographers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many vacancies there are for radiographers in acute hospitals; broken down by NHS trust. [85788]

Mr. Hutton: The number of vacancies lasting three months and over are collected by national health service trusts and have been placed in the Library.

Recruitment

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to his answer of 2 December, *Official Report*,

column 608W, on recruitment, if he has written to NHS organisations with a list of unsuitable nursing agencies who persistently recruit nurses from developing countries, contrary to the code of practice; and what action he *(a)* has taken and *(b)* plans to take, against those NHS employers who have used nursing agencies who have breached the code of practice. [86806]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The Department investigates any agency whose behaviour appears to be inconsistent with the code of practice. The agency will be investigated and given the opportunity to respond to the allegations and reconsider their practice.

National health service organisations are strongly advised to refer to the list, which is available at www.doh.gov.uk/international-recruitment, when establishing new contracts.

Road Traffic Casualties

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) why the maximum charges for the treatment of road traffic casualties by the NHS are to increase from 1 April 2003; [87553]

(2) what consultations have been held with insurers about the proposed changes in the level of charges for the treatment of road traffic casualties by the NHS in April 2003; [87563]

(3) what criteria were used to assess the appropriate level of increase in the charges in connection with the treatment of road traffic casualties by the NHS, set out in the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment No.2 Regulations 2002; [87554]

(4) what estimate he has made of the impact upon motor insurance premiums of the proposed charges set out in the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment (No 2) Regulations 2002; [87564]

(5) what changes in NHS income will result in 2003–04 from the Road Traffic (NHS Charges) Amendment (No.2) Regulations 2002. [87555]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Regulations to increase the tariff and cap for the recovery of national health service (NHS) costs following road traffic accidents were laid before Parliament on 11 December 2002. The regulations increase the tariff to take account of hospital and community health services (HCHS) inflation since 1997, which is the year the tariff was set. The regulations also increase the cap, as operational experience has shown that this was set too low when the scheme was introduced in April 1999. The increased cap would still relieve insurers of the full cost of treating those seriously injured in road traffic accidents.

The Department undertook a consultation on the proposed increases, which ran for three months between July and September 2002. Departmental officials discussed the consultation and the proposed increases with members of the insurance industry and their trade bodies.

The increased charges would increase income to NHS hospitals by around £56 million per year. However, as NHS costs are not repaid until the accident victim's compensation claim settles, which takes on average 18 months, NHS hospitals would not feel the full effect of the increases until the latter part of 2004. If this cost was spread evenly among all holders of compulsory motor vehicle insurance, then the cost of the average policy could be expected to rise by around 0.7 per cent., or around £3 per policy.

The consultation on increasing the level of charges and summary of outcome can be found on the Department of Health's website at www.doh.gov.uk/consultations

Smoking

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of the population smoke cigarettes in each region in England. [86396]

Ms Blears: Information on smoking prevalence for adults aged 16 and over is shown in the table.

Prevalence of smoking, for adults aged 16 and over, by Government Office Region England, 2000

Government Office Region	*Percentage*
North East	27
North West	30
Yorkshire and Humberside	28
East Midlands	25
West Midlands	26
Eastern	25
London	27
South East	25
South West	27
England	27

Note: For 2000, ONS have weighted the data to compensate for under-representation of people in some groups (for example, young men).

Source: Analysis of the ONS General Household Survey, published as 'Living in Britain—Results from the 2000 General Household Survey'.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 18 December 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Abandoned Vehicles

Lawrie Quinn: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policies to deal with abandoned motor vehicles. [85930]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* In October 2001 we published a consultation document on measures to remove abandoned and untaxed vehicles from the streets more quickly and, for the longer term, bring forward changes to vehicle registration and licensing procedures to ensure greater accuracy of DVLA's vehicle record.

Regulations reducing the statutory notice periods after which local authorities can remove abandoned vehicles from the highway and the storage periods for unlicensed vehicles came into force on 9 April. Local authorities can now remove those vehicles that they consider merit destruction from the highway after the expiry of a 24 hour notice placed on them.

We have supported pilot schemes in the London boroughs of Newham and Lewisham in which the local authority was given DVLA's powers to wheelclamp and remove unlicensed vehicles after 24 hours. Following the success of the Newham pilot on 10 April, we announced that all councils who wished could operate in the same way.

In addition, councils have targeted over 6,000 abandoned unlicensed vehicles in multi-agency "Operation Cubits" with over 4,000 vehicles crushed and more operations are planned. To date we estimate that the operations have induced more than 15,700 motorists to relicense their vehicles voluntarily bringing in over £2.3 million in additional revenue.

The Government are currently developing proposals for the reform and modernisation of vehicle registration and licensing, to reduce evasion and to bear down on vehicle crime. In response to the recommendations of a report commissioned by the Department for Transport from the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science, that Department has established a Modernising Vehicle Registration Implementation Board (MVRIB). This includes representatives of motorists' organisations, the motor trade, the police and the insurance industry to advise on and develop those proposals.

The 2002 Finance Act contained provisions under which the responsibility for licensing and taxing vehicles will be placed on the registered keeper, who will remain liable for doing so until such time that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has properly been notified of a change of keeper. These proposals will also mean that it is not necessary for a vehicle to be detected on the road for effective enforcement action to take place. The implementation of these new powers is at the heart of MVRIB's agenda.

Agri-environment Schemes

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will set out the timetable for the review of land based English rural development programme agri-environment schemes. [87862]

Mr. Meacher: The agri-environment schemes review consists of three phases. The first phase centred on an initial consultation, held between March and May 2002. This asked for views on the existing schemes and explored what people would like to see in future schemes. There were over 130 responses to this consultation, which were analysed in a report produced in July 2002. This is available on the DEFRA website at: http://defraweb/erdp/schemes/landbased/review/consultnew.htm.

The second phase of the review is currently in progress. It consists of two main areas of work: the production of a framework document setting out the future direction of agri-environment schemes, and the development of a pilot scheme to test the proposed entry-level scheme. The framework document was issued for consultation on 16 December 2002, and responses are sought by 28 February 2003. I announced the pilot areas for the entry level scheme on 14 November 2002 and the pilot scheme is due to be launched next spring.

The third phase of the review will involve the detailed design and development of the main entry-level scheme and a revised higher-tier scheme, intended to incorporate the best features from both the countryside stewardship and environmentally sensitive areas schemes. It is hoped to complete the review in the summer of 2004, when details of both schemes are sent to the European Commission for approval. The new schemes should open for applications early in 2005.

Paddy Tipping: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress has been made on the review of access arrangements within English Rural Development Programme agri-environment schemes; and when the results of the review will be published. [87863]

Mr. Meacher: The analysis of replies to the public consultation on this review will be published on the Department's website shortly and a copy placed in the House Library and the conclusions will feed into the wider Agri-environment Schemes Review.

Combined Heat and Power

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the change in use of CHP by companies covered by climate change agreements; and if she will make a statement. [87880]

Mr. Meacher: There has been no assessment made of the change in use of HFC by companies covered by climate change agreements. It is estimated that total

HFC emissions arising from all business will be about 29 per cent. below 1995 levels, the baseline year that the UK has chosen to use for its fluorinated gases, in 2010.

Consultation Document

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the organisations to which her Department has issued copies of their consultation document, "Living Places, Powers, Rights and Responsibilities". [87222]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* We have sent copies of the consultation to:

370 local authorities (355 English and 15 Welsh). 394 local authority planning officers also received copies.

97 police authorities and constabularies, including the metropolitan police.

17 Government Departments and offices, including the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, Home Office, Cabinet Office and No. 10.

23 Government related agencies.

114 public bodies and non-governmental organisations.

168 companies.

In all there were over 2,000 copies of the consultation paper sent out.

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when copies of "Living Places, Powers, Rights and Responsibilities" were distributed to local authorities. [87223]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Copies of the consultation were mailed out to local authorities the week beginning 4 November, following the urban summit which was held on 31 October and 1 November, when the consultation was launched.

Fisheries

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how long the principle of relative stability in fisheries management will be continued in its present form. [87630]

Mr. Morley: The future provisions on relative stability, along with all other elements of the Common Fisheries Policy, are due to be determined by the Council of Agriculture and Fisheries Ministers at its current meeting.

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make contingency plans to establish a fisheries management committee in the event that no Council of Ministers' agreement is established for European Union fisheries management for 2003 onwards. [87631]

Mr. Morley: The Government's objective is to secure a meaningful reform of the Common Fisheries Policy at this Council. We shall strive to ensure that an acceptable agreement is reached. Should there be no agreement on a reformed CFP, the current system for Fisheries Management will continue.

Hydrofluorocarbons

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many voluntary agreements within the refrigeration industry to reduce leakage of hydrofluorocarbons she has made; and what targets exist for future progress; [86494]

(2) if she will make a statement on the progress in securing voluntary agreements within the refrigeration industry to reduce leakage of hydrofluorocarbons. [86495]

Mr. Meacher: In 1996, the Government concluded a voluntary agreement on the use of HFCs with the Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Industry Board (ACRIB) and its member organisations to ensure emissions to atmosphere were minimised. The agreement took the form of a "declaration of intent" in recognition of the fact that the industry is very widely dispersed and that signatories to the agreement could not make a commitment on behalf of those they did not directly represent.

The UK climate change programme published in November 2000 sets out the key elements of the Government's policy on HFCs. During 2000, discussions with ACRIB led Government to conclude that a national registration and competence scheme for refrigerant handlers would be a more effective way of limiting and minimising HFC emissions from the refrigeration sector. The industry is developing a scheme which it proposes to put to Government in early 2003. The Government's intention is to make registration and minimum competence mandatory for companies and refrigerant handlers.

Landfill Tax

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to allow the proceeds from landfill tax to go to local authorities. [87491]

Mr. Meacher: Last month's pre-Budget report announced that the Government would consult on a revenue neutral proposal to increase the landfill tax escalator to £3 per tonne in 2005–06 and to increase the rate of tax by at least £3 per tonne in future years, towards a rate of £35 per tonne. The Government will consult with stakeholders on options for the package, including the recycling of revenue, before making its decisions.

Mr. Julian Heath

Mrs. Browning: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she intends to return the P45 certificate belonging to a constituent, Mr. Julian Heath. [87861]

Alun Michael: I can confirm that Mr. Julian Heath's P45 has been sent to his home address.

Recycling

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the amount of recycled plastic required to meet the target in EC WEEE Directive. [87330]

Mr. Meacher: Figures from a report by the Industry Council for Electronic Equipment Recycling (ICER) show that in 1998 there were about 915,000 tonnes of waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) arising, of which approximately 22 per cent. were plastics. These data are currently being updated.

The WEEE Directive requires that WEEE is recovered and recycled according to 10 categories, with recovery and recycling targets set at between 50 per cent. and 80 per cent. for each category. The plastics content varies considerably between the categories, however, a significant proportion of the plastics in WEEE will need to be recovered or recycled to meet the requirements of the WEEE Directive.

Rural Deprivation

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she is taking to allocate resources to pockets of rural deprivation in the delivery of services; and what resources she is making available. [87706]

Alun Michael: Deprivation in rural areas tends not to be as geographically concentrated as in urban areas and it is less meaningful to think in terms of "pockets". DEFRA is currently working with the Countryside Agency and Office for National Statistics to explore a better way to identify rural deprivation. The Countryside Agency has a social exclusion programme worth almost £3 million for the three years 2002–03 to 2004–05 with which to promote demonstration projects and new research to identify and tackle social exclusion in rural areas.

DEFRA and the Countryside Agency are actively promoting the equitable allocation of services in rural areas by helping Government Departments to "rural proof" their policies and programmes. Following the Rural White Paper we allocated over £47 million through the Vital Villages scheme, which in the first instance runs until 2003–04. This is aimed at tackling the problem of dwindling services at the root, by enabling local people to set up their own enterprises.

I refer the hon. Member to my earlier reply given to the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 55–57W, which gives further information on DEFRA funded projects.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH

Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on developments in and involvement of UK representatives in the case of Ahmed Omar Saeed Sheikh in Pakistan. [84647]

Mr. Rammell: Mr. Sheikh remains in detention. The Pakistani authorities are fully aware of our opposition to the death penalty, both generally and in Mr. Sheikh's case. We will make further representations if appropriate.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87390]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by his Department in the last 12 months, in each local authority area. [87263]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Convention on the Future of Europe

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to hold a referendum on the outcome of the Convention on the Future of Europe. [87931]

Mr. MacShane: No.

European Constitution

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what consultations he has had with *(a)* the EU institutions and *(b)* European partners about the development of a European constitution. [87619]

Mr. MacShane: The Government works closely with members of the EU institutions and our European partners on a range of EU issues in the Convention on the Future of Europe.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if the Government is in favour in principle of a written European constitution. [87620]

Mr. MacShane: The Government supports an EU constitutional treaty that makes clear that the EU is a union of Nation States, and clearly and concisely sets out what the EU does, and how it does it. This would help to deliver a better organised EU, more accessible to EU citizens and better able to deliver real and practical benefits.

Zimbabwe

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with other member states of the Commonwealth

regarding the actions of the Zimbabwean Government towards the eviction of white farmers from their land. [83885]

Mr. Rammell: Foreign Office Ministers and officials have regular discussions with their Commonwealth counterparts about the economic, political and humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's unsustainable programme of land seizures forms part of these discussions.

My noble Friend Baroness Amos, FCO Minister for Africa, had the most recent contact, with the South African, Mozambican and Mauritian Foreign Ministers in Maputo on 7–8 November.

DEFENCE

Armoured Vehicles

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* Challenger II tanks, *(b)* Warrior, *(c)* Sakern, *(d)* FV430, *(e)* Sabre, *(f)* Scimitar, *(g)* Striker, *(h)* Spartan, *(i)* Sultan, *(j)* Samson, *(k)* Samaritan armoured vehicles, *(l)* Challenger recovery vehicles, *(m)* Stormer, *(n)* Shielder, *(o)* Fuchs NBC vehicles, *(p)* AS90, *(q)* MLRS and *(r)* M578 were fully operational in each quarter of 2002; what percentage of fleet size this represents in each case; and if he will make a statement. [87922]

Mr. Ingram: I will write to the hon. Member and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library of the House.

AS90

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if the cost of completing the environmental enhancements to the AS90 will remain within the expected budget; when he expects the enhancements to be completed; and whether he has set a deadline for completion. [87042]

Mr. Ingram: The cost of completing environmental enhancements to the AS90 is expected to remain within the budget originally forecast. We expect that the necessary modifications will be completed in time for possible future operations but I am withholding specific details of this timescale under Exemption 1 (Defence, security and international relations) of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. To provide such information risks jeopardising our contingency planning and harming operational security.

In addition to the AS90s that we are modifying for contingency operations, consideration is being given to modifying further AS90s as part of the normal planning round. A decision on this has yet to be taken.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many expressions of interest he has received from contractors for the environmental enhancements of the AS90; and whether decisions have been made on the award of the contract. [87043]

Mr. Ingram: The contract for the environmental enhancement of AS90 has been sought via a single source prime contract with RO Defence plc, the design authority for AS90. A number of sub-contracts, which are the responsibility of the prime contractor, may also be let. We expect to award the prime contract shortly.

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems have been experienced with the environmental enhancements to the AS90; what progress has been made; and if he will make a statement. [87044]

Mr. Ingram: No significant problems have been experienced with the environmental enhancements to the AS90, and good progress is being made.

Cruise Missiles

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many cruise missiles are held by his Department and if he will make a statement on their readiness. [87918]

Mr. Ingram: I am withholding the information requested in accordance with Exemption 1 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information (Defence, Security and International Relations).

Defence Medical Services

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many consultants have been recruited to Defence Medical Services through the scheme which offers a £50,000 joining bonus. [84623]

Dr. Moonie: The initiative to offer £50,000 'golden hellos' to consultants in certain key shortage categories and to vocationally trained general medical practitioners, in return for a five year commission, was only announced on 19 November 2002. It is therefore too early for any individuals to have been recruited into the Defence Medical Services.

European Security and Defence Policy

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to maintain the distinction between the roles of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Common European Security and Defence Policy. [87310]

Mr. Hoon *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* NATO and the European Security and Defence Policy have clearly-defined and complementary roles. NATO forms the basis of the collective defence of its members and plays an important role in crisis management. ESDP allows the EU to launch military operations where NATO as a whole is not engaged, within the scope of the Petersberg tasks, which are defined in the EU Treaty as

> "humanitarian and rescue tasks, peace-keeping tasks and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking."

These roles have been reflected in agreed language in both organisations: for example, the conclusions of the 2000 Nice European Council, and the communiqué from the North Atlantic Council meeting a few days later. On this basis, the EU and NATO have agreed to create a strategic partnership between the two organisations in crisis management.

Fire Dispute

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the value was in his Department's Balance Sheet at 31 March of the equipment used in providing services withdrawn by the fire brigades. [87858]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* This information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Friendly Fire

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the armed forces' IFF status for preventing friendly fire incidents. [87921]

Mr. Ingram: The United Kingdom has fitted Identification Friend or Foe (IFF) to its front line aircraft, ships and land-based air defence systems. The current generation of IFF equipment (IFF Mk 10) is in the process of being replaced by an updated system, the Mk 12 standard, through the Successor IFF (SIFF) programme. The Mk 12 provides additional security by means of high reliability encrypted interrogation of platforms. IFF is one of a number of methods employed by the armed forces to assist Combat Identification and to minimise the risk of friendly fire incidents. Combat Identification is achieved through a triad of measures: Situational Awareness, Target Identification, and Tactics, Techniques and Procedures. These measures are complementary and IFF plays a part in improving situational awareness and contributes to effective identification.

Gulf War

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what drugs were administered to servicemen during the Gulf War; what drugs have been *(a)* administered to date and *(b)* medically approved to be administered to servicemen serving in Iraq at a future date; and if he will make a statement. [86246]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* No decisions have yet been made concerning military action against Iraq.

Service personnel are given drugs appropriate to any medical or dental conditions they may experience whether at home or on deployment. In addition, regular and volunteer reserve forces personnel are offered a range of routine vaccinations as part of an established immunisation programme. Personnel deploying to areas with a specific health hazard, and those in special occupational risk groups, such as medical personnel, may be given additional vaccinations. Drugs or vaccinations may also be provided to help protect service personnel against the effects of chemical and biological weapons.

Drugs and medicines given to armed forces personnel by medical staff are normally those approved by the Medicines Control Agency (MCA). As is the case in the NHS, drugs and medicines that are not licensed in the United Kingdom by the MCA may be used if prescribed and administered by a doctor.

HMS Ocean

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what maintenance work is being done to HMS Ocean; what the cost of this maintenance is; when the decision was made to do the maintenance work; what the original planned cost was of the work; and if he will make a statement. [87803]

Mr. Ingram: HMS Ocean completed a planned upkeep maintenance period in November at a cost of around £5 million. This package of work was completed satisfactorily. During post upkeep trials however, the Port Main Engine suffered a major defect. The defect resulted from a ship system failure which could not have been anticipated and was not related to the work undertaken during the maintenance period. The cost of this repair work is approximately £450,000.

Inoculations

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what risk assessment has been carried out on the side effects of recent inoculations given to armed services personnel posted to the middle east. [82691]

Dr. Moonie: Decisions on vaccinations for service personnel are made on the basis of expert medical advice and take full account of any risk from adverse reactions, balanced against the risks from disease. Routine inoculations given to service personnel deploying to the middle east are licensed products that have been rigorously tested for safety. This includes vaccination against anthrax, which has been offered to personnel deploying to the middle east since May 2001 under the Department's voluntary immunisation programme (VIP). All personnel who elect to receive immunisation against anthrax under the VIP are briefed on, and instructed to report to medical staff, any adverse reactions to the vaccine. No serious adverse reactions have been reported.

Pilots

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the shortfall is of trained pilots in the *(a)* Royal Navy, *(b)* Army and *(c)* Royal Air Force. [87855]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* For the Royal Navy the overall shortfall of trained pilots is currently 51 (9 per cent.). This however, includes staff and administrative posts; the RN's front-line shortfall is less than 5 per cent. For the Army the shortfall is 10 (1.2 per cent.) and in the RAF the current shortfall of junior officer pilots is 109 (7.3 per cent.) of the requirement.

Private Finance Initiative

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which of his Department's signed PFI contracts have been independently audited since they were signed and started; who conducted the audit; when the audit took place; and if he will make a statement. [87580]

Mr. Ingram: The NAO is the only body to have independently audited a selection of the Department's PFI contracts. The individual project reports can be found

on the NAO website at www.nao.gov.ukypublications/vfimsublist/vfm_ppp.htm.

The projects covered by the studies carried out are as follows:

Studies relating to specific defence PFI contracts

Title	*Date*
Ministry of Defence: Redevelopment of MOD Main Building HC 748, Parliamentary Session 2001–02	18 April 2002
Ministry of Defence: The Joint Services Command and Staff College HC 537, Parliamentary Session 2001–02	7 February 2002
The Private Finance Initiative: The Contract for the Defence Fixed Telecommunications System HC 328, Parliamentary Session 1999–2000	23 March 2000
Ministry of Defence: The Procurement of Non-Combat Vehicles for the Royal Air Force HC 738, Parliamentary Session 1998–99	19 August 1999

The PFI training element of the Apache Helicopter contract was addressed in the following:

Title	*Date*
Ministry of Defence Building an Air Manoeuvre Capability: The Introduction of the Apache Helicopter HC1246, Parliamentary Session 2001–02	31 October 2002

QinteiQ

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what freehold *(a)* land and *(b)* buildings have been transferred by his Department to the ownership of QinetiQ, what the latest estimated value is of those assets; and how much (i) land and (ii) buildings has been leased to QinetiQ on leases in excess of 10 years. [87772]

Dr. Moonie: When QinetiQ was vested as a plc on 1 July 2001, the following sites were transferred to QinetiQ: Aberporth Airfield, Alverstoke, Angle, Aquila, Bedford (three sites), Bincleaves, Chertsey, Christchurch, Cobbett Hill, Farnborough (Cody, Pyestock and Pyestock North), Fraser, Funtington North, Haslar (DERA site, not Hospital), Hurn (three sites), Hutton Moor, Malvern, Pershore, Portsdown, West Drayton and Fort Halstead. The last formal valuation which included all these properties was on 30 June 2001. At this point, the total value of the land and buildings transferred from MOD to QinetiQ reported in the opening balance sheet of QinetiQ was £342 million.

Detailed terms and conditions for a number of leases are still subject to final negotiation. Currently, the only lease from the Ministry of Defence to QinetiQ with a term exceeding 10 years is for the satellite communications centre at West Freugh.

Air-to-Air Refuelling

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence where each of the air-to-air refueller aircraft held by his Department is; and if he will make a statement on the level of serviceability of each. [87919]

Mr. Ingram: The following table show the location and serviceability of the aircraft of the Royal Air Force's Air to Air refuelling fleet at 0800 hours on 16 December 2002 and presents no more than a snapshot in time at that particular moment. All aircraft in 2nd, 3rd and 4th line maintenance are undergoing scheduled maintenance. Aircraft that are in 1st and 2nd line maintenance could be brought back into service very quickly if required.

VC10

	Serviceable	*1st line*	*2nd line*	*3rd line*	*4th line*	*Modification*
RAF Brize Norton	3	6	1	0	0	1
Op. RESINATE	2	0	0	0	0	0
Munster	1	0	0	0	0	0
Akrotiri	2	0	0	0	0	0
Chateauroux	1	0	0	0	0	0
Falkland Islands	1	0	0	0	0	0
RAF St. Athan	0	0	0	1	0	0

Tristar

	Serviceable	*1st line*	*2nd line*	*3rd line*	*4th line*	*Modification*
RAF Brize Norton	1	1	0	0	0	0
Marshalls (Cambridge)	0	0	0	0	0	1
Abu Dhabi	0	0	0	0	1	0

Note:

Only six of the total of nine Tristar aircraft owned by the Department are air-to-air refuelling aircraft, the remainder are air transport aircraft.

Tracer

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much the United Kingdom invested in the development of TRACER before it was cancelled by the US partners. [86380]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The United Kingdom agreed jointly with our US partners not to proceed beyond the assessment phase of the TRACER programme which completed in July 2002. Total UK investment in the programme was £131 million. Arrangements have been put in place to utilise key technologies developed in the TRACER programmes in new programmes such as the future rapid effects system.

PRIME MINISTER

Referendums

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's policy on holding referendums. [87933]

The Prime Minister: The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 established a generic statutory framework for the conduct of referendums held across the UK, or a referendum held in Scotland, Wales, England or Northern Ireland, or in any region in England. Dedicated primary legislation is required for any individual referendum. The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, currently before the House, provides for referendums to be held in any of the eight English regions outside of London.

TRANSPORT

Correspondence

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to reply to the letter of 21 October from the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden requesting a meeting with local groups to discuss plans to expand Luton airport. [88058]

Mr. Spellar: We are considering the request made in the letter from the right hon. Member to meet him and members of Luton and District Association for the Control of Airport Noise (LADACAN), and will respond shortly.

Terrorism

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve security at small ports and airfields to prevent entry of *(a)* terrorist suspects and *(b)* material for use in terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [87504]

Mr. Jamieson: In the UK in the immediate aftermath of September 2001 attacks we immediately tightened the security regime for commercial flights by small aircraft. Prior to that, commercial aircraft of less than 15 tonnes (maximum take off weight) were outside the requirements of the National Aviation Security Programme. That exemption has been removed, and aircraft of any weight are now subject to the programme.

The operators of such aircraft and the managers of the aerodromes they operate from have been issued with the relevant directions and guidance, and Department for Transport inspectors monitor compliance and undertake enforcement, prioritising those locations where the risks are judged greatest. As with all aspects of the regime, these measures are kept under review.

A14

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects to add the A14 widening project to the Targeted Programme of Improvements. [87449]

Mr. Jamieson: The Highways Agency is progressing preparatory work on the A14 improvement with a view to recommending to the Secretary of State the most suitable design to be included in our Targeted Programme of Improvements. This work is taking longer than expected but I hope that we would be in a position to announce the results of that work in the new year.

Aircraft Noise

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what dedicated phone lines exist for members of the public to complain about noise resulting from aircraft. [88083]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department does not have a dedicated phone line for members of the public to complain about aircraft noise. Handling of complaints is a local matter for the airport management. Some airports maintain dedicated complaint lines.

EU Transport Council

Mr. Hood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the outcome was of the Transport Council held in Brussels on 5 December; what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [87253]

Mr. Jamieson: The transport segment of the Transport, Energy and Telecommunications Council was held in Brussels on 5–6 December, my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for Transport attended on the first day, and I attended on the second day, when the Prestige incident was discussed.

The Council came to an agreement on the Single European Sky package. The aim of the four regulations making up the package is to improve the efficiency of air traffic management across the EU, thereby reducing air traffic delays. The United Kingdom has been a strong supporter of this package from the outset and I am very pleased to be able to report the successful outcome. Civil/military co-operation is an important aspect of air traffic management, and the member states made a declaration agreeing to co-operate on military aspects.

The Commission presented its recent Communication on the consequences for European aviation policy of the recent ECJ rulings on aviation agreements. The Commission called for rapid progress on concluding an EU-US aviation agreement, the Commissioner having written to Ministers, asking them to denounce their existing agreements with the US, which, following the

ECJ rulings, the Commission believed were no longer valid. There was general agreement that member states and the Commission needed to discuss the consequences of the ruling urgently, including the question of a Commission mandate for negotiations with the US. COREPER was asked to work on proposals to be put to the Council.

The Council agreed on a Regulation providing for new levels of compensation to air passengers in the event of denied boarding, cancellation and delay. A majority of Ministers accepted three levels of compensation: 250 euros for all flights of 1,500 km or less, 400 euros for intra-EU flights of more than 1,500 km and other flights between 1,500–3,500 km, and 600 euros for all other flights. These compensation levels will be reviewed four years after the Regulation comes into effect. The UK voted against the Regulation because in the absence of a link to the ticket price it could damage the interests of consumers of "no-frills" air services. During the debate, the Minister of State had voiced concern at the impact on the services of no-frills carriers, pointing out that the minimum compensation level was almost four times the average cost of a no-frills ticket. Following a suggestion from some member states that the scope of the Regulation be extended to certain passengers returning to the EU from non-Community airports, it was agreed that the Commission would publish a report on this issue.

Conclusions were agreed setting out the basis for the continuation of the Galileo satellite navigation project, including the tendering procedure, and addressing the importance of relations with third countries. A final decision on whether to include a Public Regulated Service (PRS) in the project is to be taken before the end-of 2003. The UK and the Netherlands entered a Minutes Statement stressing that they could not accept any PRS that would overlay the US GPS M-Code.

The Council debated the second package of rail measures. The presidency noted the progress that had been made on this package of five proposals, designed to progress the development of more harmonised technical standards for interoperability, harmonise safety regulation processes, to open up access to the market for all rail freight services, and to establish a European Rail Agency. In discussion of the main outstanding issues on the safety and interoperability proposals there was a consensus for member states to be able to maintain safety levels above any harmonised minimum standard, and general support for extending the scope of the interoperability requirements. The presidency concluded that work should continue on the package. Greece made clear that it hoped to reach agreement during its presidency.

There was a debate on action to be taken following the Prestige accident. I, in common with other Ministers and the Commission, generally welcomed the presidency's approach in the Conclusions put to the Council. I joined others in arguing for better quality port state control inspections, and expressed the UK view that in general there should be co-ordinated EU actions leading to improvements in the international regulatory framework. The Conclusions reaffirmed the support of member states for the establishment of a supplementary compensation fund, developed in the IMO, to the benefit of the victims of oil pollution. This would enhance the existing international fund. The UK's concern was that the EU should not commit itself at this stage to its own fund in the event of failure of negotiations in the IMO, for fear of prejudicing those negotiations, and we secured an amendment to this effect. The Conclusions also include commitments to a faster phasing out of single-hulled tankers and restrictions on those carrying very heavy oil. There is to be an analysis of available double-hull tanker capacity. Also included are: better implementation of port state control obligations, and possible measures by member states to prohibit within 200 miles of their coasts traffic carrying dangerous and polluting goods.

The Council agreed on a Regulation establishing the Marco Polo programme to grant community financial aid to projects designed to achieve the shift of freight transport from road to other modes. The programme will have a total budget of 75 million euros.

Political agreement was reached on a Regulation to prohibit the use of environmentally damaging anti-fouling paints on ships, in accordance with the latest IMO agreements.

Conclusions were agreed on the integration of environment and sustainable development into transport policy, a continuation of the process begun at the Cardiff European Council in 1998.

The Council debated the issue of Alpine transit and the ecopoint system for transit through Austria. Agreement could not be reached, and the presidency submitted the dossier to the General Affairs and External Relations Council.

During the Council, Ministers signed the Agreement on Maritime Transport between the European Community and its member states, and the People's Republic of China.

Guided Bus Routes

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he will to announce whether Cambridgeshire County Council has been successful in its bid for a guided bus along the Cambridge-Huntingdon route. [88150]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is still appraising the proposals. As this would be a large and expensive scheme, we have asked independent external consultants to undertake a technical audit of the information received, in order to help us form a view on whether the proposal passes the established tests that determine eligibility for government funding. We will continue to work with the promoters to resolve outstanding issues as soon as possible, and would hope to be able to give them a provisional view of the scheme in advance of the next local transport investment settlement. This would be without prejudice to any statutory approvals that may be required.

Motorway Congestion

Mr. Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he will make of the South and West Yorkshire multi-modal study into motorway congestion; if he will set up further studies with a

broader focus; and if he will bring forward the further investment into rail and tram routes suggested in the study. [87432]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently considering the study recommendations together with the comments received from the Yorkshire and Humber Assembly and others. An announcement giving our response to the study recommendations and on the way forward will be made in spring 2003.

Rail Passenger Partnership

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many applications there have been for the Rail Passenger Partnership in rural areas since its launch; how many have been accepted; and what the average amount spent on each bid has been to date. [88144]

Mr. Jamieson: The Rail Passenger Partnership (RPP) scheme was launched in 1999 with a budget of £105 million over three years. In December 2001 the Strategic Rail Authority re-launched RPP with a budget of £400 million until 2010–11.

It is not possible to give a precise figure for the amount spent exclusively in rural areas, as many of the schemes for which funding has been awarded by the SRA are of benefit to rural and non-rural areas. However, since the launch of the Rail Passenger Partnership scheme, applications for 68 schemes containing a rural element have been received. Of these, 36 schemes have been approved for funding. There are a further 13 schemes with a rural element where the Strategic Rail Authority are awaiting formal bids. From the total of those approved bids containing a rural element, the average RPP funding awarded is around £100,000.

Railways

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of changes in the average level of insurance paid per annum since 1995 within the railway industry related to cover for *(a)* rolling stock, *(b)* stations, *(c)* personnel, *(d)* passengers and *(e)* other infrastructure. [87628]

Mr. Jamieson: In February 2001, the Strategic Rail Authority (SRA) took over responsibility for approving all licensed operators1 third party insurance arrangements from the Rail Regulator. Neither the SRA nor the Regulator holds information on premiums paid.

Scottish Airports (Public Transport Facilities)

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of passengers who flew from *(a)* Edinburgh, *(b)* Glasgow and *(c)* Prestwick airports travelled to the airport by public transport in each year since 1995. [88082]

Mr. Jamieson: The available information is as follows.

Percentage of passengers arriving or departing by public transport[1]

	Edinburgh airport	*Glasgow airport*
1996	37	31
2001	46	34

[1] Taxi/minicab or bus/coach. For passengers whose journey included more than one mode, the final mode has been used in the calculation.

Secretary of State Representative

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 673, what resources the Secretary of State representative will have at his disposal; where he is based and if the Secretary of State has powers to intervene to direct him to act. [87521]

Mr. Jamieson: (1) The following major resources are available to SOSREP:

Aircraft

2 surveillance aircraft and 2 dispersant spraying aircraft.

Helicopters

4 x search and rescue helicopters.

Emergency towing vessels

Four Government funded emergency towing vessels, strategically placed around the UK.

Counter pollution and salvage stockpiles

The MCA has extensive stockpiles of specialised counter pollution and salvage equipment located at Milford Haven and Burnt Island and can provide equipment such as thermal imaging cameras and intrinsically safe equipment in the event of an incident.

Personnel

In the event that SOSREP is unavailable when an incident occurs, the following officers may also exercise the SOSREP powers: the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's chief executive, director of operations and deputy director of operations.

The MCA has 10 designated marine casualty officers (MCOs) around the country that during an incident would go aboard a casualty to act for SOSREP.

SOSREP has one full time administrative support officer that deals with the every day running of the SOSREP system.

SOSREP also has a list of independent call-off contractors that can provide salvage, technical or specialist advice. During incidents when a salvage control unit has been set up, SOSREP can request additional administrative support and this is usually provided by the coastguard service.

Buildings and offices

SOSREP's office is located within the Maritime and Coastguard Agency's headquarters in Southampton. SOSREP has access to all the facilities within the agency's building including the maritime emergency incident room from which the first stages of an incident are often controlled until the individual response units have been mobilised.

SOSREP also receives information from, and can make use of, the 19 coastguard stations that are located around the UK coastline.

(2) The powers of the Secretary of State:

Lord Donaldson's 1999 Review of Salvage and Intervention and their Command and Control concluded that:

"Ministers are entitled to be kept informed in the case of more serious incidents and may subsequently be accountable to Parliament. However, whilst operations are in progress, they must stand aside, and be seen to stand aside, leaving operational

controls in the hands of the Secretary of State's specially trained and appointed representative. As in military operations, with which a serious incident has much in common, Ministers must back the man in control or sack him."

This is the principle on which the UK operates the SOSREP function. It is this which sets the UK's response to incidents apart from that of all other nations.

Stingray

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 214W, on the Stingray system, how the revenue generated from enforcement against VED evaders caught by the Stingray systems compared with the target set in October 2001; and if he will make a statement. [88149]

Mr. Jamieson: No separate target was set for the Stingray ANPR camera systems in October 2001. The Stingray system was intended to, and did, contribute towards the total VED enforcement target of 720,000 successful cases for the year 2001–02. The actual figure achieved was 799,800 cases.

Trains (Chorley)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to improve rail services between Manchester and Blackpool serving parts of Chorley borough area; and what plans he has to increase the number of trains stopping at Euxton Balshaw lane station. [87516]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is combining the local and regional services currently operated by Arriva Trains Northern and First North Western—including those between Manchester and Blackpool—to form a new 'northern' franchise, in line with its new franchising policy announced on 6 November. The SRA expects the franchise to be operational in summer 2004. There are no specific plans to increase the number of trains stopping at Euxton Balshaw lane station at present, but operators can seek to increase service levels at their own discretion.

Vehicle Excise Duty

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many successful cases against evasion of vehicle excise duty there were between October 2001 and October 2002. [88084]

Mr. Jamieson: In the 13 months between October 2001 and October 2002 DVLA took successful action against 870,383 offenders.

TREASURY

Airport Vehicles

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the level of fuel taxation of land vehicles used solely within the precincts of UK airports. [88081]

John Healey: Vehicles operating within the confines of an airport are usually unlicensed vehicles not used on public roads. As such, they are entitled to use rebated gas oil (red diesel) as fuel. Rebated gas oil carries a duty rate of 3.13p per litre.

Bioethanol

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 257W, on bioethanol fuel, what research he has published on the effect the level of duty on bioethanol fuel has had on *(a)* the British sugar industry, *(b)* British farmers and *(c)* the manufacturing sector. [87794]

John Healey: We have not published any research on this subject.

Business Support

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 257W, on business support, when he expects the RDA pilots to be completed; and when a decision about the general introduction of RDA-led management and co-ordination of business support will be made. [87785]

John Healey: Pilots of RDA-led management and co-ordination of regional business support are currently in the developmental stage. The Small Business Service (SBS) and HM Treasury are continuing to work closely with RDAs to work up their proposals. An evaluation framework is being designed to capture the key learning points from the pilots. More details on timings will be announced in due course.

Climate Change

David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent discussions he has had with manufacturers about the effect of the climate change levy on UK competitiveness. [87672]

John Healey: As part of the normal process of contact with business, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Treasury ministerial team have met a variety of businesses and business organisations and have heard a range of representations. As the Chancellor of the Exchequer said in his answer of 11 February, *Official Report*, columns 114–15, in line with previous Administrations, it is not this Government's practice to provide details of the meetings they routinely have with a wide range of organisations.

Convergence

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will deposit in the Library the UK's 2002 convergence programme, arising from Article 7 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1466/97 of the Stability and Growth Pact, before 19 December; and if he will make a statement. [87944]

Ruth Kelly: The UK's 2002 convergence programme will be made available to both Houses of Parliament once it is published.

Customs and Excise

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if the government policy on rulings in writing given by Customs and Excise Officers, as set out on 21 July 1978, *Official Report*, column 426, applies to oral *(a)* VAT advice obtained by telephone from the Department's National Advice Service and *(b)* VAT advice obtained from a Customs officer by e-mail; and if he will make a statement. [87625]

John Healey: The policy set out on 21 July 1978, *Official Report*, columns 426–27, has been expressed in a published concession which provides that:

> If a Customs and Excise officer, with the full facts before him has given a clear and unequivocal ruling on VAT in writing or, knowing the full facts, has misled a registered person to his detriment, any assessment of VAT due will be based on the correct ruling from the date the error was brought to the registered person's attention.

The concession applies, in these terms, to VAT rulings given over the telephone by Customs, including their National Advice Service, and to VAT rulings given by officers in writing and communicated by letter, fax or e-mail.

Death Duty

Mr. Wray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to *(a)* reduce the percentage of death duty paid, and *(b)* raise the qualifying value of exemption from death duty. [87373]

Dawn Primarolo: The Chancellor considers all taxes as part of his annual Budget judgment.

European Tax Harmonisation

Keith Vaz: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on Franco-German plans for European tax harmonisation. [87015]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government's view is that fair tax competition is the way forward, not proposals for tax harmonisation. The Government will not support any action at European level that would threaten jobs and investment or damage the competitive position of British business.

HIPC Initiative

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made to secure the US$1 billion for the HIPC initiative that is not financed; and if he will make a statement. [87571]

John Healey: The UK government have been at the forefront of the international debate on debt relief issues, and continues to press for the rapid and full implementation of the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative.

At the G7 Summit in Kananaskis in June 2002, the UK helped secure agreement for the G7 to fund their share of the financing shortfall in the enhanced HIPC initiative, recognising that it would be up to US$1 billion.

At the annual meetings of the World bank and IMF in September the UK took a strong lead by pledging its share of the funds needed in advance. The development committee communiqué welcomed the pledges of support from the UK and others, and called on other countries to make firm pledges as a matter of urgency.

The UK and 16 other donors have now agreed pledges totalling $850 million to the HIPC trust fund. EU member states have also called on the European Commission to make a contribution through the European Development Fund.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will seek further independent reviews of IMF growth projections for HIPC countries; and if he will make a statement. [87573]

John Healey: At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on children in May 2002, the Chancellor called for greater caution over the forecasts used to calculate debt sustainability for HIPCs. And G7 leaders agreed, at their meeting in June, that the IMF and World bank should ensure that forecasts of debt sustainability are made on the basis of prudent and cautious assumptions about growth and exports. Therefore, the UK is pleased to note that in preparation for the annual meetings of the International Monetary and Financial Committee and Development Committee in September 2002, IMF and World bank staff committed to develop alternative macroeconomic scenarios, including a policy-based "optimistic" and a "conservative" scenario that would reflect country's vulnerabilities and the uncertainties of external environment. IMF and World bank staff are also expected to base their own growth projections on a thorough analysis of the likely sources of growth and to present such analyses explicitly in discussions with authorities, as well as in staff documents.

The Independent Evaluations Office (IEO) of the IMF has been discussing its work programme for 2003, proposing an evaluation of the poverty reductions strategy papers and the poverty reduction and growth facility approach. The UK has contributed to that discussion to ensure the IEO can conduct a thorough assessment.

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy to release the concluding statement of the International Monetary Fund Article IV consultations by means of a written ministerial statement; and if he will make a statement. [87626]

John Healey: The IMF's concluding statement at the end of the 2002 Article IV consultations was published by the IMF on 9 December. Copies of the statement were also placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Less Polluting Vehicles

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what further proposals he has to increase the tax incentives to motorists for mileage on business use to change to less polluting vehicles. [87325]

John Healey: The new company car tax system linking the charge on the benefit of a company car to the level of its carbon dioxide emissions came into effect in April this year.

The Inland Revenue is undertaking an extensive exercise to evaluate the effects of the reforms.

Any changes to the system will be made in the context of the Chancellor's Budget judgment.

Public Liability Insurance

Ms Bridget Prentice: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has made an assessment of the implications of changes in public liability insurance for constituency offices and venues where parliamentary advice surgeries are held; and if he will make a statement. [86207]

Mr. Robin Cook: I have been asked to reply.

Parliament provides combined employers and public liability insurance for its Members. We are not aware of any changes to the scope of the public liability insurance.

We have been advised that when we renew our policy at the end of March 2003, the ceiling for indemnity in respect of terrorist acts under the employers' liability provision will be reduced from £10 million to £5 million. We will inform Members of the terms of the new policy.

Tax Avoidance

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what financial institutions based in the City of London have used offshore financial arrangements in the last three years as a smeans of avoiding liability for employers national insurance; and if he will make a statement; [R] [87710]

(2) what steps he intends to take to remove the opportunity for financial institutions based in the City of London to avoid liability for national insurance by paying their employees who work in the UK under an offshore arrangement; [R] [87711]

(3) what recent reports he has received relating to tax avoidance schemes which involve the use of offshore arrangements in the payment of employees as a vehicle for avoiding *(a)* tax and *(b)* national insurance liability. [R] [87713]

Dawn Primarolo: The Government are committed to closing loopholes in the tax and NICs systems, which allow some people to avoid paying their fair share, increasing the burden on others. In his pre-Budget report the Chancellor announced that he was introducing measures to counter the avoidance of tax and national insurance contributions through the use of employees benefit trusts. I cannot comment on the activities of individual companies.

Training and Management Courses

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 266W, on training and management courses, when he will publish the consultation document described. [87791]

John Healey: The Government are in discussion with a number of high street banks on the detail of their proposal and will consult small businesses in due course.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many families in each of the wards in the Wansbeck constituency benefit from receipt of the working families tax credit. [88158]

Dawn Primarolo: I understand from the Office for National Statistics that they expect to publish these figures within the next few weeks as part of neighbourhood statistics.

CABINET OFFICE

Non-departmental Public Bodies

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what plans he has to reform non-departmental public bodies at the regional level. [86325]

Mr. Alexander: I have no plans for major reforms to the way that non-departmental public bodies operate at a regional level. However, the White Paper 'Your Region, Your Choice' sets out the Government's proposals to strengthen the existing regional institutions, including Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), who now enjoy increased funding and flexibility in the way that their resources can be used. In the future, in those regions where voters choose in a referendum to have an elected assembly, the RDA will be accountable to the elected assembly in the region, which will appoint the Chair and Board members and publish the regional economic strategy. Elected regional assemblies will also have a significant influence over other bodies such as the local Learning and Skills Councils, Small Business Service, Strategic Rail Authority, Environment Agency and cultural bodies, through making appointments, being consulted on strategies and co-ordinating activity.

Regulatory Impact Unit

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the employment costs are, including benefits, of *(a)* ministers representing the Regulatory Impact Unit and *(b)* special advisers and their supporting staff retained by the Regulatory Impact Unit. [87607]

Mr. Alexander: No special advisers are retained by the Regulatory Impact Unit (RIU). The one part-time special adviser and two Ministers employed in the Cabinet Office will spend some of their time on RIU-related issues but the cost of this time is not separately identifiable from the time spent by them on other issues.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Agency Workers

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with her European counterparts regarding the Agency Workers Directive; whether she has sought to make amendments to the Directive as it stands; and if she will make a statement. [87663]

Alan Johnson: As I said in the debate in European Standing Committee C on 10 July 2002, the Government would like to see further flexibilities introduced to the proposal. I have been discussing and will continue to discuss this proposal with Ministers in other member states, MEPs and Commissioner Diamantopoulou. I shall be producing an Explanatory Memorandum and Regulatory Impact Assessment on the revised proposal.

Business Leaders

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 5 December, *Official Report*, column 1039, if she will list the business leaders to whom she spoke between 27 November and 5 December, stating in each case whether the agreement to which she refers was volunteered. [87515]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* As the *Official Report*, makes clear, I was referring to a wide range of discussions with business leaders since Budget 2002, including several large meetings.

Christmas Day Trading

Donald Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what response she has received from major retailers to her appeal not to open on Christmas Day; and what action she plans for future years as a result of that response. [87987]

Alan Johnson: Consultation of major retailers earlier in the year indicated that the majority did not plan to open on Christmas Day 2002 or in future years.

The need for any further action will be considered in the light of the practice of retailers at Christmas this year.

Election Addresses

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry under what legislation the Post Office is required to deliver election addresses free of charge at general elections; what the cost of delivery was at the last general election *(a)* in each constituency and *(b)* in total; and by whom those costs are met. [87342]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* A candidate's right to send election address post free is provided for in Section 91 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 as amended by paragraph 17 of Schedule 8 to the Postal Services Act 2000. Section 91 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 entitles a candidate at a parliamentary election (subject to such reasonable terms and conditions as the universal service provider may specify) to send free of any charge certain specified postal communications to each elector. Cost is a matter that falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Royal Mail Group plc and I have therefore asked the Chairman to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Employers Liability Insurance

Miss Begg: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent assessment she has made of the ability of small businesses to secure Employers' Liability Insurance; [87405]

(2) how many businesses have gone into liquidation citing the inability to obtain affordable Employers' Liability Insurance in the last 12 months. [87403]

Miss Melanie Johnson: As businesses enter liquidation proceedings for a number of reasons, it is not possible to single out one issue, such as difficulty in obtaining Employers Liability Insurance as the sole cause of such proceedings.

However, my Department is very concerned by reports of significant rises in insurance costs, particularly for small businesses, and is aware of the difficulties that this has posed for some firms.

As announced in the Chancellor's pre-Budget report in November, the Government are conducting a review to assess the scale and nature of difficulties with the Employer's Liability Insurance system. The Department for Work and Pensions is leading the review and my Department will play a full and active role to represent the needs of business. Further details about the review are available at www.dwp. gov.uk/ publications/2002/mdex.htm.

Mozambique

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the volume of trade between the UK and Mozambique was in the last year for which figures are available; what recent estimate she has made of UK investment in Mozambique; and what steps she has taken to encourage trade between Mozambique and the rest of the Commonwealth. [87062]

Nigel Griffiths: According to figures published by HM Customs and Excise, UK imports of goods from Mozambique in 2001 were valued at £7.5 million while UK exports were worth £12.6 million. In the nine months to September 2002 UK imports were worth £1.5 million while exports were £10.9 million. The figures do not take account of trade between Mozambique and British companies located in South Africa, for which statistics are not available.

Information on UK investment in Mozambique is not available due to commercial confidentiality.

Trade Partners UK has a small but busy section in Mozambique, assisting UK companies in the market and those wishing to access it for the first time. In addition TPUK has recently funded a high level delegation to the UK to highlight investment opportunities in a hydro-power project, Mpanda Ncua, and has given support to a trade mission from the UK planned for February 2003. It is not HMG's role to actively promote business between Mozambique and other Commonwealth countries. However, TPUK supported the Commonwealth Business Council in its efforts to run an investment promotion seminar jointly with the Mozambique Government in February 2002.

Post Office Benefit Payments

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry who will oversee the second card option for post office payment after the changes in 2003. [86557]

Mr. Timms: This is a matter which falls within the day-to-day responsibility of Post Office Ltd. I have therefore asked the chief executive to reply direct to the hon. Member.

Productivity

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment has been made of the impact on productivity of the growth of the service sector relative to the manufacturing sector. [87838]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Concern is sometimes expressed that the growth of the service sector may slow overall productivity growth because measured productivity growth is lower in the service sector than in the rest of the economy. However this conclusion, which emerged in academic research in the 1960s, has been called into question by later research. Moreover a number of studies show that the UK service sector has considerable potential to catch up with best-practice productivity levels elsewhere. The Government are keen to encourage productivity growth and narrow the productivity gap in all sectors of the economy.

Renewable Energy

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the costs of establishing a target of *(a)* 25 per cent. and *(b)* 30 per cent. of the UK's electricity to come from renewable sources by 2020. [87882]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Prospects for renewable energy, including the question of possible targets beyond the 10 per cent. target for 2010, will be addressed in the Energy White Paper which we expect to publish in the new year.

Social Chapter

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to her answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 520W, on the Social Chapter, what estimates her Department has made of *(a)* the overall cost to date and *(b)* the annual cost hereafter to businesses in the UK of implementing the five directives transposed from the Social Chapter. [87674]

Alan Johnson: Estimates of the overall cost to businesses in the UK of implementing regulations transposing the five Social Chapter directives listed as follows were published in Regulatory Impact Assessments which are available from the Libraries of the House.

The estimated total annual recurring implementation cost is as follows:

Parental Leave Directive, including the 1999 extension to the implementing Regulations—£0.2 million;

European Works Council Directive—nil;

Part-time Work Directive—£4 million;

Burden of Proof Directive in Sex Discrimination cases—£0.6 million;

Fixed Term Employees Directive—£2 million.

Solar Photovoltaics

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what criteria have been used to exclude *(a)* on grid solar PV, *(b)* off grid solar PV and *(c)* hybrid systems including solar PV, from the proposed new community and household renewable energy grant scheme to be launched in January 2003. [87715]

Miss Melanie Johnson: The Performance and Innovation Unit's 'Renewable Energy in the UK—Building for the Future' report recommended that up to £10 million of support be provided as capital grants specifically for renewable energy schemes that engage local communities or individual households.

The DTI has since undertaken a broad consultation exercise to inform the positioning, design and workings of this scheme. Through the consultation the DTI has revisited the initial recommendations of the PIU. An initial scoping exercise identified schemes, which had potential overlap with the proposed Community and Household Scheme (CHS), and concluded that such a scheme would be beneficial for the advancement of renewables in the UK.

Although the PIU recommended that no restrictions be placed on technology, the DTI has sought to identify which technologies would enhance the public's understanding of renewables. The scheme has also been designed so that it would not duplicate work under way through other Government or Industry initiatives. Although solar PV has a significant contribution to make to enhancing the public's understanding of renewables, it is already supported by the first phase of the PV Major Demonstration Programme (MDP) which has a budget of £20 million. The programme has already supported PV installations by homeowners and local groups. Technologies such as solar water heating, small wind and micro hydro can also make a positive contribution to the public's understanding of renewables. These technologies, in contrast to solar PV, receive little or no Government support.

The scheme also aims to tackle some of the other barriers to uptake such as installer accreditation. Again installer accreditation for solar PV occurs under the MDP and so any such work in the Community and Household would be redundant.

On off grid applications, the DTI are currently looking at whether to expand the MDP to include off grid PV systems. On hybrid systems, customers will be able to apply to the CHS for the non solar PV component and to the MDP for the solar PV component of the hybrid system.

The technologies supported by the CHS will be reviewed throughout the lifetime of the scheme and altered if necessary.

Trawlermen (Compensation)

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many refused claims for compensation for former Icelandic trawlermen based in the city of Aberdeen are awaiting *(a)* first appeal and *(b)* a decision by the independent adjudicator. [87638]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) 51 Aberdeen-based claimants are currently awaiting a decision on their claim by the official responsible for considering queries about the initial decision of the Watford office.

(b) Eight Aberdeen-based claimants are currently awaiting a decision on their claim by the independent adjudicator.

Mr. Doran: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many refused claims for compensation for former Icelandic trawlermen based in the City of Aberdeen have been overturned *(a)* at first appeal and *(b)* by the independent adjudicator. [87639]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The information is as follows:

(a) The official responsible for considering queries about the initial decision of the Watford office (as regards either refusal of compensation or the amount awarded) has found in the claimant's favour in 51 cases involving Aberdeen-based claimants. Of these:

Nine were as a result of rule changes made in November 2001;

27 were as a result of new documentary evidence being provided to establish a longer period of continuous service than was originally calculated; and

15 were as a result of a different view being taken on the claim.

(b) The independent adjudicator has found in the claimant's favour in two formal appeals by Aberdeen-based claimants.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claims under the Former Icelandic Water Trawlermen Compensation Scheme are still to be processed; how many appeals under the scheme are awaiting a decision; and what the average time to process an appeal has been. [87664]

Nigel Griffiths: There are no claims remaining that have not been considered on at least one occasion. There are 180 currently awaiting further information prior to an initial decision of the Watford office. There are 193 queries regarding the initial decision of the Watford office currently under consideration by the responsible DTI official. Over 1,600 other queries have already been responded to by him. There are 43 formal appeals currently with the independent adjudicator for consideration. The average time taken to process a formal appeal has been 57 days.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps were taken by her Department to publicise the Former Icelandic Water Trawlermen Compensation Scheme; how many representations her Department has received from fishermen enquiring about compensation under the scheme since the expiry date; and if she will extend the application process beyond that date. [87665]

Nigel Griffiths: The scheme was publicised in the local press and other relevant publications, with port area MPs and with the British Fishermen's Association, and on the DTI website. While the scheme was in operation, DTI officials also made numerous visits to the main port areas to meet former trawlermen and/or their representatives. Further publicity was arranged in relevant publications and with port area representatives in advance of the 1 October 2002 closure date for new claims. Since that date, DTI officials have received fewer than 10 new inquiries from individuals who might have wished to claim compensation. The scheme rules made clear the closure date was final.

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether, in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Former Icelandic Water Trawlermen Compensation Scheme, affidavits from independent witnesses testifying that a certain ship has been to Icelandic waters during the relevant period will be accepted as proof of that ship's validity and will trigger compensation for those having served on it; and if she will make a statement. [87666]

Nigel Griffiths: At the outset of the scheme, officials—in conjunction with local trawlermen and their representatives—compiled a list of Icelandic-water vessels based on independent contemporary documentary evidence. More vessels have been added to this list as further such evidence has come to light during the period of operation of the Scheme. There are now over 700 vessels on the list. We continue to believe that independent contemporary documentary evidence provides the best basis for assessing the status of particular vessels.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Jubilee Medal

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will include traffic wardens in those eligible for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal. [87184]

Mr. Caborn: No. The medal is being issued to the living holders of the Victoria Cross and the George Cross, to serving members of the armed forces and the Royal Fleet Auxiliary, and to the '999' emergency services. Traffic wardens do not fall within any of these eligible groups.

Community Developments

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the public organisations that make grant funding available for community developments, and the funds available last year for them to disburse. [87413]

Mr. Caborn: The Department's annual report (May 2002, Cm 5423) gives details of all the public bodies sponsored by the Department and of any grant funding that they disburse.

Drug Testing

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what further action she has taken to increase the number of drug tests on competitors at elite sporting events in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [87887]

Mr. Caborn: This Government is firmly committed to combating doping in sport. The anti-doping programme in the UK is delivered through the national anti-doping organisation, UK Sport, in conjunction with sports

governing bodies. As a result of the 2002 Spending Review this Government has allocated additional funds to UK Sport specifically to increase the number of public interest tests carried out under the anti-doping programme and to meet the additional costs of new blood tests. The funding, which amounts to £1.5 million in 2004–05 and £3.2 million in 2005–06, will ensure the continued quality and comprehensiveness of UK Sport's anti-doping programme.

National Lottery

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much revenue has been collected from lottery sales in Morecambe and Lunesdale in the last 12 months. [87506]

Mr. Caborn: Information about National Lottery ticket sales is not collected by constituency. But the National Lottery Commission is able to provide information about sales broken down by post code area. In October this year in response to a question from my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Mr. Challen) on 22 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 182–83W, I placed in the House Libraries a table provided by Camelot plc listing sales by postcode area since the Lottery's launch.

New Opportunities Fund

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the total of uncommitted funds is from New Opportunities Fund Rounds 1 and 2; and if she will make a statement. [87651]

Mr. Caborn: The New Opportunities Fund had £1.5 billion available for its round 1 and 2 programmes which are designed to improve the quality of life for people and communities, address disadvantage and encourage community participation.

The New Opportunities Fund has committed 93.11 per cent. of Round 1 and 2 funds. There is £97.5 million yet to commit.

Noise Pollution

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment of the noise pollution caused by *(a)* amplified music and *(b)* television sets was made by her Department when considering licensing reform. [87408]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: We consulted local authorities and local residents groups, as well as representatives of the music industry, following the publication of our proposals for reform of the licensing laws, and considered views on public nuisance and the impact of various forms of entertainment on the community. The comments that were received during the initial review and in response to the publication of the White Paper led to our making the prevention of public nuisance one of the four primary licensing objectives of the Bill.

During the consultation, no organisation or individual commented on the issue of noise from television sets. Subsequently, we have considered whether the live broadcast of television in public venues should be brought within the proposed licensing regime and concluded that this is not necessary.

Tax Relief

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Treasury about tax relief for those charitable organisations affected by the provisions of the Licensing Bill, with regard to the requirement for applying and paying for licences for fundraising events. [87450]

Dr. Howells: This Department has not had discussions with the Treasury with regard to this issue.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Housing Support

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated cost of administration was in relation to the introduction of charging and means testing for housing support services in Northern Ireland. [87336]

Mr. Browne: In the interests of targeting resources to where the need is greatest I have decided that those who can afford to pay for their housing support services should continue to do so. However it is important that the administration costs of operating such an arrangement are kept to a minimum. Rather than spending around £250,000 to develop and administer a specific supporting people means test, I have decided that eligibility for housing benefit or any other means tested benefit, should be the automatic passport to free housing support services. This will be easy to operate with little additional costs in terms of administration.

North-South Implementation Bodies

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what agreement he has reached with the Irish Government about the operation of the North-South Implementation Bodies during the period of suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will place a copy of the agreement in the Library. [85884]

Mr. Paul Murphy: In an exchange of notes on 19 November the British and Irish Governments agreed a mechanism so that during the period of temporary suspension of the Assembly, decisions on policies and actions relating to the Implementation Bodies, Tourism Ireland (a publicly owned company established as an area of co-operation by NSMC) or their respective functions could be taken. The agreement was made to ensure the continuation during suspension of the necessary public functions performed by the Implementation Bodies. The agreement, which came into force on 3 December, also provided that no new functions would be conferred on the Implementation Bodies during suspension. The exchange of notes will be laid before both Houses of Parliament.

Personal Care

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much was spent in each of the last three

years in Northern Ireland in providing free personal care for those living in sheltered accommodation or living in their own homes. [87331]

Mr. Browne: Information on the cost of providing free personal care for those living in sheltered accommodation or living in their own homes is not available. The provision of personal care includes services such as district nursing, home help, occupational and physiotherapy and applies to a number of programmes of care. Information at the level required could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Public-Voluntary Sector Partnerships

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the funding arrangements for partnerships between statutory bodies and the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland. [87057]

Mr. Browne: Voluntary and community sector involvement in the design and delivery of public services is a key aspect of the Modernising Government agenda.

There are numerous and diverse partnerships at local level, funded through grant aid and service level management, between the voluntary sector and statutory bodies such as district councils and health and social services trusts. Of particular importance are Local Strategy Partnerships, supported under Peace II and now working in every district council area in Northern Ireland.

Further detail on the wide ranging sources of funding for partnerships between government and the voluntary and community sector can be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Voluntary Sector (Service Delivery)

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what initiatives in and between Northern Ireland Government Departments are in place to encourage and facilitate the voluntary sector in delivery of services. [87058]

Mr. Browne: Government strategy for support of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland is set out in "Partners for Change", a consultation document launched in June 2001. The strategy aims to add value to Government in Northern Ireland through a partnership approach with the voluntary and community sector, enabling the sector's contribution to service delivery, policy comment and achievement of government objectives.

I have endorsed the final draft of partners for change and arrangements for publishing the document are currently in place. The document will be available early in 2003 and will be posted on the Department for Social Development's website.

An allocation of £6 million from executive programme funds was announced on 7 October 2002 to maintain important services delivered by the voluntary and community sector, which otherwise might be lost due to funding difficulties. Applications for funding under this initiative have now closed and Departments aim to make recommendations to Ministers by the end of January 2003.

Longer-term sustainability issues will be considered by a Task Force on Resourcing the Voluntary and Community Sector. This Task Force will consider the further diversification of funding sources for the sector and is due to report its conclusions by April 2004.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Breakfast Clubs

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills pursuant to his answer of 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 551W, on breakfast clubs, if he will make it the Government's policy to fund breakfast clubs for all schools via mainstream funding. [87575]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My previous answer of 2 December explained that many schools already offer breakfast clubs as part of their study support or child care provision.

"Investment for Reform" spelt out our intention that, by 2006, all schools should be providing study support, in breakfast clubs or otherwise. Funding will continue to be made available to local education authorities and schools to enable them to offer a wide range of study support activities, and we will be announcing our detailed plans in due course. It will be for schools and authorities to choose whether to run breakfast clubs in particular as part of their study support, as they are best placed to determine local needs and viability.

Judy Mallaber: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what action he is taking to ensure sustainability of breakfast clubs and out-of-school activities funded by the New Opportunities Fund when this funding finishes. [87617]

Mr. Miliband: We are committed to promoting study support in schools, including breakfast clubs. In "Investment for Reform", we spelt out our aim for all schools to be providing study support by 2006, in breakfast clubs or other activities. We hope that participating schools will also be able to use the extended schools programme, and child care initiatives, to offer an increased range of provision including breakfast clubs.

Funding will continue to be available for study support activity after New Opportunities Fund grants finish. We will be announcing in due course our detailed funding plans for study support over the next three years. It will of course remain for schools and local education authorities to decide precisely what provision to offer with the resources at their disposal.

Budget Deficits

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many universities and colleges are facing deficits in their budgets in the current financial year; and what estimate he has made of the cost to universities of remedying current budget deficiencies over the next *(a)* three years and *(b)* seven years. [87309]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* In 2000–01, there were 48 higher education institutions in England with budget deficits out of a total of 130. Universities receive funding from a variety of sources, both private and public and set out their accounts in their annual reports. The Higher Education Funding Council for England works with institutions in financial difficulty to enable them to return to a sound financial position over time. The Government's plans for public funding for future years will be announced alongside the higher education strategy document in January.

GCSE Results

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the secondary modern schools which achieved better results at GCSE than the average for all-ability comprehensive schools in 2002. [87830]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The information requested will not be available until the secondary school performance tables are published early in 2003. A copy of the analyses will be included in the House of Commons Library when the data are available.

Government Grants

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average amount of central Government grant was per pupil in education in *(a)* England, *(b)* the South East, *(c)* East Sussex and *(d)* Eastbourne, in each of the last five years. [87591]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the Department's total recurrent grant per pupil allocated in England, the South East and East Sussex local education authority for the financial years 1997–98 to 2001–02. It is not possible to identify separately the amounts for individual constituencies.

£

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
England	150	70	120	240	410
South East	80	30	80	200	300
East Sussex local education authority	90	30	90	240	330

Notes:

1. Figures reflect all revenue grants relevant to pupils aged four to 19, in DfES's Departmental Expenditure Limits (excluding EMA and other grants where it is not possible to get figures on a comparable basis over time).
2. The pupil numbers used are the maintained pupils underlying the SSA settlement calculations.
3. 1997–98 figure for East Sussex has been estimated, to take account of local government reorganisation.
4. 1997–98 figures take account of approximately £500 million nationally in respect of the nursery voucher scheme which was transferred to SSA in 1998–99.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

Maintained Schools (Guidance)

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what guidance his Department has given to maintained schools regarding avoidance of political bias in the display of photographs of politicians in school buildings. [87463]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Understanding our system of government is an important part of citizenship education, which became a part of the statutory National Curriculum for 11 to 16-year-olds in September 2002. It is for teachers to decide on the most appropriate materials, including visual aids, to encourage teaching and learning in the classroom. Teachers are aware of potential political problems and are professional in their approach. There are safeguards in law to guard against biased teaching. LEAs and schools must take reasonable steps to ensure that where political or controversial issues are covered, teachers offer pupils a balanced presentation of opposing views. The law on this is contained in sections 406 and 407 of the Education Act 1996.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87357]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I refer the hon. Member to the reply given by my hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Plant Hire

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent representations he has received about the CITB levy on the plant hire industry; and if he will make a statement. [87317]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In recent weeks I have received 153 representations from a total of 25 companies about the CITB levy on the plant hire sector. I have agreed to consider whether there is a case for removing hire services from the scope of the CITB and am awaiting proposals from the sector.

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much CITB levy was received from the plant hire industry in the last three years. [87318]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Companies declaring their main activity to be "plant hire or repair" paid the following amounts of levy in the last three years:

2000: £2,043,462

2001: £2,364,100

2002: £2,973,690

Postcode Premium

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the future of the postcode premium in funding higher education institutions. [87230]

Margaret Hodge *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The Higher Education Funding Council for England has been reviewing the level and method of distributing funding for widening participation. We favour funding indicators more closely related to the extra costs to institutions of recruiting and supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds. The income of their parents, whether they are first in their family to attend university and whether they attend schools with no tradition of sending large numbers to university, seem more appropriate indicators. The funding answer will take this matter forward.

School Exclusions

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the cost is per year of educating an excluded child in a pupil referral unit. [86876]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer12 December 2002]:* The Department has no analysis of how much cost is incurred in educating an excluded pupil at a pupil referral unit (PRU). This is due to the wide variance in provision that any particular excluded pupil would require from a PRU, as well as other factors such as the location of the PRU and the funding structure of the local education authority.

Funding for PRUs is contained in the Social Inclusion: Pupil Support (SIPS) grant. This grant (£176 million in 2002–03) is designed to tackle bad behaviour in schools and to provide education for pupils outside mainstream schools. PRUs can also be funded from other sources and there is therefore no measure of costs for a PRU.

There are currently 371 PRUs open in England.

School Funding (Kent)

Jonathan Shaw: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the level of schools funding per pupil was in *(a)* Kent and *(b)* Medway in each year since 1996; what the predicted spending for the next three years will be in each case; and what the capital investment was each year since 1996. [87728]

Mr. Miliband: The tables show the Department's total education standard spending assessment, recurrent and capital grant per pupil allocated to Kent and Medway local education authorities for the financial years 1998–99 to 2002–03. The local government reorganisation means that data for 1996–97 and 1997–98 does not conform to current boundaries so comparable figures are not available.

Kent local education authority

£

	SSA	*Recurrent grant*	*Capital grant*
1998–99	2,610	20	110
1999–2000	2,710	70	110
2000–01	2,830	200	300
2001–02	2,970	290	290
2002–03	3,150	320	350

Notes:

1. Figures reflect education SSA settlement figures (all sub-blocks, excluding, where relevant, the funding for 4-year-olds at private, voluntary and independent institutions) plus all revenue grants in DfES's departmental expenditure limits relevant to pupils aged 4–19 (excluding EMA and other grants where it is not possible to get figures on a comparable basis over time).
2. The pupil numbers used are the maintained pupils underlying the SSA settlement calculations.
3. 2002–03 SSA figures include an element for LSC allocations in respect of school sixth forms.
4. 2002–03 figures are provisional.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

Medway local education authority

£

	SSA	*Recurrent grant*	*Capital grant*
1998–99	2,580	20	120
1999–2000	2,670	80	130
2000–01	2,790	200	270
2001–02	2,930	300	290
2002–03	3,120	320	350

Notes:

1. Figures reflect education SSA settlement figures (all sub-blocks, excluding, where relevant, the funding for 4-year-olds at private, voluntary and independent institutions) plus all revenue grants in DfES's departmental expenditure limits relevant to pupils aged 4–19 (excluding EMA and other grants where it is not possible to get figures on a comparable basis over time).
2. The pupil numbers used are the maintained pupils underlying the SSA settlement calculations.
3. 2002–03 SSA figures include an element for LSC allocations in respect of school sixth forms.
4. 2002–03 figures are provisional.
5. Figures are rounded to the nearest £10.

As a result of our drive to give extra resources to the front line, there will be no increase in central Government spending per pupil but a national average increase of over £540 per pupil in our plans for local government spending over the next three years.

It is not possible to set out now education formula spending shares (EFSS) for Kent and Medway for 2004–05 and 2005–06: they will depend on pupil numbers and indicator data at January 2003 and 2004. However, we have provided Kent and Medway with figures for total education formula spending for 2004–05 and 2005–06, together with forward projections at national level of pupil numbers for those years. We have also said that there will be minimum and maximum increases for authorities as we introduce the new LEA funding system. Indicator data will be averaged over three years to provide further stability and predictability in future formula spending shares. Kent and Medway will be able to use this data—together with local knowledge about pupil numbers and indicators—to form a good estimate of what their EFSS might be in those years. That will in turn allow them to provide schools with indicative budgets for the next three years.

School Security

Dr. Stoate: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what measures he is taking to improve security arrangements in *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools; [87805]

(2) what grants are available to *(a)* primary and *(b)* secondary schools to improve on-site security arrangements. [87806]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department has produced a range of guidance on school security, most recently the video "Can You See What They See?". Advice is also available on the school security website www.dfes.gov.uk/schoolsecurity.

In 2002–03 funding of £10 million was provided to local education authorities from the capital modernisation fund for school security projects. This was allocated on a formula basis for their maintained schools, and it is for them to decide how best to use the funding to improve security in both primary and secondary schools.

Special Educational Needs

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much he estimates introduction of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001 will cost in respect of *(a)* staff training costs, *(b)* other recurrent costs and *(c)* capital costs over the quinquennium from September 2002, broken down by local education authority. [87116]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Local education authorities (LEAs) and schools are able to use record increases in funding for education made available by the Government, of £12.8 billion between 2002–03 and 2005–06 (of which £2.7 billion is capital) to implement their duties under the SEN and Disability Act 2001.

Increases in the SEN Standards Fund and the Schools Access Initiative have provided specific sources of extra funding for local education authorities and schools to meet the requirements to include pupils with special educational needs and disabilities within schools and to establish local parent partnership and disagreement resolution services.

In 2002–03 a total of £91 million was made available to LEAs and schools to support the needs of pupils with SEN and disabilities and vulnerable children from the Standards Fund and in 2003–04 will remain at this record level. Eligible expenditure from the fund includes training and between 1999 and 2002 the fund has been used to establish parent partnership services, which are now statutory services.

Substantial funding has been provided, and continues to be provided under the schools access initiative to improve access for disabled children which is standing at £70 million this year and will increase again to £100 million from 2003–04 for the next three years.

Specialist College Status

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will abolish the financial threshold for schools bidding for specialist college status. [87654]

Mr. Miliband: The Department will not be abolishing the sponsorship requirement for schools applying for specialist school status.

Raising sponsorship is a key aspect of the Specialist Schools Programme. The main rationale behind it is the need for specialist schools to build partnerships with sponsors and the local community. As a task, raising sponsorship links into the enterprising ethos that is integral to the programme as a whole and it serves as a forum for the school's public presentation of its plans for specialist designation.

The Department has already done much to help schools which are having difficulties raising the necessary sponsorship. We grant-aid the Technology Colleges Trust and the Youth Sport Trust, which advise schools on raising sponsorship. The Trusts are often able to help schools with money donated centrally, on the basis of criteria set out by sponsors.

In 1999 we reduced the sponsorship requirement to £50,000, and in May this year we reduced the amount of sponsorship required by small mainstream schools (defined as those with under 500 pupils on roll) to £100 per pupil, subject to a minimum of £20,000, rising to £50,000 for a school with 500 pupils.

In November the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced the creation of a Partnership Fund. The Fund, which will contain £3 million in 2003–04, is designed specifically to help schools which have had serious difficulties meeting the £50,000 sponsorship requirement. The Department is in the process of developing criteria for the allocation of the fund, which will be managed by the Technology Colleges Trust. The criteria will be based around evidence that the school has made a real effort to raise sponsorship and has created valuable links with businesses.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list for his Department *(a)* those comprehensive spending review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the comprehensive spending review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87693]

Mr. Charles Clarke *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Department publishes progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its annual departmental report and autumn performance report. Progress against our CSR 98 targets was reported most recently in the 2002 autumn report, published in November, together with commentary where appropriate. A copy of the report is available from the House of Commons Library.

Statemented Children

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of children with statements have a transition plan. [85316]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information requested is not available centrally.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Extradition Appeals

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what categories of representation may properly be considered in extradition appeals. [87633]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Extradition Act 1989 contains a number of statutory safeguards against surrender of which a fugitive can seek to avail himself before the courts. If no legal challenge is made, or if any that are made are unsuccessful, it falls to my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary to decide, in the exercise of residual discretion, whether to order surrender. In so deciding, he has regard to all the circumstances of the case and to any grounds for concluding that it would be unjust or oppressive to order surrender. As part of that consideration, the fugitive has an opportunity to make such representations against surrender as he would wish to be taken into account.

Arson

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many under-18 year olds were convicted of arson in each year since 1992, broken down by constabulary. [86496]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is contained in the table.

Persons aged under 18 convicted at all courts of offences of arson, England and Wales 1992–2001, by police force area

Police force area	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Avon and Somerset	8	9	13	8	8	4	4	5	9	8
Bedfordshire	5	9	2	—	2	3	2	2	8	6
Cambridgeshire	7	8	5	2	3	5	4	3	7	7
Cheshire	6	8	19	15	10	13	10	16	7	8
Cleveland	8	8	6	8	7	8	5	3	4	11
Cumbria	8	6	2	3	5	5	5	16	13	12
Derbyshire	12	21	8	14	11	6	11	6	9	13
Devon and Cornwall	7	4	12	11	14	13	8	13	15	14
Dorset	5	4	8	9	10	—	4	5	9	9
Durham	21	15	23	11	12	26	14	14	16	18
Essex	12	11	13	16	14	13	24	11	9	19
Gloucestershire	2	2	1	2	2	5	7	4	7	3
Greater Manchester	10	25	23	18	18	15	12	34	47	35
Hampshire	6	6	17	24	11	9	15	23	23	29
Hertfordshire	5	7	4	10	10	5	4	4	10	6
Humberside	20	14	21	28	19	7	10	5	15	16
Kent	7	2	9	5	9	12	8	23	11	12
Lancashire	9	9	22	15	16	20	15	13	34	25
Leicestershire	4	7	11	22	8	17	22	22	14	9
Lincolnshire	5	6	8	5	2	5	9	8	7	9
London, City of	—	1	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Merseyside	5	10	10	11	8	8	12	12	10	16
Metropolitan Police	19	11	15	14	7	15	17	19	31	17
Norfolk	5	8	4	9	3	5	3	3	6	6
Northamptonshire	5	3	8	4	7	2	1	6	6	3
Northumbria	27	26	31	24	26	16	15	26	23	30
North Yorkshire	4	5	8	4	5	1	6	3	6	8
Nottinghamshire	21	17	21	23	15	15	16	27	17	29
South Yorkshire	11	6	12	9	15	26	14	25	25	14
Staffordshire[1]	14	9	23	15	8	13	10	12	*	19
Suffolk	2	5	11	1	5	5	7	6	10	10
Surrey	4	4	1	4	2	4	2	9	5	5
Sussex	6	10	4	4	5	9	5	8	8	13
Thames Valley	9	5	9	22	18	3	11	8	25	14
Warwickshire		8	2	1	4	2	4	2	1	3
West Mercia	17	10	11	7	6	6	4	20	14	14
West Midlands	28	25	31	30	16	30	22	33	27	35
West Yorkshire	28	32	36	20	22	48	37	33	39	41
Wiltshire	6	8	6	3	7	6	7	5	14	7
Dyfed Powys	1	4	5	3	10	8	7	5	9	2
Gwent	7	5	17	6	9	59	11	10	14	11
North Wales	8	4	11	10	2	5	4	4	2	10
South Wales	12	7	14	12	20	21	24	16	20	25
England and Wales	406	404	517	462	411	498	432	522	586	601

[1] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to submit sample data for persons convicted in the magistrates' courts in 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Asylum Seekers

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of in-country asylum applicants made their claim within *(a)* three days, *(b)* seven days, *(c)* 14 days, *(d)* 28 days and *(e)* 56 days of arrival in the UK in the last year for which figures are available. [87916]

Beverley Hughes: The length of time between the arrival of in-country asylum applicants in the UK and when they lodge their application for asylum is not available. The requested information could be obtained only at disproportionate cost by examination of individual case records.

Correspondence

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he will reply to the hon. Member for Woking's letters of 18 September, 24 October and 14 November concerning a constituent, Mr. Raja Munir, and his application for indefinite leave to remain in the UK; [85031]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 3 December, concerning Mr. Raja Munir, Ref 85031, by what date he expects to reply to the hon. Member for Woking's letters. [86892]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* My noble Friend Lord Filkin wrote to the hon. Member on 16 December 2002. I apologise for the considerable delay in replying.

Mr. Lloyd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when his Department intends to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Manchester Central of *(a)* 3 May, regarding Mr.LB, reference PO10343/2, *(b)* 18 June, regarding Mrs.LE, reference PO12404/2, *(c)* 19 June, regarding Ms MB, reference PO12510/2, *(d)* 25 June, regarding Ms MG, reference PO13216/2, *(e)* 26 June, regarding Ms SR, reference PO13449/2, *(f)* 10 July, regarding Mrs.TK, reference PO14227/2, *(g)* 11 July, regarding Ms CL, reference PO14427/2, *(h)* 6 August, regarding Ms MM, reference PO16718/2, *(i)* 16 August, regarding Mr.AD, reference PO17226/2, *(j)* 12 September, regarding Mr.AHA, reference PO18834/2, *(k)* 17 September, regarding Mr.MAM, reference PO19319/2 and *(l)* 18 September, regarding Mrs.DAH, reference PO19223/2. [85240]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:*

(a) PO 10343/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(b) PO 12404/2: I apologise for the considerable delay in replying to this letter. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety wrote to my hon. Friend on 4 December 2002.

(c) PO 12510/2: I will write to my hon. Friend shortly. I am sorry for the delay in replying.

(d) PO 13216/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(e) PO 13449/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(f) PO 14227/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(g) PO 14427/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(h) PO 16718/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 3 December 2002.

(i) PO 17226/2: My noble Friend Lord Filkin wrote to my hon. Friend on 27 December 2002.

(j) PO 18834/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

(k) PO 19319/2: I wrote to my hon. Friend on 8 October 2002.

(l) PO 19223/2: I shall write to my hon. Friend shortly. The Entry Clearance Officer in Jeddah was authorised by the Immigration and Nationality Directorate on 25 October to issue a visa in this case.

Mrs. Roe: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the hon. Member for Broxbourne will receive a reply to her letters of 14 August, 11 September, 7 November and 5 December relating to her constituent, Mr. Mohamed Mady. [87006]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I wrote to the hon. Member on 17 December 2002.

Criminal Records Bureau

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the mean delay for checks on volunteers was under the old system of police checks in the last 12 months of its operation; and what the mean delay for such checks has been in relation to volunteers under the new arrangements instituted by the Criminal Records Bureau in the last 12 months. [83900]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* Information is not available in the form requested. Under the previous arrangements some volunteers were subject to police checks via local authorities and other organisations but separate statistics were not collected. A number of voluntary organisations accessed police checks through a body called the Voluntary Organisations Consultancy Service (VOCS), covering both volunteers and paid employees. Their last annual report covering the financial year 2001–2002 showed that they processed 13,535 police checks for voluntary organisations of which 6,595 were for paid employees and 6,940 were for volunteers. The average time for responses from the police was 30 days. VOCS' own handling time was additional.

As to the current arrangements, no distinction is made in relation to the profession or status of an applicant. As a result, the IT system is not able at present to extract this data from the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) database (although it is expected to be able to do so in future when the system is updated). They are all subject to the same level of service. However, access to checks by the voluntary sector has been greatly increased with the advent of the CRB and many more volunteers are now subject to such checks.

The average turnaround time for processing applications remains at about six weeks.

This is measured from the point at which a correctly completed application form is received by the CRB, accompanied by all pertinent supporting details, to issuing a Disclosure.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much compensation has been paid by Capita to the Government under the terms of the contract relating to the Criminal Records Bureaux. [86720]

Hilary Benn: There is provision under the terms of the contract between Capita and the Home Office for penalties for delay or poor performance. Capita has incurred liquidated damages for delay although the details remain commercial in confidence and cannot be divulged. The main priority is for the Criminal Records Bureau and Capita to collaborate in order to achieve further improvement in the quality of service.

Drug Addicts

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provision is in place to support drug addicts on their release from prison; what information is passed to drug treatment agencies when a drug addict is released into their home community; and if drug addicts are tracked on release from prison to facilitate treatment. [87835]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* All prisons have a Counselling, Assessment, Referral, Advice and Throughcare service (CARAT), which seeks to put in place care plans for prisoners, which should identify need for throughcare on release. Prisoners serving sentences of 12 months or less can receive support from CARATs. Prior to release, CARATs will warn of the dangers associated with loss of tolerance in prison and will try to establish a link with a community drug service. When this is not achieved, CARATs will provide a degree of support, where practical, for up to eight weeks after release.

Prisoners serving sentences in excess of 12 months are routinely subject to supervision by the National Probation Service. CARAT workers will advise a supervising probation officer of any continuing, post-release drug treatment needs and will request the establishment of a link with a community drug agency. A prisoner's progress will be monitored until the expiry of the supervision period.

As outlined in the Government's updated Drug Strategy 2002, published on 3 December 2002, the Home Office, alongside the National Treatment Agency, the National Probation Directorate and the Prison Service is working to improve the availability and quality of community support for ex-prisoners with drug problems and to ensure that an effective infrastructure is in place to bridge the gap between prison and community.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment has been made of the number of drug addicts in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* England in each year since 1997. [87841]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Estimating numbers of drug addicts is very difficult and figures are not available for Hampshire or England for the years requested. The latest estimates for the number of Class A problem drug users in England and Wales range from 281,125 to 506,025. The first of these figures is closest to previously reported estimates. These figures come from a Home Office study entitled: "The Economic and Social Costs of Class A drug use in England and Wales, 2000". Copies of this publication will be placed in the Library.

Local figures are only available for those people with drug problems who have recently started drugs treatment. The most recent figures cover from 1 October 2000 to 31 March 2001. These show that for Portsmouth and South East Hampshire, Southampton and South West Hampshire health authorities a total of 501 people had entered treatment. Data are not available for the years requested.

Female Convictions

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many women have been convicted for *(a)* violent and *(b)* non-violent offences in each of the last five years. [86641]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is given in the table.

Women convicted of violent and other offences in England and Wales 1997 to 2001

	Violent offences[1]	*Other offences*
1997	3,829	213,308
1998	4,234	231,344
1999	4,073	215,907
2000	4,214	251,804
2001	4,111	233,511

[1] Violence against the person, sexual offences and robbery

Long Lartin (Tree Preservation Orders)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what powers his Department has to ignore tree preservation orders imposed by Wychavon district council on trees on land adjacent to Long Lartin prison; and if he will make a statement. [86917]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* With the exception of one tree which is in a dangerous condition, the Prison Service has no plans to remove trees on land adjacent to Her Majesty's Prison Long Lartin for which planning applications have recently been submitted.

Paul Burrell/Harold Brown

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost was of the police investigations relating to *(a)* Paul Burrell and *(b)* Harold Brown; and if he will make a statement. [86186]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has informed me that the cost of the police investigations relating to both *(a)* Paul Burrell and *(b)* Harold Brown was, in total, approximately £310,000,00. It is not possible to distinguish separately the costs for each investigation.

Prisoner Age (Wymott and Garth Prisons)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many inmates are held in *(a)* Garth and *(b)* Wymott Prisons; and how many are over the age of (i) 65, (ii) 70, (iii) 75 and (iv) 80. [87027]

Hilary Benn: On 31 October 2002 (the latest data available) there were 652 persons held in Garth prison. Of these five were over the age of 65, one was over the age of 70, and there were none over the age of 75.

On the same date there were 821 persons held in Wymott prison. Of these 28 were over the age of 65, nine were over the age of 70, three were over the age of 75 and one was over 80 years old.

Prisons

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to reduce the number of suicides in prison. [87475]

Hilary Benn: The general prison population contains a large number of prisoners with a combination of psychiatric disorders, alcohol and drug dependency, family background and relationship problems, histories of self-harm and previous abuse, all of which raise their risk of suicide. Good care and support from staff saves many lives but such instances go largely unreported. The current operating environment is very challenging because an increased prisoner population and movement of prisoners puts a strain on resources and makes it harder to prevent suicides. The Prison Service's approach, in close partnership with outside organisations such as Samaritans, better identify and support those who seem at greatest risk with an approach that focuses on relationships, processes and the physical environment.

The Prison Service's suicide prevention and self-harm reduction programme includes a series of inter-related projects to improve pre-reception, reception and induction arrangements; inter-agency information exchange; prisoner care; detoxification; prisoner peer support, and the learning from investigations into deaths in custody.

Piloting of these projects is focused on six establishments—Wandsworth, Feltham, Eastwood Park, Leeds, Winchester and Birmingham—although others are involved in aspects of the work. An investment of £21.69 million over the three year programme from April 2001 is allowing physical improvements to be made at these six sites, for example to reception and induction areas, and through the installation of more first night centres, safer cells, crisis suites and gated cells that enable staff to watch at-risk prisoners closely. The programme will be subject to an independent quantitative and qualitative evaluation. No resources have at present been allocated to work beyond April 2004.

Thirty full-time suicide prevention co-ordinators (SPCs) were trained and located in the most high risk establishments, and a further 99 mostly part-time SPCs are now operating across the estate. There has been a continuing increase in the numbers of prisoner "Listeners" being recruited in high-risk establishments, with 608 new Listeners recruited within these establishments between 1 October 2001 and 31 March 2002 alone, and further recruitment and training taking place.

Concurrently, new health care screening procedures have been piloted at 10 establishments and are to be rolled out across the estate. Wing staff will be increasingly supported in their work by in-reach mental health teams and by the establishment where possible of dedicated drug detoxification units.

Mr. Shepherd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department in the period from 28 September 2001 to 27 September 2002, how many inmates of *(a)* HMP North Sea Camp, *(b)* HMP Leyhill, *(c)* HMP Stanford Hill and *(d)* HMP Kirkham were transferred to closed conditions for breach of the conditions of their community visit or facilities licences; how many of those inmates were subsequently charged with an offence against discipline under Prison Rule 51 Paragraph 8 in connection with the breach and what the licence conditions were that were breached in each case; how many inmates were not charged with an offence under Prison Rule 51 Paragraph 8, but were nevertheless transferred because they were deemed to have behaved inappropriately while on temporary release; what the nature of the inappropriate behaviour was in each case; what conditions of his community visit or facility licence Lord Archer was held to have breached that resulted in his transfer from HMP North Sea Camp to HMP Lincoln on 27 September; and whether he was charged with an offence against discipline in respect of those breaches. [87646]

Hilary Benn: The information requested is not held centrally and I shall write to the hon. Member when it is available.

Punishment Orders

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many times *(a)* reparation orders, *(b)* final warnings, *(c)* action plan orders, *(d)* preventing orders and *(e)* court ordered secure remands have been issued in each month since their introduction. [86177]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The number of reparation orders, final warnings, action plan orders, parenting orders and court ordered secure remands are set out in the tables. The Youth Justice Board has provided the data from April 2000 onwards from returns provided by Youth Offending Teams.

As there is no intervention called a preventing order, we have assumed that the information requested is for parenting orders.

Reparation orders, final warnings, action plan orders and parenting orders made between October 1998 and 30 September 2002[1]

	October 1998–March 2000[2]	*April–June 2000*[3]	*July–September 2000*	*October–December 2000*	*January–March 2001*	*April–June 2001*
Reparation order	1,270	605	1,800	1,802	2,077	2,196
Final warnings	3,504	4,434	7,274	7,332	7,095	7,657
Action plan order	841	619	2,027	2,236	2,497	2,388
Parenting order	284	144	302	278	255	278
Total	5,899	5,802	11,403	11,648	11,924	12,519

	July–September 2001	October–December 2001	January–March 2002	April–June 2002	July–September 2002	Total
Reparation order	1,947	1,988	2,493	1,367	823	18,368
Final warnings	6,994	6,660	6,950	7,040	5,708	70,648
Action plan order	2,214	2,191	2,682	1,596	1,153	20,444
Parenting order	263	270	406	239	402	3,121
Total	11,418	11,109	12,531	10,242	8,086	112,581

[1] Data for reparation orders, final warnings, action plan orders and parenting orders include the period of the youth justice pilots, from October 1998 to March 2000, as well as national operation from then until the third quarter of 2002.
[2] Data for youth justice pilots only available as totals. The police final warning scheme, parenting orders, reparation order, and action plan order were piloted in selected areas across England and Wales between October 1998 and March 2000.
[3] Data for national operation since the youth justice pilots ended has been collected by the Youth Justice Board (YJB) based on returns from Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). These data are only available on a quarterly basis and the figures are provisional as they as based on YOT returns.

Court ordered secure remands made between 1 June 1999–30 November 2002[1]

	Number
June 1999	73
July 1999	79
August 1999	94
September 1999	111
October 1999	131
November 1999	139
December 1999	103
January 2000	110
February 2000	140
March 2000	131
April 2000	[2]78
May 2000	52
June 2000	70
July 2000	58
August 2000	60
September 2000	45
October 2000	64
November 2000	44
December 2000	46
January 2001	71
February 2001	53
March 2001	51
April 2001	69
May 2001	71
June 2001	65
July 2001	102
August 2001	103
September 2001	94
October 2001	143
November 2001	142
December 2001	88
January 2002	136
February 2002	139
March 2002	151
April 2002	168
May 2002	201
June 2002	143
July 2002	194
August 2002	181
September 2002	205
October 2002	186
November 2002	181
Total	4,565

[1] Data for court ordered secure remands based on monthly returns collected by the Home Office between 1 June 1999 to April 2000. From April 2000, the YJB assumed responsibility for commissioning and purchasing secure remand places and they have provided the data from May 2000 to November 2002.
[2] Due to the transfer of secure remand responsibilities to the YJB from the Home Office during April 2000 only partial data are available for this month based on 60 per cent. of returns received from Local Authority Secure Units.

Secure Units

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many places in *(a)* local authority secure units, *(b)* young offender institutions and *(c)* secure training centres are planned in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04, and (iii) 2004–05. [85199]

Hilary Benn: The Youth Justice Board is responsible for purchasing an appropriate number of juvenile secure places from the providers. The number of places available in 2002–03 on 1 December 2002 and planned for 2003–04, subject to final decisions on allocation of funds following the Spending Review 2002 Settlement, are as follows.

	2002–03	2003–04
Local Authority Secure Units	330	330
Young Offender Institutions	3,066	3,066
Secure Training Centres	170	194

Discussions are continuing between the Department and the Youth Justice Board about the provision of places in 2004–05.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development to which bodies her Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87393]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given on 16 December 2002, by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on behalf of the Cabinet Office.

Burundi

Mr. Joyce: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what funding commitment was made by the United Kingdom at the November Geneva Round Table Donors' Meeting on Burundi; and what conditions were placed on the fulfilment of this commitment; [87145]

(2) what funding commitment was made by the United Kingdom to Burundi at the Geneva Round Table Donors' Meeting of December 2001; what conditions were placed on the fulfilment of this commitment; and what proportion of this funding has been paid to date; [87147]

(3) what funding commitment was made by the United Kingdom to Burundi at the Paris Donors Club Meeting of December 2000; what conditions were placed on the fulfilment of this commitment; and what proportion of this funding has been paid to date. [87146]

Clare Short: At the Paris Donors Roundtable Meeting in December 2000 we stated that although the UK would not become a substantial bilateral donor to Burundi we would play our part in support of others, particularly the multilateral agencies. We stated that we would continue our existing bilateral assistance (mainly humanitarian assistance, work with the media, HIV/AIDS prevention, and peace building). We said we would look favourably on making a contribution to the World Bank Multilateral Debt Trust Fund (MDTF). At the Geneva Round Table Meeting in December 2001 we pledged US$1 million to the MDTF. These funds were transferred earlier this year.

At the recent Donors Round Table Meeting in Geneva, held on 27–28 November 2002, we agreed to consider an additional contribution of US$1 million to the MDTF.

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many civil servants are employed by her Department; and how much money was spent by her Department in the last 12 months in each local authority area. [87262]

Clare Short: On the number of civil servants, I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer provided by my hon. Friend for the Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002.

The question on local authority areas is not relevant to DFID as our work is focused overseas in developing countries.

Kashmir

Mr. Goodman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what projects *(a)* funded and *(b)* supported by her Department have been engaged in providing assistance to the people of Kashmir during the past five years. [87455]

Clare Short: Over the past five years, my Department has given over £1.5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) to support their programmes in Jammu and Kashmir (J and K). We have given a number of grants to Save the Children Fund (SCF) to support their work, including £150,000 to provide food and non-food relief to conflict afflicted families, and £47,000 to help fund their continuing work with children and internally displaced people living in camps and temporary accommodation. We have also helped fund a wide range of mostly small-scale NGO development projects in Kashmir, and through the Small Grants Scheme we have provided support for a maternity hospital in Anantnag.

In Pakistan-administered Kashmir, we have funded a community education project in the Muzaffarabad district, and a basic health care project in the Neelum valley.

During my recent visit to Delhi, I raised with the Government of India the prospect of DFID providing further support for development and conflict reduction in J and K. My officials are now taking this forward.

Mauritania

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department has given to deal with the food shortage in Mauritania. [87093]

Clare Short *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* We have provided US$158,563 to World Food Programme (WFP) in 2002 for food assistance to Mauritania. A further emergency appeal from the WFP is expected shortly. This is expected to cover food shortage needs of five countries in the region, including Mauritania. We will be considering this appeal and are also considering a related proposal from Oxfam. Funding is also provided via the EC, of which DFID share around 19 per cent. In 2000 (the latest figures available) this amounted to approximately £7.8 million.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by her or her predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in her Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87352]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries have notified the chairman of the NEPAD heads of state and Goverment Implementation Committee that they wish to participate in the African Peer Review Mechanism. [87214]

Clare Short: Algeria, Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Ghana, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa and Uganda have signed the Declaration of Intent to accede to the African Peer Review Mechanism.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Pensioners (Portsmouth, South)

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners within the Portsmouth, South constituency will benefit from the introduction of the pension tax credit in October 2003; and if he will make a statement. [85870]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of pension credit entitlement are not available at constituency level due to the insufficient sample cases in the survey data used. However, just under half of all pensioner households across Great Britain will be eligible for Pension Credit. Such information as is available relates to pensioners in the Portsmouth, South constituency receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and is as follows:

As at August 2002, there were 3,200 MIG recipients in the Portsmouth, South constituency.

Benefit Payments

David Wright: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the process a customer will go through to ensure benefits are paid into *(a)* a new Post Office card account and *(b)* a bank account, when their DWP benefit book ends. [84290]

Mr. McCartney: The Department is contacting customers and providing them with information (including letters and leaflets) which clearly sets out the account options as part of the move to Direct Payment. Customers will then be able to consider the options available and choose the account that best meets their needs and circumstances. They will be asked to provide details of their chosen account so that the Department can begin to pay their benefit or pensions by Direct Payment.

Those who wish to use an existing account will simply need to provide their account details. DWP will issue a Personal Invitation Document (PID) to customers who choose to open a Post Office card account. This document is taken to a Post Office branch where the customer will be given a Post Office card account application form.

Benefits

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, what steps he is taking to find the lost papers sent to his Department last July concerning the claim of Mrs Noreen Hooper of Brixham; and if he will make a statement. [81965]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* This is a matter for Alexis Cleveland, the Chief Executive of The Pension Service. As customers' personal details are confidential she will write to the hon. Member privately.

Child Support Agency

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost of processing a CSA application has been in each year since its creation; and if he will make a statement on the results of the operational readiness review conducted in September and October into the modernisation of payments programme. [83711]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug. Smith to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated December 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask what the average cost of processing a CSA application has been in each year since its creation and also, if the Secretary of State will make a statement on the results of the operational readiness review conducted in September and October into the modernisation of payments programme.

We do not have the average cost of processing a Child Support Agency application prior to 1999–2000. However, I have attached the details from that date to the present.

£

At 31 March	*Average cost per case*
2000	77.65
2001	97.44
2002	84.48
2002 (to October)	90.28

The cost per case has been calculated on the basis of the average number of staff employed on processing cases to assessment and the number of cases cleared in each of the years stated. The cost per case fluctuates due to corresponding changes in the quantity of cases cleared; the number of cases cleared changes in accordance with the Agency's operational priorities.

The Payment Modernisation Programme has advised that the gated review process within the Department allows for a number of formal reviews. The Payment Modernisation Programme successfully navigated through the Operational Readiness Review gate during September and October. This enabled the Programme to commence the first phase in the move towards Direct Payment, including mailings sent to Veterans Agency customers from 7 October and Child Benefit customers from 28 October 2002.

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what external audit he has commissioned of the Child Support Agency's new IT system. [85859]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Doug Smith. He will write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from D. Smith to Mr. Mark Todd, dated December 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask what external audit he has commissioned of the Child Support Agency's new IT system.

The new IT system is being built and will be operated, by EDS, a major IT service provider in the private sector. A number of reviews have been carried out over the life of the project designed to assure the Agency that the IT system will meet its requirements. These fall into three main areas:

The Department's own Internal Assurance Service have carried out a number of audits on specific parts of the system.

A technical review, focussed on the approach to development and testing, was carried out by an external organisation, in early 2001. The Department's own Technology Office have also continued to validate the on-going development following that initial technical review. In addition, there have also been a

number of reviews of the wider programme, including the approach to developing the IT system carried out by external consultants.

The Office for Government Commerce has carried out two project 'gateway' reviews. The first, in April 2001, concentrated on the development phase of the project and the second, in February 2002, on the-readiness for implementation, including the IT system. Each of these reviews highlighted the risk inherent in building and implementing a large complex IT system; but have confirmed that the Agency's risk management processes are effective.

National Audit Office have been kept informed of the: development of the Agency's new IT system and have regular briefing sessions to keep them updated on the key issues at the various stages of development: Their staff receive copies of the high level strategies, other low level documents for information and copies of-the end of stage reviews and internal audit reports that have been carried out on specific areas of the Child Support Reform Programme that are delivering the reforms. Later this year they intend to produce a position statement building on the comments they made last year in the Comptroller and Auditor General's report.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the CSA's complaints system and *(b)* the Independent Case Examiner's Annual Report 2001–02. [86534]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Doug Smith to Archy Kirkwood dated 18 December 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying the your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on *(a)* the CSA's complaints system and *(b)* the Independent Case Examiner's Annual Report 2001–02.

The Agency recognises that it needs to improve the handling of complaints and as a result conducted a detailed review of the complaints process. The recommendations from this review are being taken forward as part of the Child Support Reform programme. The key deliverable from this work is a standard process and organisation for handling client complaints. This will include:

Dedicated complaints resolution teams.

Clients, staff and stakeholders knowing how a complaint will be progressed whatever the client's location.

Complaint resolution plans agreed with the client, which specify the actions and timescales to resolve the complaint.

Senior Resolution Managers heading up a technical assurance team in each Business Unit. These teams deal with cases that cannot be resolved by the complaints resolution teams or have been referred to them by the Chief Executive or Area Director.

Accepting, recording, tracking and resolving complaints over the telephone A new aftercare process to ensure that once a case is back on track, it remains so.

A Centre of Excellence, to analyse and learn from complaints data.

In 2001/02 the Child Support Agency has worked hard with the Independent Case Examiner to reduce the backlog of outstanding complaints. Advice on how the Agency might best improve the way it handles complaints has proved invaluable.

Using this information the Agency has made some significant steps forward in improving its service to our clients including:

Restructuring the front end of its business to provide an end-to-end service for new clients, and on each team have a dedicated specialist complaints handler Creating new IT support for debt management, appointed new bailiffs improve efficiency and reduce the complaints about lack of activity in this area

These improvements are a part of the comprehensive modernisation programme in which the Agency is engaged and against that background we will continue to work closely with the Independent Case Examiner to significantly reduce the number of complaints referred to her office where she finds that the Agency has not done enough either to apologise, to offer compensation and redress or to resolve the position for the future.

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average cost was of processing a Child Support Agency application in each year since the CSA was created. [86703]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the chief executive, Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from D. Smith to Mr. Archy Kirkwood, dated December 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from me.

You ask what the average cost was of processing a Child Support Agency application in each year since the Child Support Agency was created.

I refer you to my previous answer to parliamentary question (ref no. 83711) which states:

'We do not have the average cost of processing a Child Support Agency application prior to 1999/00 however, I have attached the details from that date to the present.

At 31st March	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*2002 (to Oct)*
Average cost per case (£)	77.65	97.44	84.48	90.28

The cost per case has been calculated on the basis of the average number of staff employed on processing cases to assessment and the number of cases cleared in each of the years stated'.

CSA

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what percentage of CSA cases where the resident parent is *(a)* a private client and *(b)* not a private client, (i) the non-resident parent paying regular child maintenance and (ii) the identity and contact details of the non-resident parent are known to the agency. [81955]

Malcolm Wicks: The administration of the Child Support Agency is a matter for the Chief Executive, Mr. Doug Smith. He will write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Mr. Doug Smith to Mr. Andrew Turner, dated November 2002:

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in replying to your recent parliamentary questions about the Child Support Agency promised a substantive reply from the Chief Executive.

You ask in what percentage of Child Support Agency cases where the resident parent is *(a)* a private client and *(b)* not a private client (i) the non-resident parent paying regular child maintenance and (ii) the identity-and contact details of the non-resident parent are known to the Agency.

84% of private clients and 74.8% of non private clients are, where amounts are due to be paid, in receipt of child maintenance payments. Unfortunately, we do not collect details of the number of non-resident parents where we have contact details.

Disability Living Allowance

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether a claim for Disability Living Allowance in respect of ME may be classified as relating to mental illness. [87128]

Maria Eagle: Entitlement to Disability Living Allowance depends on the effects that severe physical or mental disability has on a person's need for personal care and/or their ability to walk, and not on particular disabilities or diagnoses. The benefit is available to people with myalgic encephalomyelitis (which can have a physical basis or a psychological basis, or can be due to a combination of factors) on exactly the same terms as other severely disabled people, and they can qualify for it provided that they meet the usual entitlement conditions.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his estimate is of the cost of extending entitlement to the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to the over-65s. [87750]

Maria Eagle: Up to date estimates are not available. However, information from the 1996–97 Disability Survey suggested that the annual cost of extending entitlement to the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance to people who claim after the age of 65 would be in the region of £2.7 billion[1].

[1] Costs is rounded to nearest 100 million and subject to a significant margin of error reflecting underlying uncertainties of modelling entitlement from available survey data. Cost includes effects on income related benefits.

Disabled People (Opportunities)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what measures are in place to *(a)* encourage employers to increase the opportunities offered to disabled people and *(b)* challenge people to donate time to charitable and community projects in the European Year of Disabled People. [86867]

Maria Eagle: Jobcentre Plus will continue to operate a number of measures involving employers during the European Year of Disabled People. Programmes such as WORKSTEP, Access to Work, the Job Introduction Scheme, and Work Preparation will identify job opportunities and help disabled people into work.

We have launched a project fund of £2.3 million to enable a wide range of disability organisations to undertake community projects across the country. We are sponsoring more than 170 projects.

In addition we are using the National Coordinating Committee (NCC) for the European Year to encourage participation among its membership organisations. These include the Federation of Small Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry, the Trades Union Congress, and a range of organisations representing disabled people.

Employers Liability Insurance

Ms Walley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many inspections have been undertaken in North Staffordshire to measure compliance with the requirement for companies to have current employers liability insurance. [84048]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) are not able to break down information specifically for North Staffordshire. Information available covers the Marches area, which comprises Shropshire and Staffordshire.

During the period 1 April 2002 to 30 September 2002 HSE recorded a total of 117 contacts with companies where Employers' Liability Compulsory Insurance (ELCI) was covered in the Marches area. These contacts were achieved by a combination of visits and phone calls.

The display of a valid certificate for employers liability insurance is one of a number of issues covered by HSE Inspectors and Workplace Contact Officers. There were four occasions in the Marches area during the period April to September 2002, where a valid certificate of employer's liability could not be produced. In each case HSE made a statutory request ('Notice to Produce') for its production. All four companies complied with the request within the stated period.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what timetable has been established for the review of employers' liability insurance. [87481]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I refer the hon. Member to the Written Ministerial Statement I gave on 12 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 23–24WS.

Hand-written Medical Reports

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many hand-written medical reports in relation to *(a)* Attendance Allowance, *(b)* Disability Living Allowance and *(c)* Incapacity Benefit were prepared by doctors employed by Medical Services or its predecessors, in the five years to October 2001; how many of these reports were completed by a person other than the relevant doctor; how many completed by someone other than the relevant doctor were the subject of disability appeal tribunal hearings; in how many of the cases, which were the subject of appeal, the original decision was altered on the basis of medical evidence; and how many claimants sought and received copies of the hand-written medical reports. [86118]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In the period 1 September 1998 to 31 October 2001 790,023 Attendance Allowance and Disability Living Allowance reports and 1,450,554 Incapacity Benefit reports were completed. No records are kept of the number of reports completed before the contract for Medical Service was let in September 1998.

All reports were provided by approved doctors and were hand written. In July 2001 Medical Services were made aware of two reports which had been completed by another person, from contemporaneous notes made by the approved doctor, in the interests of better legibility. As a result, guidance was issued to all doctors that no report for Medical Services can be hand written by any person other than the relevant doctor.

As the Department does not keep records of the information used by a decision maker in individual cases it is not possible to identify the number of appeals related to reports completed by someone other than the

relevant doctor. Neither is it possible to identify cases where the original decision was altered on the basis of medical evidence.

The Department does not keep records of requests made for copies of medical reports.

Housing Benefit

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether his officials have met the Social Security Advisory Committee to discuss the regulations concerning housing benefit reform; and whether the Committee has requested the referral of the regulations. [83870]

Malcolm Wicks: We are fully committed to involving the Social Security Advisory Committee in the drafting of new regulations supporting Housing Benefit reform.

Officials have met the Committee to provide an initial introduction to Housing Benefit reform, and draft regulations will be presented to the Committee early in the new year. The Committee will then decide whether they wish the regulations to be referred formally.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have had income from a private pension or permanent health insurance taken into account for the purposes of calculating their incapacity benefit claiming and what the average reduction in benefit has been for people affected in this way. [86717]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Incapacity Benefit (IB) exists to provide a measure of earnings replacement for people of working age who are incapable of work. Where a person is duplicating this provision, the law provides for this to be taken into account. If a person claiming IB receives an occupational pension, personal pension or payments through a permanent health insurance scheme of £85 per week or more, their IB is reduced by half the amount which exceeds £85. Only people making claims from 6 April 2001 are affected by the new rules.

As of 31 August 2002, 17,500 people have had their IB reduced under these rules with an average reduction of £33.18.

Notes:

1. Number of people who have had their benefit reduced is rounded to the nearest hundred.

2. Figures are subject to a degree of sampling variation.

Source:

5 per cent. samples of the Incapacity Benefit computer system, which exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in which postcode areas Jobcentre Plus regulations are in force and in which particularly mandatory interviews for claimants in receipt of benefits other than Jobseekers Allowance apply. [86716]

Malcolm Wicks: Mandatory work-focused meetings were introduced from October 2001 in 56 Jobcentre Plus pathfinder offices and 39 work-focused interview sites. The postcode areas covered by these offices and sites are listed in a schedule to the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2001 (SI 3210).

These regulations were revoked in June 2002 and have been superseded by the Social Security (Jobcentre Plus Interviews) Regulations 2002 (S11703). These regulations do not include a schedule of postcodes, but allow for the gradual rollout of the new Jobcentre Plus service. The offices that have been rolled out under these regulations, and the postcodes that they cover, are in the table.

Office	*Postcodes covered*
Bridgnorth	DY7 5DR, DY7 5DS, DY7 5ER, DY7 5EU, DY7 5LF, DY7 5LJ, DY12 1SU, ST19 9AP, TF11 8, TF11 9, TF12 5, TF13 6, WR15 8, WV5 7, WV6 7, WV7 3, WV8 1, WV15 5, WV15 6, WV16 4, WV16 5, WV16 6
Cheetham	M7 4DU, M7 4YG, M7 4YB, M7 4YT, M7 4YE, M7 4YH, M7 8YS, M7 4QA, M8, M9
Fraserburgh	AB 43
Kirkby St. Chads	L9 0, L9 5, L9 8, L10 0, L10 1, L10 4, L10 6, L10 8, L32, L33
Nelson	BB9
Plympton	PL7, PL21
Spen Valley	WF13, WF14, WF15, WF16, BD4, BD11, BD12, BD1 9

Note:
Where a full postcode is not given the office covers the whole of the postal area shown

Pension Schemes

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensions scheme wind-ups have there been in each of the past five years when the company has been *(a)* solvent and *(b)* insolvent; and how many members have been affected in each case. [86550]

Mr. McCartney: The information that is available is in the tables.

There are different reasons why pension schemes are wound up. The schemes' sponsoring employer might, for example, become insolvent or the employer might decide to wind up one type of pension scheme in order to replace it with another type.

	Number of schemes notifying the Pensions Schemes Registry (PSR) they are commencing wind up	*Number of members in schemes notifying PSR they are commencing wind up*	*Number of schemes notifying PSR they are commencing wind up and are still in the process*	*Number of members in schemes notifying PSR they are commencing wind up and still in the process*
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	7,334	321,254	84	10,271
1 April 1998–31 March 1999	6,530	322,699	113	2,309
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	6,003	321,991	4,287	101,236
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	5,304	316,205	1,903	74,403
1 April 2001–31 March 2002	4,651	301,646	2,206	73,038

Year	Number of schemes that completed winding up	Number of members in schemes that completed winding up
1 April 1997–31 March 1998	23,953	1,139,303
1 April 1998–31 March 1999	17,196	899,679
1 April 1999–31 March 2000	12,045	786,367
1 April 2000–31 March 2001	7,446	427,509
1 April 2001- 31 March 2002	3,315	196,841

Notes:

1. The information is based on data held by the Pension Schemes Registry (PSR). It includes all types of pension schemes. The PSR registers schemes for tracing purposes and to enable it to collect the levy from all those pension schemes required to pay it. The PSR was not designed to provide comprehensive statistical data on schemes winding up. However, the information held by the PSR is the most relevant material available.
2. The PSR does not hold information about whether the sponsoring company of the pension scheme was solvent or insolvent, this information is not required for their purposes.
3. There are no figures available for the period 1 April 2002 to date, due to a change in the Pension Registry's computer system. These figures will be available after March 2003.

Pensioner Income

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the Government remains committed to the commitment on page 103 of the 1998 Green Paper, Cm 4179, on increasing the proportion of pensioners' incomes that comes from the private sector. [86737]

Mr. McCartney: I refer the hon. Member to the oral statement made by my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, *Official Report*, 17 December 2002, columns 694—710.

Pensions

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people he estimates will claim state pension in each of the next five years. [87520]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested. However, such information as is available is set out in the table.

Number of men and women reaching state pension age between 2003 and 2007

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Men aged 65	275,000	274,000	271 ,000	258,000	274,000
Women aged 60	332,000	343,000	349,000	355,000	435,000

Note:

Figures are mid-year estimates of men aged 65 and women aged 60 in the UK, rounded to the nearest 1,000.

Source:

The Government Actuary's Department 2001 based Population Projections.

Pension Credit

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners within the Harwich Constituency will benefit from the introduction of the pension tax credit in October 2003. [85252]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates of pension credit entitlement are not available at individual constituency level due to the insufficient sample cases in the survey data used. However, just under half of all pensioner households across Great Britain will be eligible to Pension Credit. Such information as is available relates to pensioners in the Harwich constituency receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and is as follows:

As at August 2002, there were 4,200 MIG recipients in the Harwich constituency.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in the Eastern region will benefit from the pensions tax credit. [85280]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Estimates of pension credit entitlement are not available on a regional basis due to the insufficient sample cases in the survey data used. However, just under half of all pensioner households across Great Britain will be eligible for Pension Credit. Such information as is available relates to pensioners in the eastern region receiving the Minimum Income Guarantee (MIG) and is as follows:

As at August 2002, there were 133,700 MIG recipients in the Eastern region.

Skills Training Pilots

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how the skills training pilots in North Nottinghamshire and Leeds are being evaluated; how many participants there were; how many sanctions were imposed; and if he will make a statement; [86701]

(2) what plans he has to introduce the skills training pilot throughout the United Kingdom. [86702]

Malcolm Wicks: Between September 2001 and April 2002 we piloted a number of approaches aimed at encouraging greater take up of basic skills provision by people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance. These included testing different mechanisms to identify those with basic skills needs, and the use of financial incentives and/or benefit sanctions to encourage the take up of training.

In North Nottinghamshire we piloted the use of benefit sanctions if a client refused an offer of training or left training early without good cause. In Leeds we combined the use of sanctions with financial incentives of £20 per week on top of their benefit for taking up training and £100 for achieving a basic skills qualification. In the two pilots, 1,623 clients had a possible basic skills need identified. Of these, 18 had sanctions applied, three because they failed to attend a basic skills assessment and 15 because they failed to attend training or left early without good cause.

All the basic skills pilots are subject to an extensive, longitudinal evaluation study. This is looking at both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the pilots. The final evaluation report will be available in summer 2003. We will use the evidence from the evaluation to decide what changes we might make to help encourage more Jobcentre Plus clients to take up offers of help to improve their basic skills.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Legal Aid

Lady Hermon: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if Mr. Liam Campbell and Mr. Michael McKevitt have been awarded legal aid in respect of civil charges due to be brought against them relating to the bomb attack in Omagh on 15 August 1998. [87059]

Ms Rosie Winterton: It would be inappropriate to comment on individual legal aid applications. The grant or refusal of civil legal aid is a matter for the Law Society of Northern Ireland, through its Legal Aid Committee.

CAFCASS

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what consultations she has had with CAFCASS regarding *(a)* the ratification of its new standards and *(b)* the complaints procedure it may put in place. [87316]

Ms Rosie Winterton: CAFCASS is a non-departmental public body and there is no requirement for my Department to ratify their national standards. CAFCASS's corporate plan for 2002–06, agreed with Ministers and published in February 2002, set out CAFCASS's commitment to develop national standards and a new complaints procedure for the service. CAFCASS consulted widely on their proposed national standards and complaints procedure. CAFCASS intend to implement both next year.

Parental Responsibility

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the Government's policy is on the EU proposal for a Council Regulation on Mutual Recognition of Decisions on Parental Responsibility; if he will place a copy of the current text of the Proposal in the Library; and whether the current text will be detrimental to the effective operation of the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction between EU member states. [87246]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government support the underlying aim of this proposal, namely to extend the principle of mutual recognition to all decisions on parental responsibility by establishing a clear and coherent set of rules for attributing jurisdiction, and putting in place arrangements for co-operation between the courts and central authorities of member states. Agreement was reached at a Council of Ministers meeting on 29 November, on revised provisions relating to child abduction. The Government support strongly these additional measures which will, for intra-EU cases, augment the 1980 Hague Convention without affecting its operation, and have met with approval in the Permanent Bureau of the Hague Conference. A copy of this agreement has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Transsexual People

Mr. Todd: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects full legal status to be granted to transsexual people; and if she will make a statement. [87784]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government is committed to legislating as soon as possible to give legal recognition to transsexual people in their acquired gender. I refer the hon. Member to the Ministerial Statement I gave on Monday 16 December 2002.

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) when she expects to respond to the European Court of Justice ruling that discrimination against transsexuals is in breach of the Equal Treatment Directive; [87280]

(2) what plans she has for ending discrimination against transsexuals. [87276]

Ms Rosie Winterton: I refer the hon. Member to the Ministerial Statement I made on Monday 16 December. This sets out our plans for giving transsexual people legal recognition in their acquired gender. Transsexual people are already protected from discrimination in employment and vocational training by the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999, subject to limited exceptions. The Government are considering whether those exceptions should be modified in respect of transsexual people granted legal recognition in their acquired gender.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

12. **Mr. Streeter:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what steps he is taking to provide sufficient affordable housing in the south-west. [86330]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has increased investment. The south-west will receive £74.3million for affordable housing through the Housing Corporation's ADP in 2003–04, up £12.5million on this year. And reforms to the planning process will make the system more responsive to the need for affordable housing. Housing market imbalances are a key consideration as my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister develops a long-term programme of action for thriving communities—my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has promised to report back to the House on this in the new year.

Comprehensive Performance Assessment

13. **Jim Knight:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* capacity support and *(b)* intervention will be available for under-performing authorities identified through the comprehensive performance assessment process. [86331]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government want the public to receive a continuously improving standard of services from local authorities. The Government will work with those authorities which are identified as poorly

performing by the comprehensive performance assessment to ensure that they move swiftly to put an effective recovery plan in place.

Decent Home Standards

14. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the progress he has made in setting the decent home standards. [86332]

Mr. McNulty: The decent home standard was finalised in February and guidance on its implementation was issued in Mach.

Firefighters' Training

15. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what disruption to the training of firefighters has been caused by the allocation of fire-fighting equipment from training facilities to the armed forces. [86333]

Mr. Raynsford: Some courses have had to be postponed at the Fire Service College at Moreton in Marsh due to the non-availability of appliances. The scope for re-arranging these courses will be reviewed in the new year in consultation with the fire brigades.

Local fire authorities who have provided reserve training red engines, have reported no significant disruption to their training schedules.

Local Authority Housing (Sheffield)

16. **Mr. Allan**: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received since May concerning the future of local authority housing in Sheffield. [86334]

Mr. McNulty: Since May 2002, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received representations from the Leader, the Leader of the Opposition and the Chief Executive of Sheffield city council, from Jean Gleadall, Chair of Sheffield Tenants and Residents Together, and from an individual tenant and from the hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam.

Homelessness

17. **Mike Gapes**: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what his policies are for tackling homelessness. [86335]

Mrs. Roche: The March 2002 report, "More than a Roof", sets out our new approach to tackling homelessness. This includes stronger homelessness legislation, £125 million investment this year, and action to sustain reductions in rough sleeping and to ensure that homeless families with children are not forced to live in B&B hotels.

"More than a roof" and the Government's response to it set out a challenging new approach to tackling homelessness. One that focuses as much on the problems homeless people face as the places they live.

Specific measures include:

£125 million investment to tackle homelessness (2002–03);

a commitment that by March 2004 local authorities will ensure that no homeless family with children has to live in a B&B hotel, except in an emergency—and in these cases use should not be for longer than 6 weeks;

changes to housing benefit rules worth around £10 million, to boost incentives for private sector leasing by local authorities. This change increases the housing benefit subsidy levels for self-contained private sector leasing which makes it more financially viable, especially when compared to B&B subsidy rates.

Planning

18. **Andrew Mackinlay**: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his plans to reform the planning system. [86336]

Mr. McNulty: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton, South (Mr. Clarke) on 18 December 2002.

New Towns

19. **Mr. Pickthall**: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what discussions he has had with representatives of the New Towns since the Government's reply to the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee's report on the Future of the New Towns. [86337]

Mr. McNulty: Officials at the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister have been in touch with the New Town Special Interest Group to discuss the way forward in the context of my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister's sustainable communities agenda.

Transport and Social Exclusion

20. **Mr. Miller:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Social Exclusion Unit report, "Transport and Social Exclusion". [86338]

Mrs. Roche: The Social Exclusion Unit published interim findings from its transport and social exclusion project on its website in May 2002. Copies of the report are available in the Library of the House.

The Unit's final report, which builds on the interim report and examines the links between transport provision, the location of services, and social exclusion, will be published shortly.

Council Housing

21. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his plans to increase the provision of council housing. [86339]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has no plans to increase the provision of council housing.

Increases in the supply of affordable housing are now delivered through Registered Social Landlords.

Housing

22. **Margaret Moran:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to further encourage development of housing on brown-field sites and through refurbishment. [86340]

Mr. McNulty: Planning Policy Guidance Note 3, 'Housing' gives priority to re-using previously-developed land within urban areas, bringing empty homes back into use and converting existing buildings in preference to the development of green-field sites. Planning policies are backed by a package of fiscal measures, including a 150 per cent. tax credit for cleaning up contaminated land, reductions in VAT to encourage conversions of existing property into dwellings and the re-use of long-term empty homes, and a tax allowance for flats over shops to encourage use of redundant space.

British Standards (Compliance Costs)

23. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent representations he has had regarding compliance costs relating to British Standard EN 54.4 and EN 54.2. [86341]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not received any recent representations about compliance costs relating to British Standard EN 54.

Houses in Multiple Occupation

24. **Mr. Reed:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he will introduce legislation to license landlords of houses in multiple occupation. [86342]

Mr. McNulty: As announced in the Queen's Speech, the Government intend to publish a draft Housing Bill this session. The Bill will, among other measures, include provisions to introduce a mandatory licensing scheme for houses in multiple occupation.

Following consultation and scrutiny of the draft Bill, it is the Government's intention that it be introduced to Parliament at the earliest possible opportunity.

Firefighters' Dispute

25. **Miss McIntosh:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress he has made towards resolving the firefighters' dispute. [86343]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member for Vale of York to the answer given by my right. hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) on 18 December 2002, *Official Report*.

Council Tax Banding

26. **Mr. Chaytor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to review the council tax banding system. [86344]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government Bill currently before this House clarifies the power to vary the number of council tax bands. Ahead of the next English council tax revaluation in 2005, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will listen to the views of local government and taxpayers about council tax bands.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to change the housing bands for council tax; how he estimates they will benefit poorer people; and if he will make a statement. [87372]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government Bill currently before Parliament clarifies the power to vary the number of council tax bands. Work on an English council tax revaluation will begin in 2005, with council tax bills based on updated property values issuing in 2007. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is aware of the concerns of people who live in low value houses about the current width of band A. Ahead of revaluation the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will listen to the views of local government and taxpayers about council tax bands. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will decide on any changes to the banding structure nearer to the time of the revaluation.

Local Authority Performance Measures

27. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will review the measures he uses to assess the performance of local authorities with reference to the initial experience of such measures. [86345]

Mr. Raynsford: The Local Government White Paper, "Strong Local Leadership-Quality Public Services", charged the Audit Commission with developing and implementing the methodology for Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) of local authorities in England. The Commission reported the CPA outcomes for county and unitary authorities last week. An assessment framework for district councils is currently being developed and trialed.

Both the Audit Commission and the Government will wish to reflect on what has been learnt from CPA this year.

High Performing Councils

28. **Valerie Davey:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what additional freedoms and flexibilities he expects to be able to give to high performing councils. [86346]

Mr. Raynsford: For the very best authorities there will be no ring-fencing of funding (other than grants passed to schools); a three year 'inspection holiday'; removal of almost all requirements to produce plans and an opportunity to discuss with Government further freedoms through an Innovations Forum.

South-east Regional Assembly

29. **Mr. Cameron:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many representations he has received about the establishment of a regional assembly in the South East in the last 12 months. [86347]

Mr. Raynsford: Between 9 May 2002, when the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" was published, and 6 December 2002, we received 215 written or e-mailed responses to the White Paper which can be identified as having come from the South East. In addition we have received 2,333 cut-out coupons, in response to a campaign organised by Conservative MEPs in the South East, which express opposition to an elected assembly in the region.

Electoral Pilot

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which local authorities have applied to participate in the May 2003 electoral pilot programme; and which type of programme they have applied for, in each case. [87464]

Mr. Leslie: Sixty three applications to hold an electoral pilot scheme at the May 2003 local elections have been received. My right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich issued on 17 December 2002 a written statement which lists the 41 applications which have been accepted, relating to non e-voting pilot schemes.

A further 20 applications were submitted by councils wishing to run e-voting pilots. As set out in the prospectus that we published in September, the successful applicants for e-voting pilots will be announced in January. The 20 applicants for e-voting pilots schemes is tabled as follows:

E-Voting—Total: 20

Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council
Chester City Council
Chorley Borough Council
East Northamptonshire Council
Epping Forest District Council
Ipswich Borough Council
Kerrier District Council
Malvern Hills District Council
Norwich City Council
Rushmoor Borough Council
Sheffield City Council
Shrewsbury and Atcham Borough Council
South Somerset District Council
South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council
St Albans City and District Council
Stratford-on-Avon District Council
Stroud District Council
Swindon Borough Council
Vale Royal Borough Council
Waveney District Council

The applications submitted by Nottingham City Council (dual early-postal and traditional voting pilot) and by Mid-Suffolk District Council (all-postal pilot in three wards only) have not been accepted at this stage. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister officials will be in discussion with those authorities to consider whether revised applications can be put forward.

Environmental Impact Assessments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his Answer of 12 December ref. 86872, on environmental impact assessments, for what types of project an environmental impact assessment is mandatory. [87906]

Mr. Leslie: Projects for which Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is required are set out in the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (England and Wales) Regulations 1999. Schedule 1 to the Regulations lists projects for which EIA is always required. Schedule 2 lists those that the planning authority must screen to establish whether they are likely to have significant effects on the environment, in which case EIA will be required. There is nothing to prevent a developer voluntarily undertaking an assessment for a project for which there is no statutory requirement for EIA.

Fire Safety Bill

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the Government's plans to publish a fire safety bill. [87800]

Mr. Raynsford: The Government will publish a White Paper on the Fire Service in the spring. This will set out in detail the legislative and other changes required to take forward the modernisation programmes set out in the final report of the Independent Review of the Fire Service.

Fire Services

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether the Government intend to review the funding formula for the fire service with regard to the funding of specialist non-fire services undertaken by the fire service. [87802]

Mr. Raynsford: On 5 December, as part of the provisional local government finance settlement for England for 2003–04, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced proposals resulting from the review of the local government grant distribution system. This includes a new fire distribution formula which takes account of the widening role of the fire service as a fire and rescue service. The Bain report, published on 16 December 2002, recommended that the Government look again at the formula.

We will consider this and Bain's other recommendations in a White Paper to be published next year.

Helplines and Hotlines

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many calls *(a)* Supporting People helpline and *(b)* High Hedges hotline have received so far. [87467]

Mr. McNulty: Up to 13 December the Supporting People helpline has received 2,987 calls. We do not have a dedicated high hedges hotline. However, we estimate that since June we have taken about 100 telephone calls on high hedges and our Trees and Problem Hedges website has attracted almost 5,000 visitors.

Homeless People

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homeless people are living rough, broken down by health authority. [87203]

Mrs. Roche: The information requested is not collected centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

On 12 September 2002, it was announced that an estimated 596 people are sleeping rough on any one night in England based on data collated from local authorities in the summer of 2002. Because health authority areas and local authority areas are not coterminous, it is not possible to give the number of people sleeping rough broken down by local health authority area.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what support he gives to homeless people discharged from hospital. [87206]

Mrs. Roche: Under the homelessness legislation, local housing authorities must ensure that suitable accommodation is available for people who are unintentionally homeless and who have a priority need for accommodation. This would include people who are vulnerable and unintentionally homeless on leaving hospital.

In addition, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working with the Department of Health on its revision of the Hospital Discharge Workbook, due to be published shortly. This emphasises that all acute hospitals should have formal admission and discharge policies, which will ensure that homeless people are identified on admission, and their pending discharge notified to relevant primary health care services and to homeless service providers, so that people are not in a position of being made homeless at this point.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made on improving the access of homeless people to health care under the national homelessness strategy. [87447]

Mrs. Roche: The Homelessness Directorate's report, "More than a roof", set out a new approach to tackling homelessness, focused on the problems that homeless people face in the places where they live. It identified addressing health needs as critical in helping homeless people as well as preventing homelessness.

In the Cross-Cutting Review on health inequalities, which the Government published on 20 November, inequalities faced by vulnerable groups—including homeless people—were identified as a top-line priority. As part of Government's response to this through measures to improve access to health services for vulnerable groups and others, the Government have put in place more than 1,300 Personal Medical Service Pilots and 42 NHS Walk-in Centres. Local authorities are expected to work with a range of organisations to deliver their homelessness strategies, including Primary Care Trusts on appropriate health services.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many copies of Drug Services for Homeless People: A good practice handbook have been distributed; and what range of organisations has received it. [87465]

Mrs. Roche: All Drug Action Teams (DATs) and key local authorities and homelessness agencies were e-mailed a letter from the Under-Secretary of State, Home Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) and myself about Drug Services for Homeless People: a good practice handbook on 4 December. They were directed to www.homelessness.odpm.gov.uk/homelessness/pubs/drug-services/index.htm where the document can be downloaded, and were given the opportunity to be e-mailed the document directly. In addition, over 700 hard copies of the handbook are being posted this week to all DATs, Drugs Prevention Advisory Service (DPAS) co-ordinators, local authority Housing Directors and other key contacts. Further free copies are available from my Department's free distribution centre.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much funding his Department is setting aside for *(a)* the research into the impact of temporary accommodation on health and education of homeless families and *(b)* the project to evaluate different models of family support to establish good practice announced in his press release of 3 December; when he expects this work to be completed; and which Government and non-Government groups will be involved. [87466]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be commissioning a major survey of homeless households in temporary accommodation early in the new year. The research will examine the factors that led to homelessness among a representative sample of households placed in temporary accommodation under the homelessness legislation, and the impact of homelessness and life in temporary accommodation on those households.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's procurement guidance strongly advises against releasing the project budget in advance of commissioning the work as this can distort competition. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will ensure that sufficient funding is available to cover the estimated cost of the research which we anticipate will take up to two years to be completed.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will consult other Government Departments, including the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills, on the research. In taking forward the work, the appointed contractors will be expected to consult local authorities and other interest groups.

In line with the commitment to tackle homelessness more effectively we are also commissioning a project to evaluate different models of family support. The project will examine models led by different agencies, the voluntary sector, Primary Care Trust and a local authority (Hull City Primary Care Trust, Blackpool City Primary Care Trust, Leicester City Council and the Field Lane Foundation in London). All the models chosen demonstrate multi-agency working and have a health focus. The research will examine the effectiveness of the models in preventing repeat homelessness and will identify good practice to influence future delivery of services.

The evaluation will commence in February 2003 with a review of each service by June 2003, and a final paper by December 2003. Again, it is not appropriate to release the project budget at this stage but we will ensure that there is sufficient funding available to cover the estimated cost of the evaluation. In taking forward the work, the appointed researchers will be expected to consult other relevant interest groups and agencies, drawing on other examples of good practice in the field of family homelessness.

Local Strategic Partnerships

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if it is his policy that local community and strategic partnerships should be subject to legislation on admission to meetings. [87905]

Mr. Leslie: Local strategic partnerships are not statutory bodies. However, each LSP must work for, and be seen to work for the people it serves. We consider that there should be transparency and openness in the way LSPs operate and that information should be easily

accessible. The accreditation of LSPs in receipt of the neighbourhood renewal fund specifically addresses these issues in respect of decision making and other processes of an LSP.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list, for the last year for which information is available, the SSA and net spending of each local authority, and the percentage by which the latter varies from the former. [87917]

Mr. Raynsford: The information for 2002–03 budgets has been placed in the Library of the House.

Mr. Flook: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the total central government grant to *(a)* Taunton Deane Borough Council and *(b)* Somerset County Council was, broken down by type of grant, in each year since 1990. [87720]

Mr. Raynsford: The total central government grant for Taunton Deane and Somerset County Council since 1990–91, as reported by the local authority, is set out in the tables.

(a) Taunton Deane

£ million

	Revenue grants			
Year[1]	General grants 2—	Specific grants inside AEF	Capital grants	Total central Government grant
1990–91	-	0.14	0.23	-
1991–92	-	0.21	0.96	-
1992–93	-	0.19	0.98	-
1993–94	5.71	0.20	0.65	6.56
1994–95	7.05	0.22	0.86	8.13
1995–96	6.98	0.23	0.75	7.96
1996–97	6.77	0.17	0.65	7.59
1997–98	6.66	0.18	0.55	7.39
1998–99	6.23	0.18	0.49	6.90
1999–00	6.24	0.20	0.55	6.99
2000–01	6.51	0.17	0.24	6.92
2001–02	6.75	0.24	0.16	7.15
2002–03	6.91	0.24	0.16	7.31

[1] 1990–91 to 2000–01 are outturn figures. 2001–02 and 2002–03 are budgeted/provisional figures.[2] General grants include revenue support grant, SSA reduction grant, central support protection grant, GLA general grant, redistributed business rates and neighbourhood renewal fund. Between 1990–91 and 1992–93, under the community charge system, these grants were paid into Taunton Deane's collection fund, and supported expenditure by both Taunton Deane and Somerset county council.

Sources: Revenue grant information from RO forms (1990–91 to 2000–01) and RA forms (2001–02 and 2002–03). Capital grant information from COR forms (1990–91 to 2000–01), CPR4form (2001–02) and CER form (2002–03).

(b) Somerset

	Revenue grants			
Year[1]	General grants[2]	Specific grants inside AEF	Capital grants	Total central Government grant
1990–91	-	22.71	3.73	-
1991–92	-	27.07	1.75	-
1992–93	-	30.47	6.61	-
1993–94	194.33	37.96	4.50	236.79
1994–95	199.33	39.59	8.05	246.97
1995–96	186.05	14.98	4.73	205.76
1996–97	197.38	13.97	4.14	215.49
1997–98	197.86	11.71	2.51	212.08
1998–99	205.88	15.35	3.58	224.81
1999–00	216.26	20.89	6.94	244.09
2000–01	227.87	40.66	6.86	275.39
2001–02	237.25	42.86	8.08	288.19
2002–03	244.01	45.98	7.30	297.29

[1] 1990–91 to 2000–01 are outturn figures. 2001–02 and 2002–03 are budgeted/provisional figures.

[2] General grants include revenue support grant, SSA reduction grant, central support protection grant, GLA general grant, redistributed business rates and neighbourhood renewal fund. Between 1990–91 and 1992–93, under the community charge system, these grants were paid into the collection funds of the district councils in Somerset, and supported expenditure by both the districts and Somerset county council.

[3] Between 1990–91 and 1994–95 this includes police grant. From 1995–96 police grant was paid directly to Avon and Somerset Police. The rise in specific grants in 2000–01 can be attributed mainly to extra grants related to Education Standards Fund, Teachers Pay Reform and Magistrates Court.

Sources: Revenue grant information from RO forms (1990–91 to 2000–01) and RA forms (2001–02 and 2002–03). Capital grant information from COR forms (1990–91 to 2000–01), CPR4form (2001–02) and CER form (2002–03).

Local Sport

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to ensure that sport is provided for within local authority community plans; and if he will make a statement. [87650]

Mr. Leslie: The content of each local authority's community strategy will vary from one area to another, depending on local priorities as established in consultation with the local community and other partner organisations. The recent announcement concerning freedoms and flexibilities for local authorities recommended that local cultural strategies should be subsumed within community strategies. Where this happens, the profile of sport will be raised in forming part of the strategic vision for the area. In addition, the role of all cultural and leisure services within community strategies will be included in the forthcoming evaluation which the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will commission early in 2003.

New Deal for Communities

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much money has been distributed through the New Deal for Communities to fund programmes aimed at increasing benefit take-up. [86739]

Mrs. Roche: New Deal for Communities is a key programme in the Government's national strategy to renew the most deprived neighbourhoods in the country. It tests out the new approaches in the strategy, in 39 neighbourhoods across England.

The Government have provided the following funding to enable Benefits Agency—and latterly, Jobcentre Plus staff—to work with New Deal for Communities partnerships on issues relating to benefits and helping people to find jobs.

1999–2000—£1.3 million
2000–01—£1.6 million
2001–02—£1.7 million

This funding initially aimed to provide information and advice on all Social Security benefits including housing benefit, which can be paid to people on low incomes, and other in-work benefits. Following the creation of the Department for Work and Pensions—bringing together the Benefits Agency and the Employment Service—there has been an equal emphasis on moving people to a more work ready state, job brokering, advising about the various New Deal programmes and in-work benefit advice.

The NRU pays for additional DWP/Jobcentre Plus staff to work in each NDC area. This equates to an extra £50,000 per year for each neighbourhood. Typically, it enables DWP to provide 1–2 dedicated members of staff to work in support of the partnership.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister does not hold information centrally about the amount of funding allocated by individual partnerships to programmes to increase benefits take-up.

Rough Sleepers

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list *(a)* the number of staff in and *(b)* the cost of the (i) Rough Sleepers Unit and (ii) Homelessness Directorate in each year since each was established. [87434]

Mrs. Roche: The information is in the table.

Year	*Number of staff*	*Administration budget cost (£ million)*
1999–2000	19	0.73
2000–01	36	1.34
2001–02[1]	30	1.3

[1] Homelessness Directorate which incorporated the Rough Sleepers Unit was announced by Lord Falconer on 3 December 2001 and came into being on 1 April 2002.

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 267W, if he will require the Rough Sleepers Unit to record rough sleepers who are also asylum seekers separately from other rough sleepers for the purposes of the street count. [87932]

Mrs. Roche: Information from counts undertaken by local authorities does not identify rough sleepers who are asylum seekers. As rough sleepers are not woken, it is not possible to obtain information on their personal status. However outreach teams are encouraged to get as much information about people sleeping rough in their areas as possible so that individual solutions can be found to their rough sleeping where it is possible.

Rural Services

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures he is taking to ensure the delivery of services to sparsely populated rural areas; and what resources he is making available. [87707]

Mr. Leslie: Service provision in rural areas is a matter for the delivery bodies in the first instance. For local authorities, the recent provisional local government finance settlement gave every authority a grant increase of at least 3.0 per cent., with education authorities receiving at least 3.5 per cent., Rural shire districts did particularly well, their grant increasing by an average of 7.6 per cent.

Standards Board

Andrew Selous: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost was of distributing the Standards Board leaflets to hon. Members' offices *(a)* in their constituency and *(b)* in the House in December. [87834]

Mr. Leslie: Information about how to make a complaint about breaches of the Local Authorities Codes of Conduct was distributed by the Standards Board for England to hon. Members *(a)* in their constituencies at a total cost of £5,019 and *(b)* in the House at a total cost of £622.

HEALTH

"Valuing People"

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding is being provided to each local authority to meet the requirements of "Valuing People". [85501]

Jacqui Smith: Our policies for improving services for people with learning disabilities, their families and carers are set out in the White Paper "Valuing People: A New Strategy for Learning Disability for the 21st Century" (Cm 5086), published in March 2001.

Some £3 billion a year is already spent on health and social care provision for people with learning disabilities. The proposals in "Valuing People" will help to ensure that this money is spent effectively and efficiently. People with learning disabilities will also benefit from the general growth in total health and social services spending and from specific initiatives.

The White Paper announced the creation of two new funds, the implementation support fund and the learning disability development fund. The support fund, £2.3 million a year for three years from April 2001, is being used to support a range of initiatives connected with the White Paper's programme of action. These include developing and expanding advocacy services across the country.

The development fund has both revenue (£22.6 million) and capital (£20 million) elements. £2 million of the revenue element is being used to fund the "Valuing People" support team and its related activities, with the remainder being distributed to health authorities. It was distributed to the then health authorities (HAs) in March 2002 to support priorities for service change as outlined in joint investment plans they drew up with their partner local authorities. The distribution was based on the NHS general allocation formula except that five authorities received additional money to help them meet the needs of their old long stay population. Where a health authority related to more than one local authority, the allocation was to be divided according to the size of their respective resident populations unless all the parties agreed to an alternative distribution.

The distribution by HA has been placed in the Library.

Learning Disability Partnership Boards were invited to bid for funding from the capital element of the Development Fund. A list of the successful boards has been placed in the Library, but the money will not all be spent in this first financial year.

Child Care

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list *(a)* the number of children in residential care and *(b)* the total number of staff in residential care establishments for children on 1 June in each of the years since 1997 [80474]

Jacqui Smith: Information about the numbers of looked after children placed in residential placements is shown in the table. This includes children looked after in local authority children's homes and in residential accommodation provided by voluntary and private sector organisations.

Children looked after in residential placements at 31 March 1997 to 2001

	Number of looked after children in residential placements	*Total looked after children*
1997	6,600	51,200
1998	6,700	53,300
1999	6,600	55,500
2000	7,000	58,100
2001	6,800	58,900

Notes:

1. Data exclude children being looked after under any agreed series of short-term placements.
2. Residential placements include children's homes and hostels and secure units.
3. It excludes residential schools.

Source:

Department of Health Form—CLA 100.

Information about the numbers of staff employed in residential care establishments for children is not available as at 1 June. The table shows the whole time equivalent (wte) number of staff employed by local authorities in England in residential care establishments for children as at 30 September, for each year from 1997 to 2001 (the latest year for which data are available). Similar information is not available about the numbers of staff employed by the independent sector.

	Number employed (wte)
1997	13,300
1998	12,900
1999	12,400
2000	12,100
2001	11,900

Source:

Form SSDS001.

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs retired *(a)* early and *(b)* due to ill-health in each year since 1977; and how many left the profession in each year. [84495]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Data in the format requested is not readily available. The number of principal and assistant general medical and ophthalmic practitioners in England and Wales who have received a retirement pension before age 60 and on the grounds of ill-health in each of the financial years 1985 to 2002 is shown in the table.

General Medical and Ophthalmic Practitioner Retirements

Year	Before 60	Ill-health only	Total
1985	25	100	125
1986	29	112	141
1987	59	92	151
1988	30	109	139
1989	31	118	149
1990	43	136	179
1991	57	163	220
1992	53	143	196
1993	70	161	231
1994	54	168	222
1995	82	180	262
1996	156	206	362

General Medical and Ophthalmic Practitioner Retirements

Year	Before 60	Ill-health only	Total
1997	112	181	293
1998	150	172	322
1999	112	143	255
2000	84	141	225
2001	183	147	330
2002	184	172	356
Total	1514	2644	4158

The number of unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs) who left English Health Authorities from October 1996 to March 2002 is shown in the table.

Leavers

October 1996–97	October 1997–98	October 1998–99	October 1999 September 2000	September 2000–01	September 2001 March 2002	Total
1,058	1,040	1,030	1,090	1,313	687	6,218

Acute Trusts

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which acute trusts are running a deficit in this financial year. [87423]

Mr. Hutton: The audited information in respect of the 2002–03 financial performance of National Health Service trusts, including acute trusts, will be published in their individual annual accounts. The audited information will be available centrally in autumn 2003.

Brain Injuries

Martin Linton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department has made available for rehabilitation services for brain-injury patients in London in each of the last three years; what funding he will make available for the next financial year; and if he will make a statement. [86281]

Mr. Hutton: The Department does not earmark funds for particular services, such as brain injury rehabilitation. Primary care trusts are responsible for ensuring that services for patients needing brain injury rehabilitation are in place. The configuration of this service provision, however, is a matter for local decision makers as they are best placed to understand the health needs of their local populations.

We would expect that the substantial extra funds this Government have provided to the national health service will help provide improved services for all patients including those needing rehabilitation after a brain injury.

Care Beds

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what changes to the number of *(a)* private care beds and *(b)* council care beds he expects to occur in Chorley council area over the next five years; [87048]

(2) how many care beds there are in the Chorley council area; and how many he estimates there will be in each year from 2003 to 2008. [87047]

Jacqui Smith: Information is not available for Chorley council area.

At 31 March 2001 there were 11,600 residential care beds in Lancashire local authority and 1,700 nursing care beds in south Lancashire health authority. Data for 2002 are not yet available.

Forecasts of the number of care home places are not made centrally.

On 23 July 2002, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced additional funding to provide more help for older people. The funding is intended to support 6,000 more care home places in England by March 2006.

Care Housing Places (Elderly)

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the cost of the 50 per cent. increase in the number of extra care housing places for older people, announced on 23 July 2002. [81686]

Jacqui Smith: We propose to increase extra care housing places for older people by 50 per cent. between 1997 and 2006. A further announcement will be made in due course.

Consultant Surgeons (Suspensions)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many consultant surgeons were suspended from clinical duties in the past two years. [87891]

Mr. Hutton: National health service trusts report suspensions lasting longer than six months or longer to the Department. The number of consultants reported has decreased since 30 September 2000.

Year	Total consultants suspended in period
October 2000 to September 2001	23
October 2001 to September 2002	18

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many patients experienced delayed discharge from hospitals in *(a)* England and *(b)* Wales in the last quarter; [82835]

(2) if he will make a statement on the duration of delayed discharges, as a percentage of delayed discharges, waiting *(a)* less than eight days, *(b)* eight to 14 days, *(c)* 15 to 28 days and *(d)* more than 28 days in the last quarter; [82486]

(3) what proportion of patients awaiting discharge from hospital were delayed from being discharged due to awaiting *(a)* a care home placement, *(b)* assessment, *(c)* public funding, *(d)* a domiciliary package and *(e)* other reasons in the last quarter. [82487]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 25 November 2002]:* Delayed Discharge figures for Quarter 1, 2002–03 are available in the Library.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of Welsh resident patients who have had their discharge from hospital in England delayed, in each hospital with more than 20 patients in this category. [87157]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not available centrally. However, in preparing for the introduction of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges, etc) Bill, it was established that the percentage of Welsh resident patients admitted to hospitals in English health authorities near to the border in 2000–01 was very small, an average of 7.5 per cent. of all admissions. No health and social care communities are reporting as many as 20 delays.

Epilepsy

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if an initial health needs assessment of epilepsy has been produced by *(a)* eastern, *(b)* London, *(c)* north-west Greater Manchester, *(d)* north-west Lancashire, *(e)* north-west Mersey and Cheshire, *(f)* northern region, *(g)* Yorkshire, *(h)* central south-east, *(i)* Kent, Surrey and Sussex, *(j)* south-east five counties, *(k)* south-west, *(l)* Trent NORCOM and *(m)* west midlands NHS regions; which of these NHS regions has agreed a common service strategy for the commissioning of epilepsy services, involving providers and patients/carers representatives in the process; and which of them has agreed common standards, implementation and investment plans for the provision of epilepsy services; [86238]

(2) whether the necessary purchasing arrangements, including setting up service agreements, financial risk-sharing models and establishing primary care trust-led consortia, have been put in place by *(a)* eastern, *(b)* London, *(c)* north-west Greater Manchester, *(d)* north-west Lancashire, *(e)* north-west Mersey and Cheshire, *(f)* northern region, *(g)* Yorkshire, *(h)* central south-east, *(i)* Kent, Surrey and Sussex, *(j)* south-east five counties, *(k)* south-west, *(l)* Trent NORCOM and *(m)* west midlands NHS regions. [86239]

Mr. Hutton: The majority of epilepsy services are provided in a primary or secondary care setting and are not specialised services. The organisations listed in the question are regional specialised commissioning groups whose function is to commission specialised services, generally located in tertiary hospitals; non-specialised services such as epilepsy services are not within their remit. Surgery is appropriate for less than 5 per cent. of epilepsy patients. It is provided in neurosciences centres and is subject to the same access targets as other forms of elective surgery.

We expect to publish an action plan for epilepsy services following the recommendation in the chief medical officer's 2001 annual report that we should improve the standard of services for people with epilepsy. The action plan will also address the findings of the national clinical audit of epilepsy-related death, which was published in May 2002.

In addition to the epilepsy action plan, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence will publish an appraisal of anti-epilepsy drugs next year, followed by a guideline on the diagnosis, management and treatment of epilepsy in 2004. We are also developing the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions, which will focus on improving services for neurological conditions, including epilepsy. We expect to publish the NSF in 2004.

General Practitioners

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the age distribution of general practitioners in *(a)* Hampshire and *(b)* England. [87236]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The age distribution of general practitioners in England and in Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority as at March 2002 is shown in the table.

All practitioners[1], NHS plan GPs[2], unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[3] in Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority and England as at 31 March 2002

Number[4]

	Total	*Of which aged:*				
		Under 30	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–59*
England						
All Practitioners	32,011	1,305	3,557	5,497	6,272	5,376
Percentage		4.1	11.1	17.2	19.6	16.8
Of which:						
NHS Plan GPs	28,950	341	2,648	4,859	5,894	5,259
Percentage		1.2	9.1	16.8	20.4	18.2
UPEs	27,956	285	2,441	4,698	5,774	5,140
Percentage		1.0	8.7	16.8	20.7	18.4

All practitioners[1], NHS plan GPs[2], unrestricted principals and equivalents (UPEs)[3] in Hampshire and Isle of Wight strategic health authority and England as at 31 March 2002

Number[4]

	Total	*Of which aged: Under 30*	*30–34*	*35–39*	*40–44*	*45–59*
Hampshire and Isle of Wight StHA						
All Practitioners	1,184	40	153	206	251	209
Percentage		3.4	12.9	17.4	21.2	17.7
Of which:						
NHS Plan GPs	1,035	6	95	172	236	203
Percentage		0.6	9.2	16.6	22.8	19.6
UPEs	1,024	6	93	172	231	201
Percentage		0.6	9.1	16.8	22.6	19.6

Number[4]

	Of which aged: 50–54	*55–59*	*60–64*	*65–69*	*70 and over*	*Unknown*
England						
All Practitioners	4,633	3,379	1,419	506	66	1
Percentage	14.5	10.6	4.4	1.6	0.2	0.0
Of which:						
NHS Plan GPs	4,594	3,365	1,419	506	65	0
Percentage	15.9	11.6	4.9	1.7	0.2	—
UPEs	4,525	3,281	1,358	454	0	0
Percentage	16.2	11.7	4.9	1.6	0.0	
Hampshire and Isle of Wight StHA						
All Practitioners	164	128	29	4	0	0
Percentage	13.9	10.8	2.4	0.3	0.0	—
Of which:						
NHS Plan GPs	163	127	29	4	0	0
Percentage	15.7	12.3	2.8	0.4	0.0	—
UPEs	163	125	29	4	0	0
Percentage	15.9	12.2	2.8	0.4	0.0	—

[1] All Practitioners include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, GP Registrars, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA), PMS Other and GP Retainers.
[2] NHS Plan GPs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs, PMS Salaried GPs, Restricted Principals, Assistants, Salaried Doctors (Para 52 SFA) and PMS Others.
[3] UPEs include GMS Unrestricted Principals, PMS Contracted GPs and PMS Salaried GPs.
[4] Headcount
Note:
Data has been converted to match April 2002 StHA boundaries.
Source:
Department of Health General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Health Funding

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was granted from each source of support within his Department to *(a)* Westminster City Council and *(b)* the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, outside the revenue support grant settlements, in each year since 1997. [85832]

Jacqui Smith: The tables show the funding made available by the Department to Westminster City Council and the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea outside the revenue support grant settlements in each year since 1997.

Westminster City Council

£000

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*	*2003–04*
Grant							
AIDS Support	800	770	810	798	547	547	[1]—
Drugs and Alcohol Specific Grant	27	33	34	—	—	—	—
Guardians Ad Litem and Reporting Officer Services	29	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental Health (Adults)	539	539	804	904	1,006	1,013	1,014
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	—	—	26	26	82	146	376
Training Support Programme	215	198	196	319	355	212	—
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	2,305	2,171	—	—	—	—	—
Adult Asylum-Seekers' Accommodation	3,847	5,306	—	—	—	—	—

Westminster City Council

£000

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Persons from Abroad Children's Grant	2,835	3,753	—	—	—	—	—
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's Grant	41	879	2,769	—	—	—	—
Partnership[2]	—	—	1,755	1,500	—	—	—
Prevention[2]	—	—	146	222	—	—	—
Promoting Independence	—	—	—	—	1,979	1,150	—
Carers'	—	—	137	384	554	696	615
Children's Services	—	—	755	1,234	3,216	5,286	[1]—
Deferred Payments	—	—	—	—	32	64	87
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning	—	—	—	—	51	53	[1]—
Building Care Capacity	—	—	—	—	422	884	—
Preserved Rights	—	—	—	—	—	2,907	[1]—
Residential Allowance	—	—	—	—	—	606	[1]—
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	—	—	—	—	38	[1]—
Performance Fund	—	—	—	—	—	302	686
Improving Information Management	—	—	—	—	17	187	164
Secure Accommodation	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Care Direct	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	—	—	—	—	842
National Training Strategy	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Human Resource Development Strategy	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Supplementary Credit Approvals							
Mental Health	180	120	218	50	—	186	[1]—
HIV/AIDS	250	250	—	414	300	—	[1]—

[1] TBA—to be announced.

[2] The partnership and prevention grants combined in 2001–02 and became the promoting independence grant.

Note:

PFI credit approvals of £4.3 million were also issued to Westminster in 1999–2000.

Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

£000

	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01	2001–02	2002–03	2003–04
Grant							
AIDS Support	890	760	780	816	592	563	[1]—
Drugs and Alcohol Specific Grant	—	33	644	—	—	—	—
Guardians Ad Litem and Reporting Officer Services	21	—	—	—	—	—	—
Mental Health	515	515	693	760	830	835	836
Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services	—	—	20	20	61	107	332
Training Support Programme	163	161	162	204	195	180	[1]—
Community Care Special Transitional Grant	1,509	1,414	—	—	—	—	—
Adult Asylum-Seekers' Accommodation	2,326	4,604	—	—	—	—	—
Persons from Abroad Children's Grant	1,277	1,550	—	—	—	—	—
Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children's Grant	152	647	1,496	—	—	—	—
Partnership[2]	—	—	1,162	1,002	—	—	—
Prevention[2]	—	—	103	157	—	—	—
Promoting Independence	—	—	—	—	1,324	793	—
Carers'	—	—	95	270	393	496	480
Children's Services	—	—	560	916	2,390	3,871	[1]—
Deferred Payments	—	—	—	—	26	53	71
Young People's Substance Misuse Planning	—	—	—	—	37	38	[1]—
Building Care Capacity	—	—	—	—	265	563	—
Preserved Rights	—	—	—	—	—	1,701	[1]—
Residential Allowance	—	—	—	—	—	388	—
Teenage Pregnancy Local Implementation	—	—	—	—	—	37	[1]—
Performance Fund	—	—	—	—	—	201	541
Improving Information Management	—	—	—	—	17	167	139
Secure Accommodation	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Care Direct	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Access and Systems Capacity	—	—	—	—	—	—	600
National Training Strategy	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Human Resources Development Strategy	—	—	—	—	—	—	[1]—
Supplementary Credit Approvals							
Mental Health	115	62	300	—	350	89	[1]—
HIV/AIDS	200	20	—	—	—	—	[1]—

[1] TBA to be announced.

[2] The partnership and prevention grants combined in 2001–02 and became the promoting independence grant.

Homeless People

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of homeless people are addicted to *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* drugs. [87204]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

In 1998, the Social Exclusion Unit's report into rough sleeping stated that 20 per cent. of rough sleepers were misusing drugs. In July 2002, research by the charity Crisis found that 83 per cent. of single homeless people were drug users. Figures for people misusing alcohol were at around 30 to 50 per cent. in the SEU report, and recent anecdotal evidence suggests that this figure is still around the same.

On 4 December 2002, the Home Office's Drug Strategy Directorate and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's Homelessness Directorate published new guidance entitled "Drug Services for Homeless People: a Good Practice Handbook", which is aimed at addressing these figures through mainstream and specialised drug services.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps the Homelessness Directorate is taking to improve the health care of homeless ple. [87435]

Mrs. Roche: I have been asked to reply.

The Homelessness Directorate's report, "More than a Roof", set out a new approach to tackling homelessness, focused on the problems that homeless people face in the places where they live. It identified addressing health needs as critical in helping homeless people, as well as preventing homelessness.

In the Cross-Cutting Review on health inequalities, which the Government published on 20 November 2002, inequalities faced by vulnerable groups, including homeless people, were identified as a top-line priority. As part of Government's response to this through measures to improve access to health services for vulnerable groups and others, the Government have put in place more than 1,300 Personal Medical Service Pilots and 42 NHS Walk-in Centres. Local authorities are expected to work with a range of organisations to deliver their homelessness strategies, including primary care trusts on appropriate health services.

In addition, all local housing authorities are now required, under the Homelessness Act 2002, to conduct a review of homelessness in their district and to adopt a strategy, by July 2003, which must include plans for ensuring that accommodation and support are available for homeless people. As made clear in the statutory Homelessness Code of Guidance for local authorities, published jointly by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department of Health, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister expects local housing authorities to work with a range of organisations to deliver the aims of the homelessness strategy and ensure that all the support needs of homeless people are taken into account. This includes working with primary care trusts (PCTs), to deliver appropriate health services to this client group.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what training general practitioners receive in relation to the health needs of homeless people. [87436]

Mr. Hutton: Government do not specify the content of the general practitioner training curriculum. This is the job of the joint committee on postgraduate training for general practice (JCPTGP), which is the competent authority for general practice training in the United Kingdom. The JCPTGP is an independent professional body, and it is required by section 9(3) of the Vocational Training Regulations 1997 to determine and publish the curriculum to be followed by a GP registrar, a trainee GP.

The Regulations do specify seven competencies which must be tested, and which the curriculum must therefore teach:

factual medical knowledge sufficient to enable the doctor to perform the duties of a GP;

the ability to apply factual medical knowledge to the management of problems presented by patients in general practice;

effective communication, both orally and in writing;

the ability to consult satisfactorily with general practice patients;

the ability to review and critically analyse the practitioner's own working practices and to manage any necessary changes appropriately;

clinical skills; and

the ability to synthesise all the above competencies and apply them appropriately in a general practice setting.

GPs are expected therefore to learn in training the skills needed to deal with all their patients.

Invoice Payments

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what percentage of external suppliers his Department paid in *(a)* accordance with agreed contractual conditions and *(b)* where no such conditions exist, within 30 days of receipt of an undisputed invoice in each of the last five years. [86878]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* The Department's payment performance in each of the last five completed financial years is shown in the table.

Financial year	*Percentage paid*
1997–98	95.3
1998–99	94.4
1999–2000	95.3
2000–01	95.8
2001–02	94.7

Mental Health Acts

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he has taken to expedite hearings of people detained under the Mental Health Acts. [82694]

Jacqui Smith: The Secretary of State for Health is required to provide all detained patients with a speedy review of their detention. This responsibility is supported by a secretariat who manage the process and organise the hearings from four regional offices working within a national listing policy. Patients detained under

section 2 of the Mental Health Act 1983 are listed within seven days of their application being filed and all other patients as soon as is practically possible, having regard to the interests of justice.

All four Mental Health Review Tribunal (MHRT) offices work within these national procedures and the throughput of cases is managed by a team, headed by a case manager.

In April 2002, an independent review of the MHRT administration was undertaken. The Department is considering the results of the review and what action might be taken further to improve the service.

A project to support a better IT system is in progress and additional staff resources have been provided to the offices since the review began.

Officials from the Department of Health and the Lord Chancellor's Department have been working closely with the Royal College of Psychiatrists to speed up recruitment of members and to elicit a better response to recruitment campaigns.

Prisons

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether prisoners in *(a)* Garth and *(b)* Wymott prisons are included in the funding calculation for Chorley South Ribble PCT. [87046]

Jacqui Smith: Prisoners classified by the Office for National Statistics as normally resident in Her Majesty's Prison Garth and HMP Wymott are included in the population figures on which funding calculations for Chorley and South Ribble Primary Care Trust are based. From April 2003 the methodology for taking account of prisoners in PCT allocations will change. PCTs with prisons in their boundaries will receive allocations that take into account the secondary physical health care needs of whole of the local prison population.

Prisons (Mental Health)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of prisoners suffer from psychiatric morbidity. [87444]

Jacqui Smith: A survey of mental ill health in the prison population of England and Wales, undertaken in 1997 by the Office for National Statistics, estimated that around 90 per cent. of prisoners had at least one of the five disorders; personality disorder, psychosis, neurosis, alcohol misuse and drug dependence, considered in the survey.

Public Health Laboratories

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which bodies will undertake the work of the Public Health Laboratories until the Managed Pathology Networks are in operation. [87724]

Mr. Hutton: As outlined in the recently published document, Future arrangements for microbiology laboratory services, all Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS) laboratories, except for those designated as Health Protection Agency (HPA) laboratories, will transfer into the management of National Health Service trusts on 1 April 2003.

The Department of Health document, Pathology—the essential service, draft guidance on modernising pathology services, supported the development of managed pathology networks as an effective means of delivering improved pathology services.

The consultation period for this document ended on 30 September 2002. The results of the consultation are currently being considered. It is expected that new guidance will be released to the NHS in the new year.

Sheltered Accommodation

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the definition of very sheltered accommodation is; and how many very sheltered accommodation places there were in each year since 1996. [86292]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The definition of very sheltered housing used by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister for housing investment programme purposes is:

Very sheltered housing covers schemes for frail older people that have more provision of a greater level of care than ordinary sheltered housing: for example; the provision of meals, extra wardens, care assistants and additional communal facilities such as special bathrooms and sluice rooms.

The number of very sheltered housing places between 1996 and 2000 is:

	Number of places
1996	17,577
1997	18,041
1998	19,062
1999	19,577
2000	20,269

For 2001 and subsequently, figures will be available from "Supporting People" supply mapping.

Specialised Services (Commissioning)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses he received as part of its review of commissioning arrangements for specialised services from *(a)* regional specialised commissioning groups, *(b)* local service providers, *(c)* commissioners, *(d)* patients' representatives and *(e)* carers' representatives. [86236]

Mr. Hutton: A total of 53 responses were directly submitted to the review of commissioning arrangements for specialised services of which many were composite responses:

Regional specialised commissioning groups: 11 responses

Local service providers: 14 responses

Commissioners: 3 responses

Patients' representatives, including voluntary sector organisations and carer's representatives: 14 responses

Plus a further four responses from medical professional bodies, three responses from joint Department/national health service bodies and other four responses.

Trust Mergers

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the acute hospitals in England and Wales that are subject to *(a)* merger and *(b)* restructuring proposals. [85792]

Mr. Hutton: The following acute hospitals in England are subject to merger proposals: Princess Royal Hospital NHS Trust and Royal Shrewsbury Hospital NHS Trust.

Information on individual trust based restructuring proposals is not held centrally.

Issues related to acute hospitals in Wales are a matter for the National Assembly for Wales.

Vaccinations

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what stocks of vaccines are held by the NHS for illnesses known to have the potential to be used in biological warfare. [86034]

Mr. Hutton: The Department holds stocks of anthrax and smallpox vaccines centrally on behalf of the national health service. Such stocks can be rapidly deployed across the United Kingdom for use in the NHS in the event of a bioterrorist incident. A small stock of Anthrax vaccine for protection against occupational exposure is held by the Public Health Laboratory Service (PHLS). A stock of botulinum antitoxin is also held by the PHLS for use in the NHS.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 19 December 2002

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Clergy

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the honourable Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners what plans there are to establish clergy on civil service terms. [87986]

Mr. Bell: The Archbishops' Council, acting as the Church of England's Central Stipends Authority, bases its recommendations for maternity and paternity provision and long term sick leave for parish clergy upon civil service terms and conditions. Most of the (relatively few) anglican clergy directly employed by the Council or by diocesan offices will also be on civil service terms.

On the wider question of future options in respect of clergy employment rights I refer the hon .Member to my answers earlier this month.

Statutory Employment Rights

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the honourable Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners (1) if he will make a statement on the timetable for the Commissioners' response to the DTI's discussion document on Employment Status in relation to Statutory Employment Rights; [87260]

(2) how many people whose salaries are paid by Church funds are not covered by employment legislation; [87261]

(3) what the terms of reference of the working group on clergy employment arrangements established by the Archbishops' Council are, and who the members are; [87281]

(4) if he would make a statement on the Archbishops' Council's announcement of 10th December on clergy employment.rights [87275]

Mr. Bell: The Archbishops' Council has responded to the DTI's discussion document on Employment Status in relation to Statutory Employment Rights. A copy of the response has been placed in the Library, along with the terms of reference and membership of the working group, and I am happy to provide the hon. Gentleman with his own copy.

From this he will note that there are approximately 9,000 clergy on the central payroll not covered by employment legislation, of which 5,500 have the freehold (and thus have greater employment security than most employees) and 3,500 operate under a bishop's licence (and have less).

CABINET OFFICE

Contingency Planning

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what discussions his Department has had with the Local Government Association and Emergency Planning Society regarding funding levels for emergency planning. [86599]

Mr. Alexander: Government provides funding for emergency planning in local authorities in England and Wales through the civil defence grant. The Government determines that level at which the grant is set. The LGA were involved in discussions earlier this year on how the grant should be allocated to local authorities.

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the principal and common medium is for effective and secure communication between emergency services involved in contingency provision, with particular reference to when more than one major geographical area of England is involved. [86600]

Mr. Alexander: The PSTN (Public Switched Telephone Network) is the principal common medium for communication between emergency services throughout the UK. Encrypted telephone instruments are available, for use with the PSTN, to provide secure communication.

Tom Brake: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what arrangements are in place to ensure that emergency services are able to efficiently and effectively liaise and work together in the event of a major civil disaster; and what common training and instructions exist to ensure that emergency services are able to efficiently work and communicate together in such an event. [86597]

Mr. Alexander: The Government's "Dealing with Disaster" (3rd Edition) sets out core guidance for all emergency services in achieving a co-ordinated response in the event of a major incident or disaster. The emergency procedures manuals of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), the Chief and Assistant Chief Fire Officers Association (CACFOA) and the Ambulance Services Association (ASA) all contain guidance on the management of emergencies.

Because of the lead role of the police in co-ordinating the emergency services response to major incidents, the ACPO guidance sets out, in detail, the relationships and working arrangements between all of the emergency services in responding to a major incident. These arrangements are jointly exercised against different scenarios.

The emergency services each have an emergency procedures sub-committee, which meets regularly to ensure that they abide by best practice in co-ordinating responses.

Apart from their own individual service training and exercise schedules, the emergency services regularly run joint exercises both to train for and to validate their joint response arrangements, especially command, control, and communications. The Cabinet Office Emergency Planning College regularly hosts and runs multi-agency

major incident management events. For specific scenario exercising and training, such as those around chemical plants, civil nuclear power stations and major transport arrangements (by rail, sea and air), scenario-based multi-agency exercises are regularly carried out (often as a requirement under licensing regulations). Post Exercise Reports are regularly lodged, for wider dissemination and information, at the Emergency Planning College.

Government Car Service

Andrew Selous: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many cars manufactured outside the United Kingdom are used by the Government car service, broken down by manufacturer. [87833]

Mr. Alexander: Responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the framework document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its Chief Executive, Mr. Nick Matheson, to write to the hon. Member.

WALES

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year; [88105]

(2) how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88133]

Peter Hain: I anticipate sending some 600 Christmas cards; my ministerial colleague expects to send up to 500. The total cost of printing these cards is expected to be some £484, postage will be payable on many but not all. It is not possible to accurately measure the staff time involved in issuing them.

I am placing a sample of my card in the Library.

My Department has spent £15 on hosting a party for "Daffodil Kids"—an organisation which provides outings for seriously ill Welsh children.

Other than these, there has been no cost to the public purse arising from Christmas entertaining, decorating, or related festive activities this year.

My Department has no agencies and I have no official residence.

Cockle Industry (Burry Inlet)

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what representations he has received in relation to the cockle industry in the Burry Inlet. [86770]

Peter Hain: None. However, my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary has received representations from hon. Members representing affected areas of the cockle industry in Wales. These include the Burry Inlet. I am aware that the fishery has been closed for many months during the past two years, following an outbreak of Diarrhetic Shellfish Poisoning (DSP) in cockles. I understand that the fishery is open at the moment.

I understand that the National Assembly for Wales, which has responsibility for fisheries issues, is working with the Food Standards Agency, with the Environment Agency and with Carmarthen and Swansea unitary authorities, to identify the causes of the outbreak, and to agree possible solutions.

I am also advised that the National Assembly for Wales is in the final stages of negotiations with the European Commission about state aids clearance for a compensation scheme for cockle gatherers who have suffered financial hardship because of the closure of the fishery.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87704]

Peter Hain *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The creation of the National Assembly for Wales in July 1999 means that any extant 1998 targets will now lie with the Assembly rather than with my Department.

Statutory Instruments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many Statutory Instruments subject to negative procedure made by his Department *(a)* came into force and *(b)* were considered by a delegated legislation committee in each of the last three sessions. [88035]

Peter Hain: The number of negative resolution statutory instruments made solely by my Department in each of the last three Sessions is as follows:

Session	*Number*
1999–2000	1
2000–01	2
2001–02	1

These statutory instruments were considered by the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments but no points were raised. My Department is also responsible for drafting Orders in Council relating to Wales, some of which may be subject to negative resolution procedure.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Transsexual People

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Minister for Women what her policy is on including the treatment of transsexuals who are now women within her Department's work. [87277]

Ms Hewitt: The treatment of transsexual people under the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 is already part of the Department of Trade and Industry's responsibilities. The Sex Discrimination Act (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 amended the 1975 Act to protect people intending to undergo, undergoing, or who have undergone gender reassignment from discrimination at work and in vocational training.

The part of the Department with responsibility for these Regulations is the Women and Equality Unit. The wider issue of the legal status of transsexual people is the lead responsibility of the Lord Chancellor's Department.

DEFENCE

Accident Inquiries

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W, on accident inquiries, whether his Department records the results of boards of inquiry; how many boards of inquiry have been held by his Department in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [87936]

Dr. Moonie: The results of boards of inquiry are recorded by the authority that convenes the board, but there are no central records.

I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 1W, and 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W. The information concerning the number of boards of inquiry in the Ministry of Defence is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many accidents in each of the last five years in which damage was done to MOD property or equipment cost over £100,000 to repair; and if he will make a statement. [87924]

Dr. Moonie: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave him on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 1W, and 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 926W. Information concerning the number of accidents involving Ministry of Defence property and equipment that have cost over £100,000 to repair is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Alcohol/Drug Misuse

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to reduce *(a)* alcohol and *(b)* drug misuse in the armed forces. [86955]

Dr. Moonie: The armed forces employ vigorous education programmes-including pamphlets, films and lectures-at all stages of military training and service to ensure that personnel are aware of the dangers of alcohol and drug misuse. The programmes are regularly reviewed and updated as necessary, and are complemented by administrative and disciplinary measures to deter misuse.

Defence Procurement

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the total expenditure on defence procurement was for the last year in which figures are available; and how much of it was spent in Scotland. [86005]

Dr. Moonie: In 2000–01 (the latest year for which published figures are available) procurement expenditure was estimated to be £10,408 million (Table 1.7 UK Defence Statistics, a copy of which is available in the Library of the House, refers). Of this approximately £2,800 million was for the sum of associated costs, intramural research and development spending, overseas equipment expenditure and unrecoverable VAT. The balance, which represents estimated equipment expenditure with United Kingdom industry and commerce, is some £7,600 million. It is not possible to provide a regional breakdown from data available. All of these figures exclude Ministry of Defence non-equipment expenditure on items such as fuel, utilities and some support activities.

Iraq

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contingency plans he has for emergency medical procedures being carried out in the field to troops encountering *(a)* biological and *(b)* chemical weapons in Iraq in the event of a war; and if he will make a statement. [86490]

Dr. Moonie *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* No decisions have yet been made concerning military action against Iraq.

Members of the United Kingdom armed forces are afforded a range of countermeasures which would help protect them against the adverse health effects of chemical and biological weapons. These include physical protection, vaccines and antibiotics against biological agents, and nerve agent pre-treatment sets and Combopen injectors against chemical agents.

Procedures exist for the medical treatment and, if necessary, evacuation of personnel in the event of exposure, or possible exposure, to chemical or biological agents.

Legal Fees

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has *(a)* spent on legal fees as a result of cases brought against his Department, *(b)* paid out in out of court settlements and *(c)* paid out in court-ordered compensation in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [87923]

Dr. Moonie: The amount spent on legal fees as a result of cases brought against the Ministry of Defence is not recorded separately for the years in question and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The amounts paid in out of court settlements and in court-ordered payments are not recorded separately, but the total amounts paid in compensation and legal costs in both categories for the last five years were:

£ million

Financial year	*Amount paid*
1997–98	69.22
1998–99	75.20
1999–2000	75.57
2000–01	87.53
2001–02	91.26

Military Bases

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to his answer of 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 930W, on military bases (legal officers), what welfare and support services there are separate from the chain of command offered to members of the armed forces by his Department; what legal advice is available for members of the armed forces through the range of welfare and support services separate from the chain of command offered by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [87935]

Dr. Moonie: Welfare and support services available to service personnel on military bases include chaplains, medical officers, unit welfare officers and agencies such as SSAFA—Forces Help, RELATE and WRVS. A confidential helpline is also available. These services enjoy varying degrees of separateness or independence from the chain of command. All have appropriate rules of confidentiality.

None of the welfare services provide legal advice per se. However, they may advise an individual to seek independent legal advice where it is felt appropriate. Any service person who is interviewed in connection with a possible offence may make use of the duty solicitor scheme.

Military Training

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of the enforcement of preventing public access on byelawed land when military training takes place. [87377]

Dr. Moonie: Every training area and range affected by military byelaws is subject to a risk assessment in accordance with the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999. This risk assessment considers the hazard to the general public if they should enter a byelawed training area or range in error or with intent. Various control measures, which can include signing, flagging or local notification, are then implemented in light of the risk assessment. We are satisfied with the effectiveness of these arrangements.

Nuclear Weapons Tests

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on progress in the clean-up and environmental restoration of the contamination caused by nuclear weapons testing on Christmas Island since 1992. [87727]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence arranged and took part in a specialist Reconnaissance Survey to Kiritimati during September 1998. This was to identify the types and quantities of waste materials, including an assessment of environmental risks associated with the nuclear test programme in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

A further visit was made to Kiritimati in August 2000 by MOD and independent specialists to gather further detailed information for the proposed clean-up project.

The clean-up of the waste material is to be undertaken by contractors appointed and managed by specialists from the MOD. Preparatory work is currently under way with the actual clean-up work on site expected to start during 2003.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Adulterated Food

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many successful prosecutions have been brought since 1997 against persons who have doctored and sold on to retailers adulterated food which is unfit for human consumption; what the *(a)* average length of imprisonment and *(b)* fine levied was; and if he will make a statement. [86589]

Hilary Benn: I have been asked to reply.

The available information is given in the table.

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty and sentenced at all courts for certain offences under the Food Safety Act 1990, England and Wales 1997–2001

Offence	*Statute*	*Year*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Fine*	*Average fine amount (£)*	*Immediate custody*	*Average custody length (months)*
Rendering food injurious to health	Food Safety Act 1990, section 7	1997	7	7	6	325	—	—
		1998	5	5	5	760	—	—
		1999	5	5	5	1,260	—	—
		[1]2000	2	1	—	—	—	—
		2001	—	—	—	—	—	—

Defendants proceeded against at magistrates' courts and found guilty and sentenced at all courts for certain offences under the Food Safety Act 1990, England and Wales 1997–2001

Offence	*Statute*	*Year*	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*	*Fine*	*Average fine amount (£)*	*Immediate custody*	*Average custody length (months)*
Selling food not complying with food safety requirements	Ibid, section 8	1997	170	111	106	1,150	—	—
		1998	144	112	99	1,400	2	3.5
		1999	107	70	65	2,107	—	—
		[1]2000	76	58	55	1,592	—	—
		2001	92	64	61	4,083	—	—
Selling food not of the nature or substance or quality demanded	Ibid, section 14	1997	122	90	81	1,071	—	—
		1998	131	95	84	1,127	—	—
		1999	82	63	60	1,194	—	—
		[1]2000	66	47	46	1,046	—	—
		2001	39	31	25	2,168	—	—
Falsely describing or presenting food	Ibid, section 15	1997	50	36	28	812		
		1998	73	59	47	649	—	—
		1999	59	50	44	756	—	—
		[1]2000	62	45	40	1,035	—	—
		2001	43	36	31	755	—	—

[1] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Transsexual People

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what plans he has to amend the genuine occupation requirements included in the Sex Discrimination (Gender Reassignment) Regulations 1999 to remove reasons for refusing transsexuals jobs. [87279]

Ms Hewitt: I have been asked to reply.

The Government is now considering whether, once legal recognition is given to a transsexual person's acquired gender, the Genuine Occupational Qualifications exceptions in the Gender Reassignment Regulations should be modified.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Military Exports

Mr. Pound: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has in respect of military exports to ensure that end-use certificates specify final user and destination. [87287]

Nigel Griffiths: End user undertakings must be consistent with the model format published on the Department of Trade & Industry's Export Control Organisation website, which specifies the end user and destination.

The website address is *http://www.dti.gov.uk/export.control*

Nuclear Materials

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the progress of the UK's contribution to clearing-up nuclear materials in the former Soviet Union. [86956]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has now completed putting in place a fairly complex project and risk management framework to allow us to commit substantial UK funding to assist Russia in particular through our Former Soviet Union Nuclear Legacy Programme. The budget for this programme is some £32 million next year and is expected to run at least this level for the foreseeable future. The programme covers a wide range of nuclear legacy issues including supporting work on weapons plutonium disposition, closed nuclear cities, nuclear safety technical assistance, nuclear security projects, social consequences projects and contributing funding to multilateral projects on decommissioning and the Chernobyl Shelter.

A number of important projects have already been identified and the means of delivery is now in place to assist in tackling the nuclear legacy in NW Russia an area where we expect up to a third of our funding to be focused over the next few years. UK grant-aid funding for work to provide for the safe management of spent nuclear fuel stocks and for dismantling decommissioned nuclear submarines is therefore ready to flow now. However, before this funding can commence with actual projects on the ground, a suitable legal framework must be agreed with Russia to cover important issues such as third part liability, taxation and access. Hopefully, and after some delay, we are in the final stages of concluding just such a bilateral agreement under which substantive project work will begin. A similar multilateral agreement is also, again hopefully, in its final stages and will provide the mechanism for substantial multilateral assistance. I would emphasise however that the delay in signing the bilateral agreement has not delayed the preparation of projects and a number will be ready to go as soon as the agreement is in place next year.

The nuclear legacy in NW Russia, as represented by the 100 or so decommissioned nuclear submarines and their associated spent fuel and waste, is such that it is only by active bilateral and multilateral funding that they can be tackled quickly and safely. The UK is

playing a leading role in ensuring co-operation and coordination with Russia and between the various donor countries in order that this funding is effective.

Attending the Baltic Conference of Energy Ministers in Vilnius, Lithuania in November, I committed £700,000 to purchase and install physical protection equipment for two Russian nuclear-powered icebreakers. During this visit I also met with representatives of the UK industry actively involved in planning for the decommissioning of the Ignalina nuclear power station and ameliorating the social consequences of nuclear power plant closure. UK companies have vast experience in these areas and through our social consequences work, we are supporting a number of regeneration and economic projects in Lithuania and Ukraine.

We will be publishing the first annual report about progress in establishing this programme early next year and further details of specific projects and the programme will be made available on the DTI web site.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to which bodies her Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87397]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by her Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87181]

Ms Hewitt: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Details of DTI expenditure is not broken down by local authority area.

Debt Advisory Agencies

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry whether the rates of interest charged by debt advisory agencies is included in her review of customer credit legislation. [88043]

Miss Melanie Johnson: A specific investigation of the rates charged by debt advisory agencies will not form a part of the Consumer Credit Review. We are, however, planning to consult on ways to improve the consumer credit licensing regime and to increase protection for consumers in respect of extortionate credit in general.

All providers of debt management and advisory services are required to be licensed by the Director General of Fair Trading under the Consumer Credit Act 1974. In December 2001, the Office of Fair Trading issued guidance to consumer credit licence holders and applicants on how it expects debt management companies to conduct their affairs.

Export Licences

Mr. Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if he will list the *(a)* items and *(b)* value of the items, exported under the open individual export licences (i) Bolivia, numbers 1 to 9, (ii) Kenya, numbers 1 to 30, (iii) Ghana, numbers 1 to 16, (iv) Angola, numbers 1 to 4, (v) Zambia, numbers 1 to 5, (vi) Yemen, numbers 1 to 3 and (vii) Tanzania, numbers 1 and 2 granted in 2001. [87259]

Nigel Griffiths *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the right hon. and learned Member to my reply to the hon. Member for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 18 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 53W.

Intellectual Property Rights

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she has recently consulted trade bodies and user groups about proposals to change the UK's powers over intellectual property rights in international forums. [88008]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Changes are under consideration in the Convention on the Future of Europe whose working documents are in the public arena. The work of the Convention has been drawn to the attention of industry and user representatives. Formal proposals have not yet emerged, but two relevant recommendations under discussion include a separate article for IP issues within a new EU treaty and extension of qualified majority voting to all areas of commercial policy including intellectual property. Further discussion on these issues will take place in the coming months.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what plans she has to recommend changes to the division of responsibilities for intellectual property rights between the EU and the UK. [88009]

Miss Melanie Johnson: Changes are under consideration in the Convention on the Future of Europe. Formal proposals have not yet emerged, but two relevant recommendations under discussion include a separate article for IP issues within a new EU treaty and extension of qualified majority voting to all areas of commercial policy including intellectual property. Further discussion on these issues will take place in the coming months.

Small Business Charter

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on the implementation of the Small Business Charter, announced at the Lisbon summit. [88045]

Nigel Griffiths: The UK and its European partners are continuing to implement the 10 key enterprise measures in the European Charter for Small Enterprises. The European Commission's second annual implementation report to the last Spring Council noted that progress has

undoubtedly been made, but that there was clearly scope for further development. The Commission will produce its third annual implementation report early in 2003. This report will again take account of national reports. The UK's report recounted further progress across all areas in the period up to September 2002. The UK's report has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Abuja Talks

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of the talks in Abuja, Nigeria, organised by the African Development Bank and the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation, regarding Africa's agricultural problems, held on 11–12 December. [88078]

Clare Short: Talks on the NEPAD Vision for Agricultural Development and Food Security in Africa were held in Abuja from 11–12 December 2002. The talks pledged African governments and regional organisations to working on action plans and programmes on food security and agricultural development, to be implemented especially at a regional level. There was recognition of the opportunities presented by NEPAD and the need to prepare and implement short, medium and long-term bankable projects.

Afghanistan

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, with regard to health programmes in Afghanistan, what monies *(a)* her Department has pledged, *(b)* her Department has delivered, *(c)* other G8 countries have pledged and *(d)* other G8 countries have delivered. [61757]

Clare Short: In the current financial year, we have disbursed £2 million to the World Health Organisation. This is in addition to funds that have supported NGOs working in the health sector through the QIPs (Quick Impact Projects) scheme. A further £1 million has also been earmarked for the health sector for this year. The manner in which it will be disbursed has yet to be decided. Capacity building for the Ministry of Health has, however, been flagged as a priority.

It is not possible at this time to give detailed information on the activities of other donors in the health sector. We have supported the Afghanistan Transitional Authority (ATA) in developing a database that will begin to capture such information from 2003. Aid pledged in support of health programmes is delivered in a variety of different manners: bilaterally, multilaterally and through the Afghan Reconstruction Trust fund.

However, we are aware of specific pledges for the health sector of at least US$100 million from donors, including the World bank, the Asian Development bank, USAID, GTZ, the EU, JICA and the Canadian and Norwegian Governments.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with government ministers in Afghanistan to ensure the safety of Afghan girls attending school. [80562]

Clare Short: We are concerned about the reports of attacks on girls' schools in various parts of Afghanistan. Although we are only aware of a limited number of incidents and millions of girls are going back to school, this is a worrying signal of the threat to the equal status of women and girls in Afghanistan. This must be addressed through a comprehensive effort to improve gender equality. During my recent visit to Afghanistan I met the Afghan Affairs Minister, Dr. Habiba Sorabi, and representatives of women's groups. We discussed the factors affecting girls returning to school as well as the wider issue of women's rights.

African Development

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the US Government about the role of the Millennium Challenge Corporation in Africa; and if she will make a statement. [87872]

Clare Short: DFID has had frequent senior level contact with the US Administration on the development of its Millennium Challenge Account since it was announced in March this year. We have encouraged the USA to focus the Account's resources on the poorest countries, many of which are in Africa.

The US Administration has recently announced the criteria against which it proposes that the Millennium Challenge Corporation should manage the Account. But it is not yet clear how many, or which, African countries can be expected to qualify, or how much of the funding will go to Africa.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the members of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, regarding the role of the US Millennium Challenge Corporation in Africa. [87873]

Clare Short: Baroness Amos (the Prime Minister's G8 Special Representative on Africa) recently met G8 colleagues and NEPAD representatives in Accra to discuss implementation of the G8 Africa Action Plan, which includes a section on aid volume and effectiveness. The role of the Millennium Challenge Corporation in Africa was not discussed explicitly in Accra. We continue to work with African governments and other donors on aid effectiveness and are encouraging the US Administration to focus the work of the Millennium Challenge Corporation on low income countries, many of which are in Africa.

African Union

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which member states of the African Union have adopted the Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance. [87215]

Clare Short: The Declaration on Democracy, Political, Economic and Corporate Governance was jointly made by all member states of the African Union at the inaugural Durban meeting of the African Union in June 2002. It affirms commitment to the governance codes and standards which will be used as the basis for peer reviews.

Good Governance

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Treasury on the interaction between the new US Government programme to reward emerging markets that meet their criteria of good governance and the Chancellor of the Exchequer's new International Development Finance Facility. [87874]

Clare Short: The UK's proposal to establish a new International Financing Facility would allow participating Governments to disburse resources through existing effective bilateral and multilateral mechanisms. If the US Government wishes, this could include the US Millennium Challenge Account. The Government's view is that an increased share of development assistance should go to the countries in which aid is used most effectively, i.e. countries with high levels of poverty and a good policy environment, and be delivered through development agencies which share a commitment to the improved management of aid. The Chancellor of the Exchequer and I and our respective Departments are working closely together on this proposal.

Health Care and Education

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries her Department has financed *(a)* health care and *(b)* education projects that have involved an element of privatisation. [87428]

Clare Short: My Department is focused on improving health and education services for the poor and favours policies that achieve this objective. We do, however, recognise the importance of the private sector in delivering services to the poor. For example, 50–80 per cent. of all health care expenditures in developing countries are through the private sector. In parallel to our work to strengthen public sector health systems, DFID support to private sector providers seeks to increase access to high quality health services for the poor. Examples of interventions include support to social marketing of condoms and contraceptives and bed nets to prevent malaria.

HIV/AIDS

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which countries have benefited from the investment by the Department of International Development on HIV/AIDS related bilateral work since last year; and by how much. [88057]

Clare Short: The information requested is set out as follows. Please note these figures do not include expenditure on regional programmes or non region specific work on programmes and research based in the UK.

HIV/AIDS related expenditure by country

	£000
Afghanistan	351
Angola	0
Bangladesh	17,886
Belarus, Republic of	8
Bolivia	2,294
Brazil	10
Burkina Faso	0
Burma	57
Cameroon	0
Cambodia	906
China	2,426
Cuba	49
Ecuador	83
Ethiopia	92
Ghana	129
Guyana	84
Haiti	72
Honduras	123
India	5,894
Iran	334
Kazakhstan, Republic of	13
Kenya	8,011
Laos	0
Lesotho	74
Macedonia	0
Malawi	15,673
Mali	80
Mexico	42
Moldova, Republic of	12
Mongolia	24
Montserrat	424
Mozambique	7,079
Namibia	166
Nepal	1,886
Nicaragua	90
Nigeria	2,015
Pakistan	2,472
Peru	139
Russian Federation	784
Rwanda	1,072
Senegal	147
Serbia and Montenegro	807
Sierra Leone	408
Somali Democratic Rep	6
South Africa, Republic of	5,570
Sri Lanka	82
Sudan	452
Swaziland	54
Tanzania	46,944
Togo	47
Uganda	2,103
Ukraine	52
Vietnam	76
West Bank and Gaza	575
Yugoslavia	0
Zambia	4,005
Zimbabwe	8,778

Information Communication Technology

Mr. Bercow: Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, if she will make a statement on the progress of the work of the United Nations Development Programme in information and communications technology. [64978]

Clare Short: UNDP has been active in the field of information communication technology (ICT) since 1993 in close to 90 countries through a combination of global, regional and national programmes. In the initial

phases of its work, UNDP's focus was largely on creating awareness, building capacity, and supporting ICT for development at the community and national level. The focus has now widened following discussions with UNDP's Executive Board in June 2001. UNDP now includes assisting countries with ICT for development policies, the formulation and implementation of prioritised national e-development strategies. Other programme initiatives which signify further progress are that of ICT to enhance democratic governance (e-governance), economic and social development (for example, micro finance, e-business, ICT to support local development) at local and national levels.

Kenya

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of levels of food security in north-west Kenya; and if she will make a statement. [88079]

Clare Short: Following several years of poor rains and drought, the food security situation in north-west Kenya remains precarious. But heavy rainfall is now bringing both immediate respite and better prospects for significant improvements in the availability of water, pasture and browse. For the first time in two years, recovery is now a real possibility. DFID continues to monitor the situation in close collaboration with the Government of Kenya, the UN, NGO's and other donors.

Since 1999, DFID has spent over £18 million on drought-related assistance to Kenya. Most of this has been targeted on the north of the country.

New Partnership for Africa's Development

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made on the African Peer Review Mechanism within NEPAD on *(a)* economic values, *(b)* governance values and *(c)* corporate values. [87213]

Clare Short: At the Abuja meeting of the NEPAD Implementation Committee, 13 countries signed up for peer review. The full details of the process will be settled in January, but we understand that a group of eminent persons will oversee reviews carried out by technical experts. The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa will be involved in the technical reviews of economic governance, and has had a series of useful exchanges on the process of peer review with the OECD DAC.

Poverty Reduction

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial assistance her Department is providing in 2002–03 to *(a)* Bolivia, *(b)* Pakistan and *(c)* India in support of policy reforms and poverty reduction measures. [67484]

Clare Short: The information is as follows:

Bolivia

We have allocated some £10 million for our total bilateral development assistance programme for 2002–03 in Bolivia. Additionally, Bolivia will benefit from DFID funds contributed to multilateral organisations such as the World bank and IADB, through grants to civil society organisations. The EC is providing £80.7 million for 2002–06, of which DFID's share is around 19 per cent.

We have now moved away from supporting discrete bilateral projects to support for government-led policy reforms within the context of the Bolivian poverty reduction strategy, concentrating on adding value to the international community's support to Bolivia's development effort. We are focusing our support in two areas—the integration of economic and social policy, recognising the key role of the informal economy for poor people's livelihoods, and enhancing social inclusion and participation in political processes within a more accountable and transparent institutional framework.

India

DFID has allocated £230 million of development assistance to India in financial year 2002–03. The EC is providing £17.9 million in 2002–03, of which DFID's share is around 19 per cent.

Our development programme in India, where on in three of the world's poor live, is aimed at helping Government, at both national and state level, to deliver pro-poor policies and services. We are working closely with four partner states committed to poverty reduction, including on their programmes of fiscal and public service reform.

We are also working on increasing access to basic health, education, and water and sanitation services for the poor, on promoting better management of the natural and physical environment, and on promoting greater empowerment of the poor, especially women and the marginalised.

Pakistan

DFID has allocated £60 million of development assistance to Pakistan in financial year 2002–03, of which £40 million is financial aid. £105.7 million is being provided by the EC for 2002–06, again with DFID's share being around 19 per cent.

We are committed to supporting Pakistan's economic and social development for the long haul. The ultimate aim is the reduction of poverty as set out in the Government of Pakistan's interim poverty reduction strategy paper.

DFID's bilateral programme is focused on three objectives: creating the economic conditions for poverty reduction; improving health outcomes for poor people and improving education outcomes for poor people.

River Congo

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 62W, on the River Congo, what preventive measures are being taken to reduce the impact of a flooding of the river. [88148]

Clare Short: DFID funds a number of humanitarian agencies in DRC that specialise in interventions to minimise the effects of man made and natural disasters. Specifically, the United Nations Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs operates an emergency response programme to which DFID has contributed £500,000. The International Committee of the Red Cross is also mandated to respond to provide humanitarian assistance, should urgent needs arise. DFID is in the process of finalising a contribution of £2.5 million to the ICRC for DRC. We have also provided support to an OXFAM water and sanitation programme in Kinshasa. Effective intervention in this sector will be critical if significant flooding does occur.

South Africa

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department is giving in 2002–03 to provide safe water for the people of South Africa; and if she will make a statement. [87869]

Clare Short: My Department anticipates spending £1.36 million on water and sanitation in South Africa in 2002–03. A new £11.54 million DFID support programme started in September 2002. The programme will run for five years, with an anticipated spend in 2003–04 of £2.9 million.

In addition, we contribute around £2.7 million per year to EU water and sanitation programmes in South Africa.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment she has made of the US Aid Padco Report on water privatisation in South Africa. [87870]

Clare Short: I have made no assessment of the report. The report was commissioned by the Municipal Infrastructure Investment Unit, a body set up by, and accountable to, the South African Department of Provincial and Local Government, using funding from USAID. It is part of a broad series of small research projects to help inform the Government of South Africa's policy thinking around PPPs.

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had on water privatisation in South Africa with *(a)* the South African Municipal Workers Union and *(b)* non-governmental organisations working in the country. [87871]

Clare Short: My Department has not engaged in bilateral discussions on the subject of water privatisation with either the South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) or NGOs. However, SAMWU and the NGO community are represented on both the Water Sector Leadership Group (WSLG) and the Steering Committee for the SA Government's Masibambane water and sanitation programme. My Department is also represented on both committees. The subject of water privatisation has on occasions been discussed at both the Masibambane meetings and WSLG.

Southern Africa

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what efforts there have been to overcome delays to food imports in Zambia caused by the issuing of import licences. [88480]

Clare Short: DFID became aware of the delay in the issuing of import licences for food imports in Zambia in mid November. The WFP brought this up at a meeting with the Deputy Minister of Finance at the end of November and he agreed to facilitate the prompt issue of import licences if this remained a problem. My officials have encouraged WFP to pursue this issue.

Import licences are currently being issued within a week of request, which is sufficient to avoid delays to the WFP food pipeline.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made by the World Food Programme in completing the contract for the transportation of food aid to southern Africa. [88482]

Clare Short: The World Food Programme is doing an excellent job in trying to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the southern Africa region. Food Aid received in Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe since July 2002 amounts to 344,830MT. WFP, with help from DFID, is actively trying to avoid any break in the food pipeline this month. WFP's key constraint in maintaining and building up the pipeline for the height of the humanitarian crisis in January and February is getting the funding it needs from donors. We are continuing to press other donors to do more, and the UK remains the second largest bilateral donor to the crisis.

Sustainable Crops (Africa)

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance the UK is giving the underdeveloped countries of Africa to produce sustainable crops. [87766]

Clare Short: My Department works with developing countries to ensure that their poverty reduction strategies reflect the need to manage environmental resources, including agricultural production, sustainably. Sustainability must be seen in its widest context. It is not just a matter of the ecology of agricultural systems themselves, but the impact of these systems on the lives and opportunities of others, particularly poor consumers and producers. Sustainability in one system cannot be at the expense of sustainability in others.

My Department also supports a significant number of programmes and projects throughout the developing world that seek to provide direct benefits to poor people whose livelihoods are dependent on agriculture. Many of these include the provision of support to sustainable agriculture, either through training and knowledge/technology transfer, institutional capacity building and reform (e.g. strengthening co-operatives and other forms of producer groups and improving agricultural service delivery) or the funding of research, both national and international.

This year, DFID expects to spend about £35 million on natural resources research. While sustainability is a cornerstone for all our research programmes, a significant proportion of the programme is focused on developing and transferring technologies specifically for sustainable agriculture.

Copies of the DFID issues paper "Better Livelihoods for Poor People: The Role of Agriculture and the Renewable Natural Resources Research Strategy" publication are available in the Libraries of the House.

Uganda

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the plans for privatisation of water in towns in Uganda; and if she will make a statement. [87876]

Clare Short: The central theme of the urban reform process in Uganda is private sector management of existing utilities, as opposed to privatisation. A recent review by the World bank revealed that this shift has realised efficiency gains, with the National Water and Sanitation Corporation now showing an operating profit. DFID has a £5 million programme of support to the water and sanitation sector in Uganda, focused on financing the rural sector, but through which we also engage in policy dialogue on urban reform. In addition, we provide technical assistance to the Utility Reform Unit, which is leading the urban water reform programme. We have recently commissioned a review of lessons learned from private sector participation in the water sector, with the view to considering further support for assessing the social impact of new policies.

Urban Sewage Projects

Mr. Key: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department is giving to urban sewage projects in *(a)* Africa, *(b)* Asia and *(c)* Latin America in 2002–03. [87875]

Clare Short: The latest period for which details of expenditure are available is 2001–02. Allocation is defined by current DAC categories for the water sector, which do not differentiate between water supply and sanitation. My Department's bilateral expenditure on urban water supply and sanitation in the period 2001–02 was as follows:

	£
Africa	8 million
Asia	12.7 million
Central and South America	100,000

Uzbekistan

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the total amount of UK bilateral aid to Uzbekistan was in the last year for which figures are available. [87652]

Clare Short: In 2001–02, the last year for which figures are available, the total amount of UK bilateral aid to Uzbekistan was £362,000.

Funding is also provided via the EC, of which DFID's share is around 19 per cent. In 2000, our contribution to Uzbekistan was approximately £1.3 million.

Working Group on Access to Medicines

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what research and development into medicines and vaccines her Department's Working Group on Access to Medicines has undertaken since it was established. [88022]

Clare Short: The High Level Working Group on Access to Medicines' task, among others, was to consider ways to increase research and development (R&D) for diseases that affect poor people in the developing world. The group has now reported to the Prime Minister and put forward options for partnerships and policies that can help resolve market failure and re-shape incentives for industry, and to ensure investment by the pharmaceutical industry on R&D for diseases of poor people is monitored. One positive advance has been the Government's announcement, in April, to extend tax relief to companies involved in R&D for HIV/AIDS, TB and malaria relevant to the developing world.

The group recognised that investment in R&D for childhood diseases and six additional tropical diseases remains critically short. My Department currently invests in a number of R&D partnerships in this area and will continue to look at policy options that can further increase R&D for neglected diseases. The Government are taking forward a High Level Working Group recommendation to look at the potential that modified Orphaned Drug legislation might have to stimulate R&D investments for these neglected diseases.

Yemen

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made on the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper of the Yemen. [87548]

Clare Short: The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was submitted by the Government of Yemen to the Boards of the World bank and the IMF at the end of July, and subsequently approved by both.

The World bank hosted a Consultative Group meeting in Paris during October, which was attended by representatives from the Government and from donor agencies operating in Yemen. At this meeting, both the Government and the donor community affirmed their commitment to work together in implementing the Poverty Reduction Strategy over the course of the next three years.

Detailed discussions are now under way in Sana'a about how to implement that commitment and monitor progress.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her Department is doing to work with the Government of Yemen *(a)* on their basic education programme and *(b)* reproductive health. [87549]

Clare Short: My Department does not currently have a programme of work with the Government of Yemen in either the basic education or reproductive ealth sectors. Through the Small Grants Scheme

administered by the British Embassy, we are supporting some small-scale activities which are being implemented by non-governmental organisations at a local level.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money her Department will give to the Yemen in 2002–03 and if this will increase within the Framework of the Resource Allocation Round. [87550]

Clare Short: My Department expects to provide funding worth around £2.28 million to Yemen in 2002–03. The outcome of the Resource Allocation Round for future years will be known early in 2003.

Zimbabwe

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps are being taken to encourage school attendance in Zimbabwe. [88478]

Clare Short: There are programmes in Zimbabwe which aim to provide all primary school children with supplementary food. But there is a lack of funds to implement these programmes fully. Direct bilateral programmes, including DFID's supplementary feeding programme, are now providing over one million school children with a supplementary meal a day. Monitoring indicates that where feeding is being conducted, this has been successful in reducing drop-out rates.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development, pursuant to the answer of 10 July, *Official Report*, columns 957–8W, on HIV/AIDS, how money has been *(a)* allocated and *(b)* spent for HIV/AIDS-related programmes, broken down by country. [72433]

Clare Short: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Mr. Marsden) 23 July 2002, *Official Report*, columns 894–5W.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the impact which the decision of the Zimbabwean Government to ban the milling of GM maize has had on food relief efforts in the country. [88477]

Clare Short: Last week, the Government of Zimbabwe rescinded its decision to ban the importation of GM maize for milling in-country. Milling of GM food already in the country has resumed, agreement has been reached on the import of 17,500MT of GM grain which will also be milled in country. The National Food mill at Bulawayo has continued to mill, and the Gweru plant will also be brought on stream, bringing the authorised milling capacity in Zimbabwe to about 16,000MT/month.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what impact the break in food aid in the first two weeks of December has had in *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* Zambia. [88479]

Clare Short: It is now unlikely that there will be breaks in the food pipelines to either country during December, although the situation remains fragile. For Zimbabwe, against a target distribution of 50,000MT of maize for 4.5 million beneficiaries in 44 districts, the realistic distribution figure may be as low as 20,000MT. In order to allow for this shortage, WFP has introduced two ration scales: (i) 5Kg of maize will be distributed to families in districts that have been receiving food aid on a regular basis; and (ii) 10Kg of maize will be distributed to families in areas that have not received food aid thus far. All families will receive 1Kg of CSB and 1Kg of pulses. For Zambia, DFID has helped strengthen the WFP pipeline with a unique agreement between the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and WFP. This involves distributing 23,000MT of GRZ purchased maize through the WFP pipeline with transportation costs being met by DFID. This will ensure a full maize pipeline for Zambia during December.

SCOTLAND

Civil Defence

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if she will list the civil defence grant allocations by local authority, in *(a)* cash and *(b)* real terms; and if she will make a statement on civil defence in Scotland. [87035]

Mrs. Liddell: Civil Defence grant to Scottish local authorities ceased with the signing of the Civil Defence (Grant) (Scotland) Regulations 2001 in March 2001. Financial support for local authorities for the emergency planning work which they carry out continues to be provided at the request of local authorities through the normal GAE mechanism.

In Scotland there are well-established procedures for dealing with a wide range of civil emergencies. Following the events of 11 September a range of additional measures have been put in place. These provide significant funding for new equipment for the emergency services; new procedures for dealing with suspect packages; and guidance on dealing with the threat from, and consequences of, chemical and biological incidents. In addition my Department and Scottish Executive colleagues are fully involved in the work being led by the Cabinet Office in resilience planning across the UK.

Expenditure Limit

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her Written Ministerial Statement of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 29WS, whether the Scotland Office is running a budget surplus in the current financial year. [85194]

Mrs. Liddell: I expect Scotland Office expenditure to be contained within the Department Expenditure Limit in the current financial year.

Mrs. Lait: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland, pursuant to her Written Ministerial Statement of 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 29WS, what factors account for the increase in the Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limit arising from the take-up of the End Year Flexibility. [85195]

Mrs. Liddell: The increase in the Scotland Departmental Expenditure Limit is required to meet planned expenditure by the Scottish Executive and the Boundary Commission for Scotland, and to enable the Scotland Office to move towards its full staffing level.

Industrial and Provident Society Law

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive about amending industrial and provident society law; and if she will make a statement. [87888]

Mrs. McGuire: Scotland Office officials have discussed with executive officials the implications of the report by the Strategy Unit, "Private Action, Public Benefit", on charities and the wider not for profit sector. This report contains recommendations on bringing Industrial and Provident Society law up to date.

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the total expenditure of *(a)* her Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travel in 2001–02. [84794]

Mrs. Liddell *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Since 1999, the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Libraries of the House.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Total expenditure on travel by my Department in 2001–02 was £305,000.

Organic Food

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how the target for increasing the market share of UK-produced organic foods over organic imports in the DEFRA Organic Action Plan will apply in Scotland. [87915]

Mrs. Liddell: Responsibility for agriculture in Scotland is devolved. While some of the elements of the DEFRA plan such as the compendium of standards will apply on a UK basis, the targets will not apply to Scotland. Scottish Executive Ministers have appointed an Organic Stakeholder Group to deliver an action plan with recommendations for future executive support for the organic sector in Scotland. The Group will consider a wide range of issues including future executive support for organic conversion, development of the organic food chain, research priorities and organic standards and certification. The group is due to report in January 2003.

Rail Links

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the proposed plans to redevelop a rail link between Edinburgh and the Scottish borders. [87761]

Mrs. Liddell: Following approval in July of an Order under Section 30 of the Scotland Act 1998, the Scottish Parliament now has legislative competence for the promotion and construction of railways wholly within Scotland. I understand that the Scottish Executive has provided £2 million to the promoter, the Waverley Railway Partnership, to help towards the costs of securing the necessary parliamentary powers for reinstating a railway connection between Edinburgh and the central Borders.

Sustainability Strategy

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the sustainability strategy is for her Department; and if she will make a statement on how it has changed since the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. [83505]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has limited executive responsibilities, but it is committed to the Government's sustainability development strategy in carrying out its functions.

Following devolution, most aspects of sustainable development in Scotland are the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. In April this year, the Executive published "Meeting the Needs—Priorities, Actions and Targets for Sustainable Development in Scotland". This identified resource use, energy and travel as the main priorities for action and set out indicators and targets for monitoring progress.

The outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, and first views on follow up, will be reflected in the annual report on UK progress on sustainable development for 2002.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Canoeing

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has to increase access to water for canoeing; and if he will make a statement. [87886]

Angela Smith: The Department for Culture, Arts and Leisure has a water recreation remit which allows it to provide and improve facilities for promoting the recreational or navigational use of waterways. The Department has funded the installation of public canoe steps and associated facilities on a number of Northern Ireland rivers under this programme. The Department is also administering a European-funded Water Recreation Development Programme 2001–04 for projects designed to develop the inland waterway network and improve water recreation facilities available to both local and tourist users.

In December this year the Countryside Access and Activities Network for Northern Ireland (CAAN) published a Report on "Canoeing in Northern Ireland—Strategic Review" which sets out a recommended way forward for the future development of canoeing.

Foetal Health

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what obligations there are on employers to provide protection for an unborn child at the mother's workplace. [88070]

Mr. Pearson: Obligations on employers to provide protection for an unborn child at the mother's workplace are provided through the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000. These regulations require employers to carry out risk assessments to identify hazards and take appropriate action to protect the health and safety of the expectant mother and her unborn child.

Local Government

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland when he will meet the National Association of Local Councillors (Northern Ireland Region) to discuss *(a)* members' allowances, *(b)* the future of local government and *(c)* other matters of mutual interest. [87320]

Mr. Paul Murphy: I have no immediate plans to meet the National Association of Councillors (Northern Ireland Region). Local Government issues are the responsibility of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Angela Smith), who has responsibility for the Department of the Environment. I understand she plans to meet members of the Association on a regular basis, as was the practice of the former Minister of the Environment (Dermot Nesbitt). Preparations for a meeting early in the new year are currently underway.

Sickness (Teachers)

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what measures are in place to reduce the number of teacher sickness absences in Northern Ireland. [88077]

Jane Kennedy: The monitoring of sick absences is the responsibility of teachers' employers.

Information on teacher absences in the controlled and maintained sectors is routinely made available by the Department to each Education and Library Board and the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools.

The Department of Education and the employing authorities are very much aware of the pressures and challenges facing teachers and are working closely with teacher representatives to seek ways of maintaining and improving the health of teachers. The Teachers' Health and Well-being Survey Report has just been published and a strategy group has been established to take forward its recommendations.

The Department and employers will also be looking very carefully at the recommendations in the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on The Management of Substitution Cover for Teachers, about identifying local patterns and trends so that reasonable targets for reducing sick absences can be set and monitored.

Supply Teachers

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what efforts he is making to ensure that schools in Northern Ireland give priority to offering supply teaching vacancies to young unemployed qualified teachers. [88076]

Jane Kennedy: The recruitment of substitute teachers is the responsibility of teachers' employers. Employers are encouraged to give preference to newly qualified teachers and experienced non-retired teachers who are seeking employment. Retired teachers should only be re-employed to provide short-term cover where newly qualified teachers or experienced non-retired teachers unavailable. Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment's (DETI) statistics for February 2002 (the latest month for which statistics are available) indicate there were only three teachers under 25 years of age registered as unemployed for more than six months.

Capping of the levels of the central reimbursement of the costs of substitute cover also provides an incentive for schools to employ newly qualified teachers as substitutes.

Youth Services

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how much is being spent in 2002–03 on youth service provision in *(a)* North Belfast, *(b)* East Belfast, *(c)* South Belfast and *(d)* West Belfast; and how many people are employed as (i) full-time staff and (ii) part-time staff in each area. [87406]

Jane Kennedy: It has not been possible to divide Belfast into areas corresponding to parliamentary constituencies. However, for Education and Library Board controlled and voluntary youth projects an attempt has been made to define the boundaries that are currently considered North, South, East and West within the Belfast Youth Service. The position in respect of 2002–03 for youth projects in these areas is as follows:

Area	*Spending (approx.) (£000)*	*Staffing*	
		Full-time	*Part-time*
(a) North	908	20	40
(b) East	413	9	49
(c) South	482	11	64
(d) West	812	24	63
Total	2,615	64	216

As Education and Library Board Support and other services such as outdoor education centres, support to uniform organisations, training, Duke of Edinburgh and headquarter staffing are city wide or city centre initiatives it has not been possible to breakdown the remaining spending of around £1 million or the remaining staffing provision.

The Belfast Regeneration Office of the Department for Social Development will have a total spend, during 2002–03, of £371,833 on youth service provision in North, South, East and West Belfast and will employ

seven full time and one part time staff during this period. Please see details of the breakdown of these figures in the following table.

Area/project name	Funding 2002–03 (£)	Number of employees
North Belfast		
Ballysillan Elim Church	1,456.00	0
Ardoyne Youth Providers' Forum	17,154.00	0
Artillery Youth Centre	23,143.00	0
Manor Street/Cliftonville Community Group	9,239.00	0
Total	50,992.00	0

TREASURY

National Insurance

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it Government policy not to *(a)* employ and *(b)* award contracts to a financial institution which uses offshore arrangements intended to avoid employers' national insurance liabilities, or has done so in the last three years. [R] [87712]

Mr. Boateng: Individual Government Departments are responsible for taking decisions on the goods and services they acquire—and from whom they acquire them—taking account of the Government's procurement policy of seeking value for money for the taxpayer. Under Regulation 14 (1) *(f)* and *(g)* of the Public Works, Services and Supply Contracts Regulations (SIs: 1991/2680, 1993/3228 and 1995/201 respectively), Departments may reject any potential supplier who has not fulfilled obligations relating to the payment of social security contributions or of taxes under the law of the UK and, where relevant, of another member state. This provision is not time limited.

Annual Convergence Programme

Barbara Follett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to submit an updated, annual Convergence Programme, as required by the Stability and Growth Pact. [88638]

Ruth Kelly: As required under the Stability and Growth Pact, an updated, annual Convergence Programme has today been submitted to the European Commission. Copies of the Programme are available in the Libraries of both Houses.

Community Care Grant and Budgeting Loan

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will increase the amount of money available to *(a)* the Community Care Grant and *(b)* the Budgeting Loan budget. [85289]

Malcolm Wicks: I have been asked to reply.

The discretionary Social Fund provides people on low incomes with grants and loans to help them manage a wide range of unexpected or occasional costs, including the purchase of beds and cookers, depending on their individual circumstances.

On 27 November, we announced that from April 2003, £90 million will be added to the discretionary Fund over the three years to 2005–06. This extra investment will enhance the fund's ability to help those on low incomes manage their finances.

We have already introduced a number of important changes to the Social Fund. We have simplified the budgeting loan scheme so that all applicants who satisfy the qualifying conditions, and have no outstanding Social Fund debt, will be offered a loan. We have also extended the qualifying conditions for community care grants to help people setting up home in the community who have been without a settled way of life.

ECOFIN

Mr. Hood: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the outcome was of the Special ECOFIN Council held on 11 December 2002; and what the Government's stance was on the issues discussed, including its voting record; and if he will make a statement. [87768]

Mr. Gordon Brown: I attended the special ECOFIN meeting on 11 December 2002.

There was a discussion of draft conclusions on the tax package, based on the proposals outlined by the Presidency at the 3 December 2002 ECOFIN meeting.

The Presidency confirmed that further discussion on this and energy taxation would be scheduled for the ECOFIN meeting on 21 January 2003. The Commission undertook to put in place appropriate measures to ensure that the French and Italian derogations, allowing reduced duty rates for hauliers, would be extended until then. No votes were taken at this meeting.

Economic Activity

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the 50 local authority areas with *(a)* the lowest and *(b)* the highest rates of economic inactivity. [88215]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 19 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on economic inactivity rates. (88215)

The attached table lists *(a)* the 50 local authority areas with the lowest economic inactivity rates and *(b)* the 50 local authority areas with the highest economic inactivity rates, for the twelve month period ending August 2002. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Economic inactivity rates[1] by local authority area; United Kingdom—Average of September 2001 to August 2002

	Inactivity rate (per cent.)
50 local authority areas with the lowest inactivity rates	
Test Valley	9.6
Welwyn Hatfield	10.0
Salisbury	10.1
Tandridge	10.5
Eastleigh	10.6
Cherwell	11.1
Blaby	11.1
Runnymede	11.2

Economic inactivity rates[1] by local authority area; United Kingdom—Average of September 2001 to August 2002

	Inactivity rate (per cent.)
Milton Keynes	11.2
West Oxfordshire	11.6
Crawley	12.2
Rushmoor	12.5
Spelthorne	12.5
Chichester	12.6
South Somerset	12.7
Broadland	12.8
Tewkesbury	12.9
Harrogate	12.9
South Staffordshire	13.0
Hambleton	13.2
Swindon	13.2
East Hertfordshire	13.3
South Kesteven	13.3
East Staffordshire	13.3
Reigate and Banstead	13.4
Vale of White Horse	13.4
Kingston upon Thames	13.5
East Hampshire	13.5
Winchester	13.5
South Derbyshire	13.6
Dacorum	13.6
North West Leicestershire	13.7
South Gloucestershire	13.8
Erewash	13.9
Northampton	13.9
Dudley	14.0
Bracknell Forest	14.0
Mid Sussex	14.0
South Cambridgeshire	14.1
Perth and Kinross	14.1
Fareham	14.1
Taunton Deane	14.3
West Berkshire	14.3
Woking	14.3
North Kesteven	14.4
Aylesbury Vale	14.4
Sutton	14.4
Wyre Forest	14.5
Rugby	14.5
Chelmsford	14.5
50 local authority areas with the highest inactivity rates	
Newham	39.6
Ceredigion	38.8
Tower Hamlets	38.5
Hackney	35.7
Liverpool	35.0
Torfaen	33.8
Neath Port Talbot	33.6
Hartlepool	33.3
Glasgow City	32.9
Manchester	32.8
Wear Valley	32.5
Westminster	32.4
Anglesey Isle of	31.6
Barrow-in-Furness	30.7
Pembrokeshire	30.3
Haringey	30.2
Easington	30.1
Newcastle upon Tyne	30.1
Knowsley	30.1
Nottingham	29.9
Blaenau Gwent	29.6
Islington	29.6
Leicester	29.4
Barnsley	29.3
Clackmannanshire	29.3
Carmarthenshire	29.2
Rhondda Cynon Taff	29.2
Redcar and Cleveland	29.1

Economic inactivity rates[1] by local authority area; United Kingdom—Average of September 2001 to August 2002

	Inactivity rate (per cent.)
Greenwich	28.9
Durham	28.7
Caerphilly	28.5
Northern Ireland	28.3
Southwark	28.2
Kingston upon Hull City of	28.2
Kensington and Chelsea	28.1
Merthyr Tydfil	28.0
Stockton-on-Tees	27.9
Ashfield	27.9
Cardiff	27.7
Birmingham	27.7
Sunderland	27.7
Inverclyde	27.6
Darlington	27.6
Burnley	27.4
Barking and Dagenham	27.3
Stoke-on-Trent	27.3
Wrexham	27.1
Scarborough	27.0
Wansbeck	27.0
Great Yarmouth	26.9

[1] Total economically inactive as a percentage of the resident population of working age.

Note:
These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates have not yet been adjusted to take account of the recent 2001 Census results.

Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

Insurance Premium Tax

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 263W on insurance premium tax, what material he has published reviewing insurance premium tax; and if he will publish an interim report. [87792]

Ruth Kelly: We have not published any material reviewing insurance premium tax and there are no current plans to do so.

North Sea Oil Profits

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the revenue from corporation tax on North Sea oil profits was in each year since 1997. [86666]

Dawn Primarolo: Receipts from North Sea corporation tax are given in Statistics Table 11.11 on Inland Revenue's website, http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/corporate_tax/ct_t11_1.htm

Pension Contribution Statistics

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will give a breakdown of line H of the table on page 31 of the ONS Review of Pension Contribution Statistics published on 10 October between transfers within the assured sector, transfers between the self-administered and assured sector and transfers from public sector schemes; [81798]

(2) if he will estimate the average contribution per head of those who *(a)* have made contributions and *(b)* have had contributions made on their behalf in each of the last five years, broken down by those who

have had the contributions made to (i) individual and personal pensions, (ii) self-administered occupational pension schemes and (iii) insurance-managed occupational pension schemes; and if he will make a statement; [81799]

(3) if he will estimate the number of individuals who have made contributions or who have had contributions made on their behalf in each of the last five years, broken down by those who have had the contributions made to *(a)* individual and personal pensions, *(b)* self-administered occupational pension schemes and *(c)* insurance-managed occupational pension schemes; [81800]

(4) how much has been contributed to funded pension schemes by individuals and employers in each of the last five years, broken down by individual and personal pensions, *(b)* self-administered occupational pension schemes and *(c)* insurance-managed occupational pension schemes. [81801]

(5) whether the checks referred to in paragraph 2 on page 30 of the ONS Review of Pension Contribution Statistics published on 10 October had been carried out between the time the Statistical Working Group met in June and the Review was published in October; what the result was of those checks; and whether they were taken into account in providing the answer to the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack), 29 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 689W; [81796]

(6) what deduction was made to the figure for gross contributions to allow for transfers of pension scheme assets that pass between the self-administered and insurance-managed sectors but remain within the same pension fund, when preparing the table on pages 31 and 32 of the ONS Review of Pension Contribution Statistics published on 10 October. [81797]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts dated 19 December 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent questions on pension contribution statistics. (81796, 81797, 81798, 81799, and 81801).

Question 112—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will give a breakdown of line H of the table on page 31 of the ONS Review of Pension Contribution Statistics published 10th October between transfers within the assured sector, transfers between self-administered and the assured sector and transfers from public sector schemes.

Annex B table 1 provides a framework for reconciling the gross inquiry data, provided by self-administered pension funds and insurance companies, with the total used by the Inland Revenue for contributions attracting tax relief.

Where data are drawn from our inquiries to pension funds and insurance companies, the 2001 figures are based on smaller quarterly samples and are provisional. They are usually subject to revision when the annual benchmark data become available.

Line H contains adjustments to exclude transfers from self-administered pension funds *(d)*; transfers within the assured sector *(c)*; and transfers from public sector schemes *(b)*. In addition an adjustment is made to total pension contributions, received by UK insurance companies, to remove premiums paid to UK companies by individuals overseas *(a)*. The adjustments, which are included in line H, are shown below:

Year	*Adjustment for UK only business a (£bn)*	*Adjustments for notionally and unfounded schemes b (£bn)*	*Surrenders/ refunds under group/ company sponsored schemes c (£bn)*	*Net transfers from (+) to (−) self-administered pension funds d (£bn)*
1997	0.3	0.2	7.5	0.4
1998	0.3	0.2	11.1	0.9
1999	0.3	0.2	14.8	-0.7
2000	0.3	0.2	14.3	-2.3
2001*(p)*	0.3	0.2	16.4	3.1

(p) Data for 2001 are provisional.

The row totals may be different from the total published in Annex B, due to rounding effects.

Question 114—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will estimate the number of individuals who have made contributions or who have had contributions made on their behalf in each of the last five years, broken down by those who have had the contribution made to *(a)* individual personal pensions, *(b)* self-administered occupational pension schemes and *(c)* insurance managed occupational pension schemes.

The Family Resources Survey estimates of the number of individuals contributing to either personal or occupational pensions in each of the five years are given below.

The estimates for occupational pensions can not be broken down into contributors to self-administered and insurance-managed schemes.

Numbers of working age individuals building up rights to a private, occupational and personal pension (millions)

	Private pension	*Occupational pension*	*Personal pension*
FRS			
1996–97	15.2	10.2	5.8
1997–98	15.0	10.3	5.6
1998–99	15.2	10.6	5.6
1999–2000*	14.5	10.6	4.2
2000–01*	14.5	10.9	4.0

Source:
Family Resources Survey GB
Rounding:
All figures are rounded to the nearest 100,000
Definitions:
Working age is defined as 16-State Pension Age
Private pensions:
Numbers contributing to a private pension are all those contributing to either occupational and/or personal pension
**Data from 1999/00 are not comparable with earlier data.*

Question 115—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, whether the checks refer to in paragraph 2 on page 30 of the ONS Review of Pension Contribution Statistics published on 10th October had been carried out between the time the Statistical Working Group met in June and the Review was published in October; what the result was of those checks: and whether they were taken into account in providing the answer to the Right Honourable Member for Fylde, 29th October, Official Report, column 689W.

The publication of the ONS Review of Pension Contributions Statistics on 10th October 2002 highlighted a number of areas where further work is necessary to improve our present data collection system. I will announce the timetable to take forward this work and the other recommendations shortly. The checks referred to in paragraph 2 on page 30 of the report will be carried out as part of that programme of work.

The answer I gave to the Right Honourable Member for Fylde on 29th October is consistent with the data in Annex B table 1 of the report.

Question 116—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, if he will estimate the average contribution per head of those who have made contributions or who have had contributions made on their behalf in each of the last five years, broken down by those who have had the contributions made to *(a)* individual and personal pensions, *(b)* self-administered occupational pension schemes and *(c)* insurance-managed occupational pension schemes; and if he will make a statement.

Whilst approximate estimates could be obtained by dividing the numbers in Question 114 into the amounts in Question 118, these would not be reliable indicators of the build-up of pension rights. Estimates of those covered by personal and occupational pensions, such as those provided in reply to Question 114, will include those covered by schemes that are unfunded, non-contributory or subject to temporary contribution holidays and so are not closely related to the amounts in Question 118.

Question 118—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much has been contributed to funded pension schemes by individuals and employers in each of the last five years, broken down by individual and personal pensions, *(b)* self-administered occupational pension schemes and *(c)* insurance-managed occupational pension schemes.

Estimates of the contributions to self-administered pension funds and premiums receivable by insurance companies related to pension business are given in the table below. Adjustments made to inquiry data to derive net flows to occupational schemes are made at the aggregate level and the apportionment between self-administered and insurance managed funds is approximate. Care, therefore, needs to be taken in interpreting these figures:

£ billion

	Individual and personal premiums receivable by insurance companies	*Group or company sponsored premiums receivable by insurance companies*	*Contributions to self-administered pension funds less refunds*
1997	8.2	10.5	11.6
1998	9.0	14.3	11.3
1999	9.4	16.2	13.7
2000	10.3	18.0	15.7
2001*(p)*	11.6	18.2	16.2

(p) Data for 2001 are provisional.

This information is consistent with that provided in the answer to the Right Honourable Member for Fylde on 29th October.

Question 119—To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, what deduction, was made to the figure for gross contributions to allow for transfers of pension scheme assets that pass between the self administered and insurance-managed sector but remain within the same pension fund, when preparing the table on pages 31 and 32 of the ONS Review of Pension Contributions Statistics published on 10th October.

The Pension Fund Income and Expenditure Inquiry (which collects data from Self-Administered Pension Funds) records estimates of transfers to self-administered funds from insurance managed funds and vice versa. These data are shown in column *(d)* of the response to question 112, above.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87739]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury, the Government Actuary's Department, the Royal Mint, and the Debt Management Office do not currently make use of postcode areas.

National Savings and Investments does not make use of postcode areas to collect data. Postcoded individual records are used to analyse the responses to promotional campaigns.

The Valuation Agency does not make use of postcode areas to collect data. Postcoded addresses are used to allow the public to obtain non-domestic rating assessments and Council Tax band data on its website and for operational purposes.

HM Customs and Excise does make use of postcode areas to collect data. A variety of postcode-based information, from a range of sources, is aggregated at regional level for operational and policy-making decisions. Usage of postcoded information data is continuously reviewed.

Inland Revenue does not make use of postcode areas to collect data. Postcoded individual records, held for administrative purposes, are used to derive published aggregated data for other geographies.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) collects both social and economic data at the unit postcode level which are used to derive published aggregated data for other geographies. ONS keeps its use of unit postcodes for the collection of data under continuous review.

None of the Departments or agencies publishes data for any postcode areas or makes use of postcode areas to devise formulae for the distribution of grants and awards.

Pre-Budget Report Leaflet

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many summary leaflets entitled Steering a steady course: Delivering stability, enterprise and fairness in an uncertain world were printed to publicise the pre-Budget report statement; and what the cost was of publication. [87786]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answers given to the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) on 2 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 506W, and on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 597W.

Programme Budgets

John Mann: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with ministers in Government Departments and their Agencies taking advantage of full end-year flexibility in relation to their programme budgets. [87033]

Mr. Boateng: Since April 1999, Government Departments have had full end-year flexibility (EYF) on their Departmental Expenditure Limit budget allocation.

The recent report of the Agency Policy Review recommended that Departments should ensure Agencies have three-year funding agreements and end-year flexibility, and report to the Treasury by the end of 2002 on their current and proposed management of EYF.

Public Sector Productivity

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what private sector benchmarks the Government use to set targets for productivity gains of public sector employees. [85944]

Mr. Boateng *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Government do not operate any benchmarks of that kind. In determining pay, it is for individual employers across the public sector to take decisions on their own pay arrangements to recruit and retain the staff they need to support the delivery of public services, within the resources available to them, taking account of their own particular circumstances and requirements. Generally, settlements above inflation can only be justified where there are specific recruitment or retention problems, or where the increases will be financed by reform and modernisation changes, including efficiency and productivity savings.

Recycling

David Hamilton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what appraisal he has made of the case for the introduction of an incineration levy to encourage future reuse and recycling of waste. [87673]

John Healey: There is a range of issues associated with developing an effective waste management and disposal mix. The Government will therefore commission a review of the environmental and health effects of all waste management and disposal options. The Government will also consider how the use of economic instruments can be extended to provide a more comprehensive and coherent framework for waste management.

Self-assessment

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportions of taxpayers who completed their self-assessment forms by 30 September 2002, and who are entitled to have additional tax due reflected in their PAYE code for 2003–04, have received demands for payment of the lump sum by 31 January 2003. [88021]

Dawn Primarolo: There is no legislation that entitles SA taxpayers to have underpayments collected under PAYE. However, where the taxpayer indicates that he would prefer that method, the Inland Revenue will usually be able to accommodate his wishes where:

the SA return is received by 30 September;

the underpayment is less than £2,000; and

the whole amount can be included in the PAYE code in one year.

The Inland Revenue will also try to code out underpayments arising from SA returns received after 30 September but before 30 November, but cannot guarantee it.

Underpayments that are not coded out are included in the SA statement of account for payment on or before 31 January. The Department does not record how many underpayments are dealt with in this way where the taxpayer has indicated that he would prefer the underpayment to be coded out.

Since October 2002, the process of coding out SA underpayments has been automated so this should happen in all appropriate cases.

Sheriff Officers

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much expenditure was incurred by the Inland Revenue through using sheriff officers in each of the last three years; and what proportion of that expenditure arose as a result of incorrect call-outs based on inaccurate information supplied by the Inland Revenue. [87603]

Mr. Boateng: Costs paid to sheriff officers in Scotland by the Inland Revenue in the last three years are:

Year ending	*£*
31 October 2000	1,292,768.04
31 October 2001	1,332,079.89
31 October 2002	1,904,717.72

No information is kept to indicate what proportion of the figures above arose as a result of inaccurate information supplied by the Inland Revenue.

No figures are available for costs paid to sheriff officers in England and Wales.

No costs are paid to sheriff officers in Northern Ireland.

Thalidomide

Ross Cranston: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to his answer of 17 December, (ref, 87375) on the Thalidomide Trust, what categories of information on beneficiaries he holds. [88507]

Dawn Primarolo: Various Government Departments hold information on some of the beneficiaries, depending on the personal circumstances of the beneficiary concerned. In some cases this might be just a name, in others they would hold confidential information about the individual's tax affairs or health issues.

Waste Management

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effect of increases in landfill tax on the role of incineration in waste management strategies. [86774]

John Healey: Future increases to the standard rate of landfill tax, announced in the recent Pre-Budget Report, are intended to encourage a move away from landfill as the primary means of waste disposal, as well as to encourage greater use of recycling. It will clearly be for the market to decide what role incineration plays once the increases have taken effect.

The recent Pre-Budget Report also announced a review of the environmental and health effects of all waste management and disposal options. The role of incineration within the waste management and disposal mix, and the case for using economic instruments, will be considered in light of this work, and in consultation with other stakeholders.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when take-up figures for the working families tax credit will be published, and if they will include take-up figures for child care tax credit. [88217]

Dawn Primarolo: For the first part of his question, I refer the hon. Member to my reply to him on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1191W.

Reliable estimates of the take-up rate for the child care tax credit are not available as the survey data, on which take-up rate estimates are based, yield too few sample cases.

Workless Households

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many workless households there were in each year since 1997; how many of these are lone parent households with dependent children; and how many *(a)* working age people and *(b)* dependent children lived in these households. [88220]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. David Willetts, dated 19 December 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about workless households. (88220)

The attached table gives the information requested for the March to May period of each year from 1997 to 2002. These estimates are from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Workless working-age households[1]. United Kingdom, March to May 1997 to 2002

Thousand[2]

March to May of each year	*Workless working age households*[1]	*Workless lone parent households with dependent children*[3]	*Working-age people in workless households*	*Dependent children in workless households*[4]
1997	3,271	732	4,719	2,163
1998	3,237	762	4,634	2,156
1999	3,158	751	4,491	2,086
2000	3,070	689	4,323	1,896
2001	3,063	684	4,333	1,830
2002	3,133	703	4,412	1,889

[1] Households that include at least one person of working age (i.e. a woman aged 16–59 or a man aged 16–64) where no-one is in employment. Includes estimates for households with unknown economic activity.

[2] Not seasonally adjusted

[3] Households that include a lone parent family unit, with or without others.

[4] Dependent children aged under 16.

Note:
These Labour Force Survey (LFS) estimates are Not Seasonally Adjusted (NSA) and have not been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results.
Source:
ONS Labour Force Survey

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Car Dumping

4. **Harry Cohen:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her policy on controlling the dumping of cars in cities. [86766]

Mr. Meacher: Statutory notice periods have been reduced so that abandoned and unlicensed vehicles can be removed from the highway more quickly. Local authorities can now use DVLA's powers to wheelclamp and remove unlicensed vehicles after 24 hours.

The 2002 Finance Act includes outline powers to create a system of continuous registration. This will make it increasingly more difficult for keepers of abandoned vehicles to evade their responsibilities.

Coastal Erosion

15. **Mr. Liddell-Grainger:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on her action to deal with coastal erosion. [86780]

Alun Michael: Total Government funding on flood and coastal defence has risen from £312 million in 1997–98 to a projected £564 million in 2005–06. This is a substantial increase and is proof of this Government's continuing commitment to maintenance and improvement of our flood and coastal defences.

Bee-keeping

20. **Lawrie Quinn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the impact of EC Directive 92/65 on British bee-keeping. [86785]

Alun Michael: Where it applies, Directive 92/65 sets out the animal health requirements for trade in and imports into the Community of bees. Its main effect has been to help control the spread of American foulbrood, a notifiable disease of bees throughout the European Community.

Illegal waste

21. **Mr. Todd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what advice she has given to the Environment Agency on its measures to deal with illegal carriage of waste and disposal by illegal campers. [86786]

Mr. Meacher: No specific advice has been provided to the Environment Agency on measures to deal with illegal carriage of waste and disposal by illegal campers. However, a voluntary protocol has been agreed between the Agency, the local government association and the fly tipping forum on dealing with fly tipping incidents.

Water Framework Directive

23. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what action her Department is taking to implement the water framework directive. [86788]

Mr. Morley: The Water Framework Directive has to be transposed into national law by December 2003. The Government published the second of three consultation papers on 29th October 2002, which consults on the key policy issues to transposition and implementation and a third consultation paper, with draft transposing Regulations and an updated Regulatory Impact assessment will be published by Defra next year. The Environment Agency will play a key role in implementation of the Directive as the "competent authority". My officials are working closely with the Agency to ensure that implementation deadlines will be met.

Agricultural Wages Board

24. **Mr. Luff:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent representations she has received on the future of the Agricultural Wages Board. [86789]

Alun Michael: Since the Agricultural Wages Board last met on 29 August and following the NFU's regrettable withdrawal from the Board—now retracted—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has received 36 letters from members of this House concerning the future operation of the Agricultural Wages Board.

Dairy Sector

25. **Mr. Heath:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on the profitability of the dairy sector. [86790]

Mr. Morley: The profitability of the dairy sector in the UK has been adversely affected by low farmgate milk prices. The reasons for these low prices are complex, but include high levels of production earlier in the year combined with the effects of low world prices for dairy commodities. The average farmgate price of milk has recovered from its seasonal low in May, but it is still too low for many dairy farmers to be able to maintain the level of investment required to sustain their businesses.

The prices negotiated between farmers and purchasers, or indeed processors and retailers, are private commercial matters in which the Government cannot get involved. Nevertheless, I do welcome the recent price rises announced by major retailers and dairy processors and hope that these will help alleviate some of the difficulties faced by dairy farmers. The Government can influence the environment in which price negotiations take place through the mechanisms of the dairy CAP and, during the period of lowest prices, we actively supported measures taken in Brussels to support Community markets and encourage exports.

For the longer term we believe that a sustainable future for dairy farming is best secured through taking forward the recommendations in the Report of the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming, together with the Milk Task Force Report, and this is reflected in our Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy, launched on 12 December. My noble Friend, the Lord Whitty, has convened a number of meetings of an informal dairy supply chain group, including representatives of dairy farmers, which has addressed issues of concern to those in the dairy supply chain that came out of these reports. This group is also likely to consider how the industry can best address any lessons that emerge from the ongoing KPMG study on the structure of the UK dairy sector and milk pricing, commissioned by the Milk Development Council.

Warm Front Scheme

26. **Mr. Best:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many homes in Leeds, North-West have benefited from the Government's warm front scheme. [86791]

Alun Michael: The Scheme Manager for the area, TXU Warm Front Ltd., has confirmed that between June 2000 and 9 December 2002, 10,096 households in the Leeds local authority area received assistance through Warm Front. The information is not identified by constituency.

20-day Rule

27. **Paul Flynn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the effects of the 20 days animal movement rule on reducing the spread of animal infections. [86793]

Mr. Morley: In line with the FMD Inquiry recommendations, a detailed risk assessment and cost-benefit analysis of the 20-day standstill is currently being carried out. We hope to be able to publish the emerging findings early in the new year.

Earth Summit

28. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on steps being taken by her Department to meet the outcomes of the Earth Summit in Johannesburg. [86794]

Mr. Meacher: Defra is committed to take forward the commitments made at the Johannesburg Summit as part of our wider effort to promote sustainable development. In doing so, we shall focus particularly on those commitments for which we have lead responsibility in Government. A grid that sets out the key commitments from Johannesburg and indicates which Departments lead on these has been deposited in the Library of the House.

Flood Plains

29. **Mr. Hendry:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs in which of the areas affected by flooding in autumn 2000, it is her Department's proposal that the main solution is the removal of buildings on flood plains. [86796]

Mr. Morley: Defra provides grant to local operating authorities for flood defence capital works that meet certain criteria. However responsibility for deciding which projects to promote and their timing rests with the operating authorities.

The information requested is not readily available from all operating authorities. The Environment Agency advise that they are not aware of any specific proposals to buy properties in the floodplain and remove them, following the autumn 2000 floods as the solution to flooding.

However, some flood protection schemes involve property acquisition to allow defences to be built, and in some areas where effective flood alleviation is difficult then the long-term solution may be relocation outside the flood risk area as buildings reach the end of their useful life.

British-produced Food

30. **Mr. Wiggin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to promote British-produced food. [86797]

Alun Michael: Defra promotes the export of British produced food through sponsorship of and grant in aid to Food from Britain, which also assists with the marketing of regional speciality foods. As part of the Strategy on Sustainable Farming and Food, published recently, we will be introducing a new structure and additional support for regional food initiatives.

Waste Refrigerators

31. **Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment she has made of the ability of local authorities to deal with waste refrigerators. [86798]

Mr. Meacher: Special Grant Report No 109 was laid in Parliament on 14 November. The report, which was debated by the House on 16 December, details the proposed allocation to the relevant receiving authorities of the £40 million allocated this year to assist with the disposal of refrigerators. These allocations will be given to relevant local authorities shortly, and with this money, local authorities will be well equipped to deal with waste refrigerators.

Farmers (Entry-level Payments)

32. **Paddy Tipping:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whom she has consulted about the proposed entry level scheme for payments to farmers; and how the scheme links with other agri-environmental schemes. [86799]

Mr. Meacher: In March this year my Department held an initial public consultation on agri-environment schemes in England, including the Policy Commission's recommendation for an entry level scheme. We received over 130 responses, and the analysis of the responses is available on the Defra website at: http://defraweb/erdp/schemes/landbased/review/consultnew.htm

Since then we have worked closely with a wide range of stakeholder organisations on developing the pilot for the entry level scheme. These include:

Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers, Association of National Park Authorities, Country Land and Business Association, Countryside Agency, Environment Agency, English Heritage, English Nature, Farmcare, Game Conservancy Trust, Hill Farms Initiative, Local Government Association, National Farmers Union, National Trust, Royal Society Protection of Birds, Tenant Farmers Association, The Wildlife Trusts/Link, and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group.

The conclusions of this work have led to the document on the proposed future framework for agri-environment schemes in England that was issued for consultation earlier this week. This document is available on the Defra website at: http://defraweb/corporate/consult/current.htm

Coastal Protection

34. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs at how many public inquiries on coastal protection proposals her Department has been represented in the last year for which information is available. [86801]

Mr. Morley: Defra officials held one local hearing in 2001–02 to consider views on unresolved objections to coast protection works proposed by local authorities.

Bovine TB

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what evidence has been obtained to establish a link between badgers and bovine tuberculosis. [86800]

Mr. Morley: The Krebs Review of bovine TB in cattle found compelling evidence that badgers are a significant source of infection for cattle. However, the relative contribution that badgers and other wildlife make to the disease is unknown. The ongoing badger culling field trial was designed by the Independent Scientific Group on Cattle TB (ISG) to evaluate what role, if any, badgers play in the transmission of bovine TB to cattle, and whether badger culling is an effective or sustainable bovine TB control mechanism. It will provide epidemiological data on the occurrence and prevalence of TB in badgers, its relationship to population density and social group size and the spatial relationship between TB-infected badgers and TB breakdowns in cattle herds.

The ISG have advised that it is too early for a full analysis of results. It is a basic rule for scientific trials that results are not published prematurely. However, it has been possible to complete a preliminary analysis of the risk factors associated with cattle TB, and this is set out in the ISG's Third Report, available in the House Library.

CAP

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her French and German counterparts regarding the mid-term review of the Common Agricultural Policy. [86773]

Margaret Beckett: I have regularly spoken to my French and German counterparts about reform of the Common Agricultural Policy during recent meetings of the Agriculture and Fisheries Council. I also met my German opposite number on this subject on 24 October and plan to meet my French counterpart early in the new year.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the total area of farm holdings is in England and Wales which are part of the Countryside Stewardship Scheme; and if she will make a statement. [87329]

Alun Michael: The Countryside Stewardship Scheme operates in England, whereas the equivalent scheme in Wales, Tir Gofal, is the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly. The total area of land under agreement in the Countryside Stewardship Scheme is approximately 338,000 hectares, not including the 2002 application round.

Farmers (Retirement)

Mr. Grogan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans she has to introduce a means-tested retirement scheme for farmers. [86787]

Alun Michael: We have no plans to introduce an early retirement scheme for farmers. The Government agrees with the findings of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food that a retirement incentive scheme would not offer value for money. However, as suggested by the Commission, Defra is developing a supporting pack of advice for farmers considering retirement, in consultation with stakeholders. The pack should be available by June 2003.

Fuel Poverty Advisory Group

Alan Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the report of the fuel poverty advisory group. [86784]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Lord Whitty, has only recently received the Fuel Poverty Advisory Group's first annual report and will be making a full assessment of it in due course.

Recycling

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what *(a)* guidance and *(b)* advice is provided to Government Departments regarding the disposal of (i) printer cartridges and (ii) mobile phones; [85851]

(2) what support her Department *(a)* provides and *(b)* plans to provide to (i) local authorities and (ii) charitable organisations regarding the recycling and reuse of (A) mobile phones and (B) printer cartridges; [85853]

(3) what the total *(a)* volume and *(b)* number of printer cartridges (i) purchased and (ii) disposed of in the UK was in each year since 1990. [85855]

Mr. Meacher *[holding answer 11 December 2002]:* There are around 90 million mobile phones in use and being stored the UK, and around 15 million of these are replaced every year. The majority of these are set to be reused or recycled through schemes such as FoneBack to which the main mobile phone companies are members. A number of phones are also being refurbished and sold to eastern Europe, Asia and Africa where there is a strong second hand market. In addition to this, the recently finalized text of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) Directive sets a 75 per cent. target for the recovery and 65 per cent. target for the recycling of separately collected mobile phones.

The average office printer uses around a dozen printer cartridges a year, while a home printer uses around five. There are currently a number of businesses and charities that will collect printer cartridges when they are disposed of and send them for re-manufacturing. The text of the WEEE Directive encourages the design of equipment for recycling in general, and prioritises the re-use, recycling and recovery of WEEE so as to reduce the disposal of waste. Under the Directive producers of electrical and electronic goods will be responsible for the recovery, treatment and environmentally sound disposal of their equipment.

The Directive does not cover consumables such as printer cartridges when they are discarded separately. Devices are sometimes inserted into such consumables to prevent their reuse. The Department is therefore looking at effective measures to reduce this.

Guidance and advice will be developed and provided to Government Departments, local authorities and charitable organisations on the disposal, recycling and reuse of mobile phones and printer cartridges as part of the implementation of the WEEE Directive.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list for her Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87694]

Alun Michael: The Department published progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in its Departmental Report 2002 (Cm 5422) and Autumn Performance Report 2002 (Cm 5698).

Technetium-99

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to her written statement of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, columns 20–22WS, on technetium-99, whether THORP produces technetium-99 wastes; what evidence she considered when assessing whether the continued reprocessing of Magnox and thermal oxide spent fuel at Sellafield was justified; and when she expects to consider the question whether to undertake a review of justification under Article 6(2) of Directive 96/29/ Evratom. [87829]

Margaret Beckett: THORP does produce technetium-99 wastes, but these account for a small fraction of the totality of technetium-99 discharges from the Sellafield site. By far the largest proportion of technetium-99 discharges from that site originate from the reprocessing of Magnox spent fuel.

We have considered the information that has been provided by the Environment Agency in its published documents, and information that has been provided in the form of representations both to the Agency and directly to Ministers concerning technetium-99. We have concluded that as discharges of technetium-99 constitute only one small aspect of the practice of Magnox spent fuel reprocessing and the practice of spent oxide fuel reprocessing, it would be more appropriate to consider whether their justification should be reviewed when considering the other radioactive discharges that arise from those practices.

With regard to the reprocessing of spent Magnox fuel, the Environment Agency has carried out a separate review of the remaining radioactive discharges from the Sellafield site (other than technetium-99), including those from Magnox reprocessing and, in August, published its proposed decision for Ministers to consider. We intend to come to a view on the Agency's proposals, and come to a conclusion as to whether it is necessary to review the practice of Magnox reprocessing as to justification in the spring of next year.

With regard to the reprocessing of spent oxide fuel, the Government set out the position with respect to the continued operation of THORP in the White Paper on Managing Nuclear Energy which was published in July 2002. If and when any proposals for new contracts for THORP are received, the Government will review the range of issues involved in increasing the current volume of oxide fuel to be reprocessed. One of those issues will be the appropriateness of carrying out a review of the practice of reprocessing spent oxide fuel.

Thailand

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what commitments concerning agricultural produce the Government has entered into as part of or in association with the trade agreement reached in October with Thailand. [81817]

Margaret Beckett *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 21 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 218W.

Water Directive

Mr. Borrow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure the timely implementation of the water directive. [86779]

Margaret Beckett: Much work is already in hand. We published the second of three consultation papers this October and a third is planned for next year. The Environment Agency are also gearing up for implementation.

PRIME MINISTER

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly: To ask the Prime Minister how many departmental Christmas cards he intends to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88119]

The Prime Minister: I shall be sending 1,260 official Christmas cards which cost £267. The despatch and staff time for posting those cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Christmas Security

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Prime Minister how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88120]

The Prime Minister: No public money will be spent on entertaining and other festive activities this Christmas. Around £2,500 will be spent on Christmas decorations for official purposes, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

European Policy

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister whether his speech in Cardiff on 28 November 2002, entitled "A Clear Course for Europe", represents Government policy towards the European Union; and whether the *(a)* Foreign Office, *(b)* DTI and *(c)* Cabinet colleagues were consulted on the speech before delivery. [88274]

The Prime Minister: Yes.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on *(a)* the occasion and *(b)* the audience of his speech in Cardiff of 28 November 2002 entitled "A Clear Course for Europe". [88275]

The Prime Minister: I spoke to an audience which included business people, community leaders and political representatives to set out the Government's policy towards the European Union, and in particular its position on the debate surrounding the Convention on the Future of Europe.

TRANSPORT

Aircraft Security

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what measures have been put in place

within the air traffic control system to deal with the threat posed to civil aircraft by surface-to-air missiles; [87844]

(2) what recent advice the Government have provided to British civilian airlines on counter measures to deal with surface-to-air missiles; [87846]

(3) what discussions he has had with allied countries about the threat posed to civil aircraft from surface to air missiles; [87849]

(4) what consultations he has had with defence contractors about the development of counter measures against surface-to-air missiles for civil airliners; [87847]

(5) what plans he has to introduce regulations for the introduction of counter measures for civil aircraft to deal with surface-to-air missiles. [87848]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Appropriate action has been taken and we are giving urgent consideration to the issues in conjunction with other relevant parties.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88111]

Mr. Jamieson: We shall be sending up to 800 departmental Christmas cards at a cost of £731 + VAT, in accordance with practise over very many years. This expenditure is made in line with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. A sample copy of the official Christmas card has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88136]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is not available centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. However, all expenditure incurred on decorations, entertainment and any other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

Dredging

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the effect on the environment of dredging in the Dee Estuary. [86795]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department is currently considering an application from the Port of Mostyn for consent to dredge in the Dee Estuary outside their harbour limits. The applicants have produced an Environmental Statement assessing the impacts on the environment resulting from the dredge and this is currently being advertised and is available for inspection locally. Representations about the application and associated Statement can be made to the Department before January 12th 2003 and we are also seeking comments from specific bodies in the area who have environmental responsibilities. Wirral Borough Council is one of these.

Highway Maintenance

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what funding has been allocated to local authorities for highway maintenance for each financial year from 1997–98 to 2005–06 *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each local authority; [86096]

(2) what support was given by his Department to local authorities *(a)* in total and *(b)* for each authority, in each financial year since 2000–01 for roads maintenance and repair, broken down by different sources of this funding; and what changes are planned in the next 10 years to the level of funding. [86108]

Mr. Jamieson: Before 2000–01 capital allocations were made under the TSG/TPP system. Since then allocations have been made under the Local Transport Plan system. Details of capital funding for English local authorities outside London for the years 1997–98 to 2004–05 have been placed in the Libraries of the House. Capital funding for maintenance in London is a matter for the Mayor.

Revenue funding for highway maintenance is provided through Revenue Support Grant (RSG). RSG is an unhypothecated grant provided to Local Authorities to enable them to carry out their functions; local authorities can choose to spend this on any services for which they have responsibility, subject to local spending priorities. The amounts provided for highway maintenance within the national totals for RSG in the years 1997–98 to 2004–05 are set out in the table.

Highway maintenance revenue funding between 1997–08 and 2004–05

£ million cash

Year	*Local roads revenue*
1997–98	1,658
1998–99	1,721
1999–2000	1,763
2000–01	1,859
2001–02	1,905
2002–03	1,955
2003–04	2,005
2004–05	2,055

The Government is committed to halting the deterioration in local road condition by 2004 and to eliminating the backlogs in carriageway, footway, bridge and street lighting maintenance by 2010. Over £30 billion for local road maintenance is being provided over the timescale of the 10-year Transport Plan.

M6

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the economic impact of traffic congestion on the M6. [87911]

Mr. Jamieson: The consultants gave consideration to this aspect of the MidMan Multi Model study. A copy of this report can be found in the House of Commons Library.

In response to its recommendations, the Secretary of State for Transport last week announced that the widening of the M6 between junctions 11a and 19 will be progressed. It is expected that the Highways Agency will add a scheme to its Targeted Programme of Improvements during the first half of 2003.

Motorway (South Preston and Warrington North)

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what part of the motorway between South Preston and Warrington North will remain three lanes; and which council areas will be affected; [87517]

(2) what plans he has to make the Warrington North to Preston South section of the M6 four lanes; and what plans and costings have been carried out of the four lanes proposal. [87518]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Lindsay Hoyle, dated 19 December 2002:

The Transport Minister has asked me to write to reply to your recent questions about plans for the M6 motorway between Warrington North and Preston South.

There are currently no proposals to make the Warrington North to Preston South section of the M6 four lanes. However as the Secretary of State said last week we do keep these matters under review. You also asked for confirmation of which council areas are affected by this route. The M6 passes through the Boroughs of Warrington, Wigan, St. Helens, Chorley and the City of Preston.

You may be interested to note that the Agency is currently progressing a Route Management Strategy (RMS) on the M6 between Junction 20 at Lymm to the Scottish Border as part of our 10-year plan to make best use of this route. Early investigations on the RMS have identified congestion problems during the peak periods especially between Junctions 24 and 28. However, further study work is needed before we can incorporate any local network schemes into the RMS management plan.

We expect to hold Public consultation on the draft RMS during spring next year. I will write to you again nearer the time with more details. In the meantime if you need any further information, please contact the Highways Agency's Regional Manager for Network Strategy in the North West, Malcolm Roberts, at Sunley Tower, Piccadilly Plaza, Manchester, M1 4BE, Tel: 0161 930 5668.

New Roads

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new *(a)* motorways and *(b)* trunk roads have been constructed in each of the last five years. [87910]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the chief executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to the hon. Member.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Nigel Evans, dated 19 December 2002:

I have been asked by David Jamieson to reply to your recent parliamentary question asking how many miles of new motorways and trunk roads have been constructed in each of the last five years.

In England a total length of 68.31 miles of new motorway and 139.86 miles of new trunk road have been constructed over the last five years. More detailed information is shown in the table below.

Miles

	Motorways			*Trunk road*	
Year of completion	*Newly constructed*	*Widened*	*Upgraded from APTR*	*Newly constructed*	*Widened*
1997–98	11.37	12.5	13.125	46.875	18.06
1998–99	0	7.94	13.125	12.375	7.875
1999–2000	0	0	0	24.75	2.5
2000–01	10.25	0	0	13.75	0
2001–02	0	0	0	0	0
2002–03	0	0	0	1.8	11.875
Sub total	21.62	20.44	26.25	99.55	40.31
Grand total		68.31		139.86	

I hope that this is helpful. If you would like more information, Graham Rainbow of the Programme Planning and Development team, would be pleased to help. He can be contacted at our offices at Broadway, Broad Street, Birmingham B15 1BL, or by telephone on 0121 678 8008.

Redhill Aerodrome

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) if he intends to include a proposal to develop Redhill Aerodrome in his consultation on airport capacity in the South East; and if he will make a statement; [87990]

(2) if he will make a statement on road links to Redhill Aerodrome; [87991]

(3) what representations the Department has received regarding plans for the development of a major airport based at Redhill Aerodrome; and if he will make a statement; [87994]

(4) what estimate he has made of the effect on air movements at Gatwick Airport of the development of an international airport at Redhill Aerodrome capable of transporting *(a)* 2.6 million and *(b)* 15 million passengers per year; [87992]

(5) what proposals he has received regarding the development of Redhill Aerodrome as a major passenger airport; and if he will publish them. [87993]

Mr. Jamieson: As a response to The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom (South East) Consultation Redhill Aerodrome Limited lodged on 13 December a submission that includes proposals to develop a new stand-alone passenger airport on the existing aerodrome site.

We will make publicly available in due course all responses to the consultation, except those marked confidential. In the mean time publication is a matter for the authors.

As part of the early SERAS analysis two options for the development of Redhill as an adjunct to Gatwick airport were considered. Details of this work are contained in Chapter three of the Stage One appraisal findings report. Following the conclusion of the first stage of the SERAS study, Ministers decided that these options would not be taken forward for more detailed assessment in the latter stages of the study.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport announced to Parliament on 28 November that the consultation on airports capacity will be extended until we have consulted on proposals in respect of Gatwick. Those who have already responded to the consultation will be able to amend, add to, or replace their response having considered the new document. We will set out our plans for the remaining stage of the consultation process when we publish the further consultation paper in the new year.

Road Improvements (Yorkshire)

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will include ways of improving traffic flows on both A614 and A165 in the further studies on road improvements in Yorkshire announced on 10 December. [87382]

Mr. Spellar: The further studies on road improvements in Yorkshire announced by the Secretary of State in the Statement on Transport Investment on 10 December refer to the two Multi-Modal studies that have been undertaken in the Yorkshire and the Humber region: the South and West Yorkshire Multi-Modal Study (SWYMMS) and the Hull East-West Corridor Multi-Modal Study (HUMMS), on which Ministers expect to take decisions next year. Neither of these relate to the A614 or A165 roads over any of their lengths.

The A614 and A165 roads are the responsibility of East Riding of Yorkshire Council as local highway authority and the Government allocates funds annually to local authorities to spend on their transport infrastructure.

Road Signs

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to introduce metric distance signs on roads; and if he will make a statement. [88223]

Mr. Jamieson: The position remains as set out in my reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Gloucester (Mr. Dhanda) on 11 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1116W.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87702]

Mr. Spellar *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* My Department published on Tuesday progress against all its outstanding PSA targets in "Delivering Better Transport: Progress Report."

Surface-to-air Missiles

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how he assesses the threat posed to British civil airlines from surface to air missiles; and what actions he proposes to take. [87997]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government believe that the terrorist threat to UK interests, including civil aviation, both in the UK and overseas, is a very real one, and has taken a range of actions to manage the risk. So far as the threat to civil airlines from surface to air missiles is concerned, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given today [87844].

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Cransby: To ask the Solicitor-General what role the Attorney-General plays in relation to the firefighters' dispute. [83558]

The Solicitor-General: The Attorney-General has the power to apply to the Court for an injunction to prevent threatened breaches of the criminal law. This power is to be exercised in the public interest, which is exercised in independent judgment in the role as Attorney-General rather than as a member of Government. Such an application is always exceptional and is only instituted where there is the prospect of genuine, serious and irreparable harm and is judged that it is in the public interest to make the application.

It is the Attorney-General's duty to keep under constant review the question whether to exercise this power. In order to determine where the public interest lies he may consult as he has been doing with ministerial colleagues to ensure that he is properly informed as to the public interest consultations arising. The Attorney has been informed also of the views of fire authority representatives in relation to the potential threat to public safety. But the power to apply for an injunction is one for the Attorney-General to exercise in the public interest and the decision is for him alone.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Solicitor-General what use her Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data and *(b)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87737]

The Solicitor-General: Neither my Department nor its agencies make use of postcode areas data.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many departmental Christmas cards he and his ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88116]

Mr. Straw: I sent 905 Christmas cards at a cost of:

a) £932.95;

b) £97.20 to post 360 first class. 415 cards were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag and a further 130 via the government mail system. There was no separate charge for this;

c) £301.22 for an A2 to spend 4 working days updating and amending the database throughout the year, ordering the cards and sending them out.

Dr. MacShane sent 250 cards in 2002 at a cost of:

a) £175;

b) £16.20 to post 60 first class. The remaining 190 were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag;

c) £160 for an A2 to spend 17 hours updating and amending recipient details, ordering the cards and sending them out.

Baroness Symons sent 451 cards in 2002 at a cost of:

a) £315;

b) £114.75 to post 425 first class. The remaining 26 were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag or via the government mail system;

c) £184.80 for an A2 to spend 20 hours updating and amending recipient details, ordering the cards and sending them out.

Mr. O'Brien sent 185 cards (106 Christmas cards, 79 Bid cards) in 2002 at a cost of:

a) £129.50;

b) £15.12 to post 56 first class. The remaining 129 were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag or via the government mail system.

c) £337.50 for a B3 to spend 32 hours updating and amending recipient details, ordering the cards and sending them out.

Mr. Rammell sent 225 cards at a cost of:

a) £157.50;

b) £27.54 to post 102 first class. 29 were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag and a further 94 via the government mail system;

c) £129.36 for an A2 to spend 14 hours sending out the Christmas cards.

Baroness Amos sent 380 cards at a cost of:

a) £266;

b) £67.77 to post 251 first class. 56 were sent through the FCO diplomatic bag and a further 73 via the Government mail system;

c) £206.01 for an A2 to spend 27 hours updating and amending recipient details and sending out the Christmas cards. And 22.50 for a B3 to spend two hours sending out Christmas cards.

A sample copy of my and all other ministers Christmas cards will be placed in the Library of the House.

My cards were ordered through Card Aid which donates all profits to charity. £205 will be donated to UNICEF this year. All other ministers choose their cards from the official FCO selection. The profits of the official FCO card are split between the FCO Welfare Fund and the Diplomatic Families Association Emergency Welfare Fund.

All expenditure incurred in the purchase and dispatch of official cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting.

Citizenship Applications

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs where records of applications for registration as a citizen of the UK and its colonies submitted at the British Embassy in the former colony of Aden in 1970 have been retained; and whether they can be inspected by members of the public. [87424]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Applications for registration as a citizen of the UK and colonies, which were submitted to the British Embassy in Aden in 1970 would have been forwarded to the Home Office for consideration. Copies of these applications were not retained at the British Embassy. Any enquiries about individual cases should be made to the Home Office.

European Union

Mr. Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the acquisition of full legal personality by the European Union. [87907]

Mr. MacShane: Recognition of the legal personality of the Union would have the advantage of clarity and simplicity. But if the European Union were to have its legal personality recognised in the European treaties it could only be on the basis that the distinct arrangements for common foreign and security policy, and aspects of justice and home affairs were fully safeguarded, along with the existing arrangements for representation in international bodies. The Government would need to be sure that the necessary safeguards were in place before taking a decision on this issue.

Iraq

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs which British *(a)* individuals and *(b)* companies were identified in the Iraqi declaration to the United Nations Security

Council as having supplied arms, weapons-related technology or material to Iraq, giving in each case (i) the nature of the arms, technology or material supplied and (ii) the date of supply. [87868]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my hon. Friend the Member for Newport West (Paul Flynn) on 17 December UIN 87497.

Oil Revenues

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the volume is of unspent oil revenues allocated for Iraqi Kurdistan in the escrow account of the UN oil-for-food programmes; and what the reasons are for withholding aid to Iraqi Kurdistan. [87078]

Mr. Mike O'Brien *[holding answer of 16 December 2002]*: As of 11 December US$3.3 billion of 'Oil For Food' revenue remained unallocated by Iraq in the UN escrow account. US$1.2billion of the revenue allocated to the UN humanitarian programme in northern Iraq is currently unspent.

The Iraqi regime has consistently obstructed improvements in northern Iraq, delaying the arrival of de-mining equipment that could save lives and denying visas to UN personnel involved in essential humanitarian projects. It has also restricted the distribution of food and medicines to northern Iraq.

Sandy Mitchell

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what talks he has had with the Saudi Arabian government on the imprisonment of a constituent, Sandy Mitchell. [87300]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, and ministerial colleagues have raised the cases of Mr. Mitchell and the other British men detained in Saudi Arabia at the highest levels with the Saudi authorities. We remain deeply concerned about these cases. The men's welfare is our paramount concern. We continue to work tirelessly to resolve the cases. We are in close contact with the Saudi authorities and the men's lawyers. We also continue to make consular visits to the men.

Uzbekistan

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he last discussed human rights with representatives of the Government of Uzbekistan. [87653]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: When I last met the Uzbek Ambassador on 4 September, I raised human rights. The Permanent Under Secretary also raised human rights issues with Uzbek Foreign Minister Kamilov in London in September. Officials raise the subject regularly, most recently with the Uzbek Ambassador on 16 December. The UK also makes representations with the EU wherever possible and was recently part of an EU delegation making representations to Deputy Foreign Minister Safaev on the deaths of two prisoners, apparently due to torture. We also make statements on human rights issues, both with the EU and bilaterally: our Ambassador made a strong speech in October at the opening of the Freedom House NGO in Tashkent, while in December the EU made a statement protesting about the unfair trial of Iskander Khudaiberganov.

PRIVY COUNCIL

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the President of the Council how many departmental Christmas cards he and his ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88117]

Mr. Robin Cook: 700 Christmas cards (in three different designs) were purchased for my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary and me to send at a total cost of £763.75. These cards were bought in aid of The Children's Society and Amnesty International. The postage cost is some £70; the majority of cards were sent via the Inter-Departmental Service or parliamentary mail. Some 10 hours staff time was spent in addressing and despatching the cards; the gross salary costs for this work were some £75. Sample copies of these cards have placed in the Library.

Given the hon. Member's interest in this matter, I will include him on my Christmas card list for next year.

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the President of the Council how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88126]

Mr. Robin Cook: This Christmas, the Privy Council Office (PCO) spent £2,112 on entertaining, £15 on decorations and nothing on other festive activities. The expenditure on entertaining was accounted for by my traditional Christmas party, held to thank all those (hon. Members, parliamentary clerks, officials and others) who helped me in my capacity as Leader of the House. All PCO expenditure was Department-wide, and nothing was spent in Ministers' private offices or in official residences.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Amateur Sports Clubs

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what assessment he has made of the impact of introducing 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief for all community amateur sports clubs via the Local Government Bill; and if he will make a statement; [87647]

(2) what estimate he has made of the proportion of community amateur sports clubs that would qualify for mandatory rate relief under the provisions of the Local Government Bill; and if he will make a statement. [87648]

Mr. Leslie: The Local Government Bill does not include provisions for introducing 80 per cent. mandatory rate relief for community amateur sports clubs and so no assessment has been made of the impact of introducing such a scheme.

There is also no estimate available of the proportion of community amateur sports clubs that would qualify for mandatory rate relief under the provisions in the Local Government Bill. Community amateur sports clubs would benefit from the rate relief scheme for small businesses in the Local Government Bill. The scheme would provide mandatory rate relief of up to 50 per cent. for properties with rateable values of up to £3,000. For larger properties the percentage of relief would gradually taper off, with no relief for properties with rateable values above £8,000.

Local authorities may grant up to 100 per cent. relief at their discretion to community amateur sports clubs that qualify under the new mandatory relief scheme for small businesses.

The rating lists do not record the use of property by voluntary or community amateur sports clubs as distinct from other sports clubs. The rating lists for England include about 16,000 sports properties, including those used by community amateur sports clubs as well as professional and commercial sports bodies. Of the 16,000 sports properties in England, around 7,500 have rateable values of under £3,000 and a further 4,000 have rateable values above £3,000 and below £8,000.

As explained in the White Paper "Strong Local Leadership—Quality Public Services", which was published in December 2001, mandatory rate relief is already available for all premises used wholly or mainly for charitable purposes, provided that they meet the criteria for charitable status. The Charity Commission announced in November 2001 that they will recognise as charitable purposes "the promotion of community participation in healthy recreation by the provision of facilities for the playing of particular sports", and "the advancement of the physical recreation of young people not undergoing formal education".

Where individual clubs do not meet the Charity Commission's criteria, or where they decide not to seek charitable status, local authorities retain discretion to grant rate relief to any non-profit making body. Local authorities have the power to grant relief where it is in the interests of local council taxpayers for them to do so. We have recently published on our website, revised guidance for local authorities and ratepayers on rate relief for charities and other non-profit making organisations.

In addition to this specific assistance, the Government has also introduced a tax package (legislated for in Finance Bill 2002), which will provide a range of tax reliefs for community amateur sports clubs on their income and on the donations which local people make to support them. The tax package follows that outlined in the "Promoting Sport in the Community" consultation document—mandatory rate relief was not part of the tax package which was consulted upon. The Government believes that the tax package and the option of charitable status, together with the help available for clubs under the non-domestic rating system, represent a generous system of support sports clubs.

Asylum Seekers (Rough Sleeping)

Simon Hughes: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact on the number of rough sleepers of the coming into effect of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylums Act 2002 on 8 January 2003; what steps he has taken to address change in the number of rough sleepers after that date; and if he will make a statement. [85816]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 10 December 2002]:* I have been asked to reply.

The purpose of the new policy is to ensure that those wishing to seek asylum do so at the first practical opportunity on arrival in the United Kingdom. If that purpose is fulfilled, there is no reason to suppose that the coming into force of section 55 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 will result in an increase in the number of rough sleepers.

Bain Inquiry

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much is to be paid to the individual members of the Bain Inquiry into the fire service. [88499]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to my hon. Friend, the Member for Glasgow, Kelvin (Mr. Galloway) on 9 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 129W.

John McDonnell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost is of the Bain Inquiry into the Fire Service. [88500]

Mr. Raynsford: The estimated cost of the independent review of the Fire Service chaired by Professor Sir George Bain is £468,000.

Business Co-ordination Unit

Tim Loughton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when a Minister from his Department last visited a business in *(a)* West Sussex and *(b)* East Worthing and Shoreham as part of the work of the Business Co-ordination Unit. [87468]

Mr. Leslie: The Business Co-ordination Unit have not arranged any Office of the Deputy Prime Minister ministerial visits to either West Sussex or East Worthing and Shoreham since the creation of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Business Improvement Districts

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what systems he has assessed for voting in relation to business improvement districts; and how the Government proposes to ensure that the system is simple. [87971]

Mr. Leslie: Clause 52 of the Local Government Bill, which was introduced into Parliament on 25 November, sets out the rules governing the BID ballot. A successful ballot will have to meet two tests. Firstly a simple majority of those voting in the BID ballot must vote in

favour. Secondly, those voting in favour must represent a majority by rateable value of the hereditaments (rateable properties) of those voting. This "dual-key" mechanism means that a scheme cannot be forced through by large firms against the wishes of small firms, or vice versa.

Secondly, Clause 57 of the Local Government Bill gives my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister the power to make regulations on the timing of BID ballots, the non-domestic ratepayers entitled to vote in the ballot, the question to be asked in the ballot, the form the ballot will take, the persons who are to hold ballots, and how the ballots are to be conducted. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is holding discussions with representatives of local authorities, rating professionals and members of the business community to ensure that the rules on voting are as simple as possible, while safeguarding the interests of those who will be liable to pay the BID levy.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88118]

Mr. Leslie: In accordance with the conventions followed by all administrations the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister shall be sending out up to 1,820 Office of the Deputy Prime Minister Christmas cards, purchased for a total cost of £1,364.40 plus VAT. It is Office of the Deputy Prime Minister policy to send mail by second class post where ever possible. Ministers will sign the cards and they will be placed in envelopes and sent out by Office of the Deputy Prime Minister staff as part of their normal duties. Sample copies of the cards have been placed in the Library of the House. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum how much will be spent in ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88121]

Mr. Leslie: Any expenditure incurred on decorations, entertainment and any other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

The information requested is not held centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Deprivation

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will indicate the level of deprivation which exists in each local council area. [88341]

Mrs. Roche: A table showing how local authority districts in England are ranked, relative to each other, on the Index of Multiple Deprivation 2000 (IMD 2000) has been placed in the Library of the House. All 354 local authority districts (as at April 1998) are ranked with the most deprived authority being given a rank of 1.

Patterns of deprivation are complex—in some areas the entire district may be generally deprived but with no severe areas, while elsewhere deprivation may be concentrated in very severe pockets, which coexist alongside generally affluent areas. The IMD 2000 has reflected these different patterns through six different measures that are all equally valid. The six measures are:

The concentration measure tells us how severe deprivation is in each authority's 'hot spots' of deprivation;

The extent measure is the percentage of each district's population that live in one of the 10 per cent. most deprived wards in England;

The 'average scores' and 'average ranks' are the average level of deprivation across the entire district;

The income scale and employment scale measure how many people suffer from income and employment deprivation respectively.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is currently involved in a project to consider options for strengthening and updating the Indices of Deprivation 2000 (ID 2000). The Stage One Consultation Report contains preliminary proposals for updating the ID 2000 and is open for consultation until 15 January 2003.

Empty Homes

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his Department's performance in the disposal of empty homes in the last year for which figures are available. [87942]

Mr. McNulty: The Fire Service College, an Executive Agency of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, owns 39 residential properties, which are kept to house staff on secondment to the College. Currently, a small number of properties are not required for staff use and are let on short-term tenancies. One property is currently empty and due to be let by the end of January.

Fire Services

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* deaths and *(b)* serious injuries as a result of fire there were in each of the last five years; and what proportion occurred (i) between 11pm and 6 am and (ii) during the hours of darkness. [88484]

Mr. Raynsford: The number of deaths and/or injuries by the time of the fire is tabled below. Data are shown for 1997 to 2001 (the last five years of data available).

Data relating to the severity of injury resulting from fire are not held centrally and could be obtained only at

disproportionate cost. Information is collected on the type of injury but not the severity of those injuries.

It is not possible to identify separate data relating to the hours of darkness.

Deaths and injuries from fires by time of day[1], 1997–2001

			Proportion occurring between 11pm and 6am		Rate per 1,000 fires between 11pm and 6am		Proportion occurring between 6am and 11pm		Rate per 1,000 fires between 6am and 11pm	
	Deaths	Injuries	Deaths (%)	Injuries (%)	Deaths	Injuries	Deaths (%)	Injuries (%)	Deaths	Injuries
1997	723	18,583	35	31	5	124	65	69	3	83
1998	656	18,198	33	30	5	117	67	70	3	83
1999	623	18,198	29	30	3	103	71	70	3	77
2000	623	17,640	34	31	4	100	66	69	2	74
2000[2]	(595)									
2001	627	17,288	32	30	3	89	68	70	3	71
2001[2]	(606)									

[1] The time of day is denoted as the time the emergency call was received by the local authority fire brigade.
[2] The 2000 and 2001 data for fatalities are estimated to account for the revisions as later information is received. Calculations are based on the provisional total of deaths.

Firefighters' Dispute

John Barrett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the average response time to emergency fire calls during *(a)* the recent firefighters' strike and *(b)* full firefighter cover. [88485]

Mr. Raynsford: During the Fire Brigade Union strike between 22 and 30 November 2002, 10,793 fire-related incidents were dealt with by the armed forces and 1,367 by firefighters working for local authority fire brigades. The armed forces' remit was to ensure that all incidents were dealt with where there was a confirmed threat to life (Category A) or a possible threat to life (Category B). In the event, all non-life threatening (Category C) incidents were also attended. An analysis of serious fire-related incidents (mostly Category A) in the north-west of England showed an average response time by the armed forces of 7.2 minutes. The figure for serious incidents in London was 13.8 minutes, largely reflecting traffic problems; and in the south-west, which is a largely rural area, the average response time for serious incidents was 14.2 minutes. These figures are not directly comparable with Fire Service data as fire brigades' target response times are based on four risk categories, ranging from five minutes for main shopping and business centres to 20 minutes for rural areas. Nevertheless, they do demonstrate the highly professional job performed by the armed forces.

John Barrett: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many emergency fire calls were not answered during the recent firefighters' strike. [88486]

Mr. Raynsford: During the Fire Brigades Union strike from 22 to 30 November 2002, 30,278 fire-related 999 calls were received by the Joint Operational Control Centres. All such telephone calls were answered. Because of multiple calls per incident, this gave rise to 20,237 incidents. Around five per cent. of calls were filtered out immediately as not being emergencies, and advance police attendance turned back firefighter response in around 40 per cent. of cases. The armed forces therefore attended 10,793 incidents, and firefighters working for local authority fire brigades attended 1,367 incidents. All fire related incidents which required a firefighter response were attended.

Green Belt (West Midlands)

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures are in place to retain the green belt areas in the West Midlands. [86792]

Mr. McNulty: Government policy on the Green Belt throughout England remains, as set out in Planning Policy Guidance Note (PPG) 2, which states that protecting the countryside from encroachment is one of the main purposes of including land in the Green Belt.

PPG 2 continues to require that local authority development plans include a strict presumption against inappropriate development in the Green Belt.

Green Belt designations can only be established or altered through development plans. Once approved Green Belts should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. If such an alteration were proposed, the Secretary of State would then wish to be satisfied that the authority has considered opportunities for development within urban areas before allowing it to take place.

Home Ownership

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 711W, what assessment he has made of the ability of each group to access home ownership. [87941]

Mr. McNulty: Many teachers, health workers and police are experiencing difficulties in accessing home ownership in London, the south-east and other housing hot spots. Starter Home Initiative scheme managers assess each applicant's circumstances and provide assistance only to those key workers who would not otherwise be able to buy their own home within a reasonable travelling distance of their work place. Over 1,500 teachers, health workers and police have been assisted through the Starter Home Initiative to date.

Homelessness

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of lettings were made available to homeless households in priority need by *(a)* local

authorities and *(b)* registered social landlords, broken down by (i) region and (ii) local authority area in 2000–01. [87988]

Mr. McNulty: Information reported by local authorities in England on their Housing Investment Programme returns in respect of lettings of their stock, and nominations to that of registered social landlords, made during 2000–01 has been placed in the Library.

Mrs. Anne Campbell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much was given to Cambridge City Council towards relieving homelessness in each of the last five years. [87985]

Mrs. Roche: Funding to local authorities for the provision of homeless services is allocated through Revenue Support Grant (RSG) as part of the annual local government finance settlement. RSG is unhypothecated to particular services and up to the current financial year was calculated on the basis of standard spending assessments for individual local authorities. It is for each local authority to decide how much RSG it receives, and its other resources, should be directed towards any particular service. Voluntary Agencies working with Cambridge City Council received almost £900,000 to tackle rough sleeping from 1999–2000.

Housing (Black and Minority Ethnic People)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research he has commissioned into the use of rent assessment panels by BME tenants in the private rented sector, following the recommendation in the DTLR (Housing Directorate) Action Plan, "Addressing the Needs of BME People"; and what steps he will take to address the problems that have been identified. [88264]

Mr. McNulty: To date, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not commissioned any research into the use of Rent Assessment Panels (RAPs) by BME groups. The Action Plan, "addressing the housing needs of BME people", made it clear that an examination of the use of RAP's would be subject to resources and other priorities.

Priority is currently being given to the implementation of the Commonhold and Leasehold Reform Act 2002, including measures affecting the leasehold valuation tribunals, which are made up of the RAPs by BME groups will be undertaken after the anticipated completion of the implementation of the Act on spring 2003.

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of *(a)* African, *(b)* Afro-Caribbean, *(c)* Chinese and Vietnamese, *(d)* Bangladeshi, *(e)* Indian and *(f)* Pakistani households are in overcrowded accommodation. [88265]

Mr. McNulty: If overcrowding is measured by the 'bedroom standard' from Survey of English Housing data, averaged over the last three years (1999–2000, 2000–01, 2001–02), the estimated percentages of households in overcrowded accommodation (i.e. one or more bedrooms below the standard) are: *(a)* African 15 per cent., *(b)* Afro-Caribbean 6 per cent., *(c)* Chinese 7 per cent., *(d)* Bangladeshi 30 per cent., *(e)* Indian 7 per cent. and *(f)* Pakistani 22 per cent. The corresponding percentages for other ethnic groups are : white 2 per cent., 'other black groups' 9 per cent., and 'mixed and other ethnic groups', including Vietnamese, 9 per cent.

Housing Associations

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to help local authorities *(a)* promote stock transfer and *(b)* improve council tenants' knowledge of housing associations. [87939]

Mr. McNulty: Local authorities should involve tenants fully in any decisions about the future ownership and management of their homes. This includes both appraisal of the options available to achieve the decent home standard, and development of the chosen investment option.

If housing transfer is the option chosen, tenants should be involved in choosing the successor housing association. Information about the housing association sector is available from the Housing Corporation and the National Housing Federation. The local authority and the tenants' independent adviser should also familiarise tenants with the work of local housing associations.

Housing Need (Somali Community)

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information his Department has collated on the housing needs and experiences of the Somali community in the UK. [88266]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not collated centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much in grants the Government is proposing to allocate to each local authority. [88336]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister announced details of the allocation to individual authorities of the £43.9 billion of Revenue Support Grant, Business Rates and Principal Formula Police Grant in 2003–04 on Thursday 5 December. Details were also announced on the same day of most of the grants for specific Personal Social Service's initiatives as set out in the Department of Health letter to local authority social services' departments (LASSL(2002)11). In addition local education authorities have received information on allocations for most of the Standards Fund in the circular "The Standards Fund 2003–04", and the Housing Benefit (HB) and Council Tax Benefit (CTB) circular "HB/CTB S8/2002" provided councils with their 2003–04 allocations for HB/CTB Administration Subsidy. Local authorities will also already have received their indicative Neighbourhood Renewal Fund allocations for 2003–04. Departments will be announcing remaining grants as soon as possible.

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when usages were last reviewed. [87769]

Mr. Leslie: I will write to my hon. Friend as soon as the necessary information is collated.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when the proposed floors and ceilings in the new funding system for local government will be removed. [88335]

Mr. Leslie: As my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) made clear in his statement to the House on 5 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 1079, we expect floors and ceilings to be part of the system indefinitely.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will list the level of council tax rates in each authority. [88337]

Mr. Leslie: Council tax levels in each authority in England are already published. Figures for each financial year since its introduction in 1993–94 are available from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website at www.local.dtlr.gov.uk/finance/ct.htm.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much each local authority has spent below its SSA in the current financial year. [88338]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to the Member for the Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner) on 18 December 2002, *Official Report*.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the impact which the new local government funding system will have on each authority's council tax levels. [88339]

Mr. Leslie: Decisions on council tax are for local authorities to take, after consulting with their local electorate and taxpayers.

Mr. Watts: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister by how much each local authority will be over and under funded if his Department's new proposed funding changes for local government are introduced. [88340]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister no longer takes the view that a grant distribution formula can represent Government's view on what councils need to spend. The proposed new formula grant distribution system aims to reflect the relative cost of service provision. This year, for the first time, The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will also ensure that all authorities receive a grant increase of more than inflation. Since both formula spending shares and floors and ceilings are simply parts of the system which distributes a fixed pot of grant, all authorities will receive their correct share.

Mr. Michael Foster: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) in the local government finance proposed settlement for 2003–04, for what reason Worcestershire is combined with Herefordshire in the assessment of area cost adjustment; [88445]

(2) under the proposed local government finance settlement for 2003–04 on what basis he calculated that Dudley receive area cost adjustment. [88446]

Mr. Leslie: The area cost adjustment has been calculated on pre-1995 county boundaries and pre-1986 metropolitan county boundaries (though counties bordering London are divided into fringe and non-fringe areas). This means that all unitary authorities (including Herefordshire) and all metropolitan districts (including Dudley) receive the same area cost adjustment as the county or metropolitan county of which they were formerly a part. Not only does this help to reduce complexity, but it ensures that the area cost adjustment calculations are robust and stable from year to year. This is because New Earnings Survey sample sizes for individual unitary and metropolitan district authorities are relatively small.

Mr. Kidney: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to include an element of resource equalisation in local government settlements from 2004–05 onwards. [88790]

Mr. Leslie: Resource equalisation has been an element of the local government grant distribution system since the mid-1970's. It will remain so for the foreseeable future.

Local Sport

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to make sport a statutory duty for local authorities; and if he will make a statement. [87649]

Mr. Caborn: I have been asked to reply.

I have no such plans. Local authorities are key providers of sport and recreation and play a central role in the delivery of sport in and for the community. It is through the continuous assessment and improvement of local services through processes such as the comprehensive performance assessment and statutory duties such as Best Value that we can safeguard and bring the highest standards to non-statutory services such as sport and recreation. The Local Government Act 2000 also gives authorities new powers to promote or improve the economic, social or environmental well-being of their area, including the provision of sport and recreational opportunities.

Overcrowded Housing

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister on how many occasions since 1985 he has *(a)* received a report from a local housing authority and *(b)* directed a local housing authority to prepare and submit a report on the extent of overcrowding in their district, under section 334 of the Housing Act 1985; and what action was taken in each instance. [88262]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. As far as the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is aware, the powers in section 334 of the Housing Act 1985 have not been used by local authorities or the Deputy Prime Minister in recent years.

Planning Applications

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 688W, on planning applications, what will happen to the planning applications not dealt with within 16 weeks from close of inquiry to decision. [86963]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister always aims to issue a decision as soon as possible. However, the target recognises that, due to the complex nature of some cases or the impact of unforeseen circumstances, a proportion of them will not be dealt with within the 16 week period following the close of the inquiry.

Right to Buy Scheme

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many appeals against the valuation of a property being sold under the right to buy scheme were submitted in London in each year since 1992, broken down by local authority. [87989]

Mr. McNulty: The following table, compiled by the Valuation Office Agency, which carries out all determinations of appeals under the statutory Right to Buy scheme in England and Wales, shows determinations made in each London borough between 1 January 1992 and 30 November 2002.

Right to Buy cases in London boroughs-Between 1 January 1992 and 30 November 2002

Local authority/case type	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Barking and Dagenham						
LA	56	33	22	15	31	9
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	56	33	22	15	31	9
Barnet						
LA	32	20	12	9	7	6
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	32	20	12	9	7	6
Bexley						
LA	18	15	11	4	13	10
RSL	2	3	2	1	0	0
Total	20	18	13	5	13	10
Brent						
LA	52	37	21	16	27	33
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	52	37	21	16	27	33
Bromley						
LA	24	6	4	4	1	0
RSL	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	24	7	4	4	1	0
Camden						
LA	318	168	84	65	69	124
RSL	0	0	0	10	0	
Total	318	168	84	66	69	124
City of London						
LA	5	7	7	10	4	2
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	5	7	7	10	4	2

Right to Buy cases in London boroughs-Between 1 January 1992 and 30 November 2002

Local authority/case type	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Croydon						
LA	12	13	6	3	4	7
RSL	3	0	0	0	0	0
Total	15	13	6	3	4	7
Ealing						
LA	96	46	22	17	25	8
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	3
Total	96	46	22	17	25	11
Enfield						
LA	31	19	26	9	15	8
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	31	19	26	9	15	8
Greenwich						
LA	178	194	111	133	118	112
RSL	3	3	8	0	0	0
Total	181	197	119	133	118	112
Hackney						
LA	110	63	35	31	39	55
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	110	63	35	31	39	55
Hammersmith and Fulham						
LA	55	30	7	17	25	34
RSL	0	0	0	1	0	0
Total	55	30	7	18	25	34
Haringey						
LA	45	26	15	15	19	31
RSL	0	2	0	0	0	0
Total	45	28	15	15	19	31
Harrow						
LA	11	7	3	1	1	2
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	11	7	3	1	1	2
Havering						
LA	31	27	12	11	10	4
RSL	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	32	27	12	11	10	4
Hillingdon						
LA	55	26	8	5	7	19
RSL	0	0	1	0	0	0
Total	55	26	9	5	7	19
Hounslow						
LA	40	15	10	11	10	8
RSL	2	1	0	0	0	2
Total	42	16	10	11	10	10
Islington						
LA	307	181	101	65	48	82
RSL	1	0	0	1	1	0
Total	308	181	101	66	49	82
Kensington and Chelsea						
LA	32	26	15	18	12	17
RSL	5	0	1	3	0	0
Total	37	26	16	21	12	17
Kingston Upon Thames						
LA	15	4	3	1	1	3
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	15	4	3	1	1	3
Lambeth						
LA	170	69	42	52	46	143
RSL	1	2	0	0	0	0
Total	171	71	42	52	46	143
Lewisham						
LA	63	60	26	30	21	39
RSL	0	7	4	0	0	0
Total	63	67	30	30	21	39

Right to Buy cases in London boroughs-Between 1 January 1992 and 30 November 2002

Local authority/case type	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*
Merton						
LA	1	2	0	3	9	8
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	1	2	0	3	9	8
Newham						
LA	38	37	21	22	22	30
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	38	37	21	22	22	30
Redbridge						
LA	6	10	5	8	8	10
RSL	5	0	0	0	0	0
Total	11	10	5	8	8	10
Richmond upon Thames						
LA	8	12	8	9	4	7
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	8	12	8	9	4	7
Southwark						
LA	93	91	45	29	37	43
RSL	0	0	0	0	1	0
Total	93	91	45	29	38	43
Sutton						
LA	13	11	10	5	10	3
RSL	0	5	1	0	0	0
Total	13	16	11	5	10	3
Tower Hamlets						
LA	61	50	16	11	21	38
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	61	50	16	11	21	38
Waltham Forest						
LA	33	11	14	14	7	14
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	33	11	14	14	7	15
Wandsworth						
LA	29	18	28	29	18	29
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	29	18	28	29	18	29
Westminster						
LA	35	7	6	20	17	14
RSL	1	0	0	0	0	0
Total	36	7	6	20	17	14
Grant total						
LA	2,073	1,341	756	692	706	952
RSL	24	24	17	7	2	6
Total	2,097	1,365	773	699	708	958

Local authority/case type	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Total*
Barking and Dagenham						
LA	12	35	20	22	5	260
RSL	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	12	36	20	22	5	261
Barnet						
LA	5	16	31	62	12	212
RSL	0	0	0	1	0	1
Total	5	16	31	63	12	213
Bexley						
LA	4	3	8	6	5	97
RSL	1	6	3	4	1	23
Total	5	9	11	10	6	120
Brent						
LA	47	79	45	35	11	403
RSL	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	47	79	45	35	12	404

Local authority/case type	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*	*Total*
Bromley						
LA	0	4	5	8	1	57
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	4	5	8	1	58
Camden						
LA	90	112	171	102	39	1,342
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	91	112	171	102	39	1,343
City of London						
LA	0	1	2	0	0	38
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	1	2	0	0	38
Croydon						
LA	7	9	15	12	4	92
RSL	0	0	0	1	0	4
Total	7	9	15	13	4	96
Ealing						
LA	19	35	55	35	7	365
RSL	0	1	0	0	0	4
Total	19	36	55	35	7	369
Enfield						
LA	11	23	26	28	7	203
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	11	23	26	28	7	203
Greenwich						
LA	81	104	108	103	22	1,264
RSL	0	4	1	3	0	22
Total	81	108	109	106	22	1,286
Hackney						
LA	41	101	213	246	74	1,008
RSL	0	4	3	16	6	29
Total	41	105	216	262	80	1,037
Hammersmith and Fulham						
LA	60	53	53	62	14	410
RSL	0	3	0	1	1	6
Total	60	56	53	63	15	416
Haringey						
LA	26	33	33	49	22	314
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	2
Total	26	33	33	49	22	316
Harrow						
LA	7	5	3	6	2	48
RSL	0	0	1	1	0	25
Total	7	5	4	7	2	50
Havering						
LA	4	9	11	25	5	149
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	4	9	11	25	5	150
Hillingdon						
LA	12	15	22	20	3	192
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	12	15	22	20	3	193
Hounslow						
LA	9	21	10	50	15	199
RSL	0	0	2	0	0	7
Total	9	21	12	50	15	206
Islington						
LA	127	186	124	121	33	1,375
RSL	2	0	2	6	4	17
Total	129	186	126	127	37	1,392
Kensington and Chelsea						
LA	36	54	56	55	10	331
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	9
Total	36	54	56	55	10	340
Kingston Upon Thames						
LA	6	4	5	6	3	51
RSL	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	6	5	5	6	3	52

Local authority/case type	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total
Lambeth						
LA	152	296	196	225	44	1,435
RSL	0	6	10	24	2	45
Total	152	302	206	249	46	1,480
Lewisham						
LA	60	74	109	159	47	6[illegible]
RSL	0	0	1	0	0	
Total	60	74	110	159	47	7[illegible]
Merton						
LA	11	10	21	14	3	82
RSL	0	1	0	0	0	1
Total	11	11	21	14	3	83
Newham						
LA	35	33	50	50	13	351
RSL	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total	36	33	50	50	13	352
Redbridge						
LA	15	18	20	18	6	124
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	5
Total	15	18	20	18	6	129
Richmond upon Thames						
LA	18	46	27	13	4	156
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	18	46	27	13	4	156
Southwark						
LA	76	100	104	162	21	801
RSL	0	0	2	2	0	5
Total	76	100	106	164	21	806
Sutton						
LA	2	6	23	19	7	109
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	6
Total	2	6	23	19	7	115
Tower Hamlets						
LA	40	51	114	136	36	574
RSL	0	8	14	19	3	44
Total	40	59	128	155	39	618
Waltham Forest						
LA	15	43	44	46	10	251
RSL	1	0	1	1	2	6
Total	16	43	45	47	12	257
Wandsworth						
LA	36	45	45	49	4	330
RSL	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	36	45	46	49	4	331
Westminster						
LA	29	63	36	37	6	270
RSL	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	29	63	36	37	6	271
Grant total						
LA	1,093	1,687	1,805	1,981	495	13,581
RSL	5	35	41	79	20	260
Total	1,098	1,722	1,846	2,060	515	13,841

Note:

Appeals determined for local authority tenants are shown as 'LA'. Those for tenants of registered social landlords (for example, housing associations) exercising the preserved Right to Buy are shown as 'RSL'.

Social Inclusion

Mr. Mullin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to encourage use of public procurement contracts to achieve greater social inclusion; and if he will make a statement. [88141]

Mr. Leslie: Contracts let by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister are based on value for money, defined as the optimum combination of whole-life cost and quality (or fitness for purpose) to meet the user's requirement.

Local authorities are independent and autonomous and responsible within law for making their own decision on procurement matters. It is for them to decide how far their procurement contracts should be used to achieve greater social inclusion. It remains the responsibility of individual local authorities to make their own judgement about the use of social considerations in procurement, consistent with domestic law, including the duty to achieve best value, and the EC legal framework.

The European Commission has recently provided clarification on the possibilities that Community law offers public purchasers who wish to take account of relevant social considerations into public procurement procedures. This clarification takes the form of an Interpretative Communication that explains how social concerns may be taken into account at each separate stage of the contract award procedure.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is working with the Local Government Association through the Local Government Procurement Forum to prepare guidance for local authorities on the EC Procurement Directives and how social considerations may be included in procurement exercises.

Starter Home Initiative

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, pursuant to his answer of 3 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 711W, how many key workers there are in each of the groups; and how many key worker shortages there are in each group used in informing his Department of the numbers to give assistance to. [87940]

Mr. McNulty: When the first Starter Home Initiative allocations were made in 2001, the broad numbers of staff in London and the south-east in each of the key worker groups were:

c250,000 health staff, excluding senior medical staff and management;

c120,000 teachers; and

c40,000 police officers and 18,000 police civilian staff.

The Department of Health, Department for Education and Skills and the Home Office advised the now Office of the Deputy Prime Minister where the Starter Home Initiative funds might best be spent to address shortages. This helped to inform allocations to organisations that submitted bids for funding.

Tenancy Deposit Scheme

Margaret Moran: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans he has to consult on making the Tenancy Deposit Scheme compulsory. [88310]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recently launched a consultation on options for the protection of tenancy moneys, including tenancy deposits. The prospects for legislation will be considered in the light of responses received to the consultation.

Visually Impaired Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what measures are in place to ensure that families with visually impaired children have the same priority as other disabled children when allocating housing; what housing improvement schemes are available for poor parents with visually impaired children; and what proposals he has to widen the availability of these schemes. [87363]

Mr. McNulty: In England, housing authorities must ensure that their allocation scheme is framed so as to give reasonable preference to certain categories of persons. The categories are set out in s167 (2) of the Housing Act 1996 and include households consisting of or including someone with a particular need for settled accommodation on medical or welfare grounds, and families with dependent children. Medical grounds will include a visual impairment where it is serious enough to constitute a disability and where a settled home is required to ensure that the particular needs of the visually impaired person are met. A young person with a visual impairment is also more likely to continue to be considered as a "dependent child" for a longer period.

In England, a family with a visually impaired child has a mandatory right to apply for a disabled facilities grant (DFG) which is intended to help with any necessary adaptations to the home. The grant system is administered through local housing authorities who are required to consult with social services to assess the particular needs of the disabled child. The mandatory grant is subject to a maximum limit of £25,000 per application and subject to a means test.

Under the Regulatory Reform (Housing Assistance) (England and Wales) Order 2002, local authorities have been given additional wide ranging powers which can be used to provide additional assistance with housing adaptations outside the statutory limits of the mandatory DFG system. These new powers can be used at the discretion of the local authority, which would need to allocate resources from its own budgets for this purpose.

Home Improvement Agencies (HIAs) enable vulnerable people to maintain their independence in their own home by helping people through the process of arranging home repairs, improvements or adaptations. Also included is the direct provision of repair and maintenance services, preventative initiatives and providing advice on accessing appropriate finance.

In recognition of the important role HIAs play in supporting independent living, Government recently announced additional funding to assist HIAs to deliver housing and health objectives. In addition to the £8.5 million currently invested, ODPM are investing an extra £5.2 million in the sector, and the Department of Health is making £9.5 million available through local authorities over the next three years.

Issues in Scotland are a matter for the Scottish Executive.

Wandsworth Development Plan

Martin Linton: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the timetable is for Wandsworth borough council to deposit a new draft revised (second stage deposit) unitary development plan incorporating the recommendations of the Planning Inspectorate issued to the council on 6 March. [87113]

Mr. McNulty: It is expected that a report will be considered by the relevant Wandsworth borough council committee early in the new year, with a view to the deposit of modifications in spring 2003.

West Midlands Regional Assembly

Mr. Luff: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which organisations he is consulting in Worcestershire as part of his soundings exercise on the possibility of holding a referendum on a West Midlands regional assembly. [88416]

Mr. Leslie: The soundings exercise that was launched by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 2 December 2002 invites views, information and evidence from people on the level of interest in each English region (outside London) in holding a referendum about establishing an elected regional assembly. Views are welcome from any person or organisation on this issue. The paper giving details about this exercise and inviting responses, along with a pro forma for responding, is available on the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's website. Paper copies are also available.

With regards to Worcestershire (as for all English regions outside London), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has written to its principal local authorities, MPs and MEPs inviting views, information and evidence. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has written similarly to the following regional bodies in the West Midlands: the West Midlands Regional Assembly (regional chamber); the West Midlands local government association; TUC Midlands region; Institute of Directors West Midland Region; Birmingham Chamber of Commerce and Industry; CBI West Midlands; West Midlands Constitutional Convention; and Sustainability West Midlands. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has, of course, written to the equivalent bodies in the other English regions outside London.

I have placed a list of all organisations in England contacted about this soundings exercise in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Annual Reports (Production Costs)

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the cost of production was of the *(a)* Community Fund's Annual Report, *(b)* Sport England Annual Report, *(c)* Heritage Lottery Fund and National Heritage Memorial Fund Annual Report and Accounts and *(d)* NESTA Annual Report, in each of the past three years; how many copies of each report were produced; and if she will make a statement. [86377]

Dr. Howells: The information requested for each organisation is set out as follows:

	£	Number of copies
1999–2000		
Community Fund	39,144	7,300
Sport England	36,251	2,000
Heritage Fund	66,486	5,000
NESTA	41,436	3,000
2000–01		
Community Fund	86,686	7,000
Sport England	35,732	2,000
Heritage Fund	71,924	5,000
NESTA	43,896	4,500
2001–02		
Community Fund	71,362	5,300
Sport England	25,671	2,000
Heritage Fund	58,782	5,000
NESTA	48,885	5,000

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to which bodies her Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87386]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 607W.

BBC

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when she will publish the revised version of the proposed changes to the BBC Agreement; and if she will make a statement. [87278]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The proposed amendments to the Agreement will be made available to the Standing Committee on the Communications Bill in time to assist the Committee's consideration of clause 193.

Broadcasting Regulations

Mr. Yeo: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport which regulations govern the broadcasting of programming material by *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial, *(c)* digital cable and *(d)* broadband. [87488]

Dr. Howells: The regulations which govern the broadcasting of programming material by *(a)* digital satellite, *(b)* digital terrestrial, *(c)* digital cable and *(d)* broadband are set out in the Broadcasting Acts 1990 and 1996.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many departmental Christmas cards she and her Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if she will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card she has sent this year. [88110]

Dr. Howells: Ministers sent 1,120 of the 3,800 Christmas cards produced by my Department this year. The design and print costs totalled £1,985, and the majority of cards were sent by second class post.

No assessment was made of the time taken to sign, address and place cards in envelopes. However, most cards were addressed using pre-printed labels.

I am arranging for a copy of the card, which depicts a mural produced by the Crew Art Legacy Project at the Manchester Commonwealth Games, to be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Licensing Reform

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the cost of the impact of the Licensing Bill on *(a)* churches, *(b)* village halls, *(c)* voluntary associations and *(d)* other non-profit-making bodies. [87411]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The Government anticipate that it will be simpler and less expensive for voluntary associations and other non-profit-making bodies to stage entertainment under the new regime. The Regulatory Impact Assessment estimates that some organisations would save around £150 million over the first 10 years. Churches, of course, have been exempt from the requirement for a public entertainment licence for music outside Greater London. Any costs would depend on the licensable activities, if any, which are undertaken and their frequency.

However, as I stated in the House of Commons on 16 December, *Official Report*, column 517, the Government have made a commitment to reconsider its position on the licensing of churches and will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Mr. Heath: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions took place between her Department and religious authorities as part of the consultation on licensing reform. [87409]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* The White Paper "Time for Reform", published in April 2000 was the subject of a full public consultation. It was sent directly to 231 organisations and over 650 organisations produced responses. We received eight responses from religious organisations, including one from the Churches Main Committee. None of these were concerned with the proposal to licence public entertainment in churches and other places of religious worship. Since then, officials of my Department have had discussions with officials of the General Synod of the Church of England about a possible mechanism to exempt churches from licensing controls.

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the additional costs which will be incurred by churches as a result of the provisions of the new Licensing Bill. [87451]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* In the Regulatory Impact Assessment, published with the Licensing Bill, it has been estimated that an initial application for a premises licence would cost between £100 and £500, and that there would be an annual charge of between £50 and £150. Any costs would depend on the licensable activities, if any, which are undertaken and their frequency.

However, as I stated in the House of Commons on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 517, the Government have made a commitment to reconsider its position on the licensing of churches, and will announce our conclusions as soon as possible.

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by her or her predecessor and *(b)* by ministers in her Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87359]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the written answer given to him by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what use her Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87743]

Dr. Howells: The information is as follows:

(a) The Department collects and publishes data which use post codes on:

(i) awards made from National Lottery funds.

(ii) the proportion of households living within a specified distance of a static library.

This followed the introduction of national standards for public libraries in April 2001.

These usages have not been reviewed.

The Department's sole agency, the Royal Parks Agency, does not make use of
postcode areas in collection and publication of data.

(b),(c) The Department and the Royal Parks Agency do not use postcode areas in either devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards or the delivery of services.

Public House Licences

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment she has made of the number of public house licence holders that will be required to undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check by regulations made under the Licensing Bill. [88239]

Dr. Howells: Schedule 8 to the Licensing Bill provides that under the transitional arrangements, holders of justices' licences authorising the sale of alcohol by retail under the current licensing regime will be able to apply for personal licences under the new regime, without undergoing a Criminal Record Bureau check. If such a licence holder has been convicted of any relevant offence or equivalent foreign offence under the Bill, they would, however, be required to submit a statement giving details of that offence with their application for a personal licence. Failure to provide such a statement would be an offence under the Bill.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87691]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Department publishes progress against all of its outstanding PSA targets in its departmental report and autumn performance report. The most recent departmental report was published in May 2002 (Cm 5423) and the autumn performance report in December 2002 (Cm 5699).

Television Subtitling

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer given on 4 July, *Official Report*, column 514W, on television subtitling, whether the code produced by Ofcom relating to the provision of television services for deaf and visually impaired people will include specific guidance on the presentation of subtitles. [87705]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* The code relating to the provision of television services for the deaf and visually impaired, to be produced by Ofcom, will include guidance on the technical standards to be attained for subtitling. We would expect the code to include aspects of style and presentation, as the ITC code currently does.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87388]

Mr. Stephen Twigg *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given yesterday by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office.

Connexions Service

Mr. Phil Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Connexions Card will have an electronic purse to *(a)* manage payments from Education Maintenance Allowances paid by LEAs and *(b)* manage training allowances paid by the Learning and Skills Council. [87957]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There are no plans for the Connexions Card to have an electronic purse for the purposes of managing payments from Education Maintenance Allowances or training allowances.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when the Connexions Card is to be launched. [87958]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Connexions Card is now available to all 16 to 19-year-olds in England.

From February 2003, there will be an extensive national launch programme of activities aimed at young people across England.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many personal advisors worked for the Connexions Service in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [87959]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The information in the table below shows the number of full time equivalent personal advisers who had worked for the Connexions Service in the last two years.

Period	*Number of personal advisers (full time equivalents)*	*Number of operational Connexions Partnerships*
2001–02	2,175.9	15
2002–03[1]	5,958.9	42

[1] Data available to end October 2002

Education Maintenance Allowances

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many 16 to 19-year-olds used their allowance for *(a)* travel costs, *(b)* books and equipment and *(c)* other living costs during the education maintenance allowance pilots; and what research has been undertaken to ascertain these figures. [87954]

Margaret Hodge: Independent evaluation of the education maintenance allowance scheme has been carried out by a consortium led by the Centre for Research in Social Policy. They have collected a great deal of data, including information on how young people spend their EMA, and this was included in the quantitative report on the first year of the scheme. The findings so far show that recipients of EMA are as likely as non-recipients to make a contribution to housekeeping costs, and more likely to pay towards the cost of transport, books and equipment for school. They spent no more than non-recipients on entertainment and were more likely to say that transport, books and equipment were their main item of expenditure.

Free School Meals

Mr. Pike: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he plans to change the criteria for qualification for free school meals; and if he will make a statement. [88270]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: During the passage of the Education Act 2002, the Secretary of State made it clear that she would protect the free school meals' entitlement of families who would otherwise lose this entitlement because they cease to be entitled to income support or income based jobseekers allowance and begin receiving child tax credits instead. The new system will be slightly more generous than the old system with around 75,000 more children from low income families eligible for free school meals from April 2003.

Language Teaching

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many primary schools in the UK teach languages; how many secondary schools do not teach languages; which languages are taught in schools; what proposals he has to increase the range of languages available; what teaching there is in schools on non-European languages; and if he will make a statement. [87367]

Mr. Miliband: A survey conducted by Warwick university estimated that around 20 per cent. of primary schools currently provide some form of language teaching.

Secondary schools are required to offer at least one of the working languages of the EU. When schools have met this requirement they are free to offer non-European languages.

Ofsted is not aware of any secondary schools that have no provision for language teaching.

We do not collect data on the number of languages taught in secondary schools. However, we are aware that overall around 20 languages are offered by 157 Specialist Language Colleges including Chinese, Japanese, Urdu and Gujerati.

Our Languages Strategy which was published on 18 December, sets out how we intend to improve the country's capabilities in language skills.

Ministerial Meetings

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he last attended a ministerial meeting with European Union Ministers for Education. [87008]

Margaret Hodge: My right hon. Friend has not yet attended a meeting of European Union Ministers for Education. I represented the Secretary of State at the most recent meeting of the EU Education Council which was held in Brussels on 12 November.

Plant Hire

Sir Teddy Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what estimate he has made of the

number of employees in the plant hire industry who have received educational and other benefits from the facilities provided by the Construction Industry Training Board. [87319]

Mr. Ivan Lewis *[holding answer 18 December 2002]:* During 2002 approximately 5,000 employees of plant hire companies received educational and other benefits through the Construction Industry Training Board.

Post-16 Funding

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what research his Department has undertaken to ascertain the extent to which school sixth form and college access funds are used for *(a)* travel costs, *(b)* books and equipment and *(c)* other living costs. [87953]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department for Education and Skills has commissioned a two-year study by the Institute of Employment Studies to evaluate the use and effectiveness of the learner support funds in further education institutions. The interim report was made available in April 2001 and can be accessed via the DfES website at: www.dfes.gov.uk (young people/further education funding support/report). Publication of the final report is expected in spring 2003.

The interim research found that 81 per cent. of further education institutions use learner support funds to subsidise travel costs. Around 40 per cent. of the available funding is spent on transport services and residential provision.

A total of 367,055 awards were made in 2000–01. The table shows the number of awards made against the three categories.

	Number of awards
Transport	83,714
Books and equipment	81,837
Other (inc. living/general)	37,474

Postcodes

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what use his Department and its agencies make of postcode areas for *(a)* the collection and publication of data, *(b)* devising formulae for the distribution of grants and awards and *(c)* the delivery of services; and when such usages were last reviewed. [87746]

Mr. Miliband: Wherever possible, the Department and its agencies collect information on an on-going basis on the postcode of usual residence of individual learners and/or place of learning to facilitate the compilation of statistics on education and skills at various geographical levels—for example, local education authorities and coalfield areas. Some of these statistics are then used with others as a basis for funding allocations—for example, postcodes are used to obtain a measure of resident pupils, one factor in calculating Education Formula Spending Shares. The Department is fully committed to working closely with the Office for Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) and others to produce better information for small areas. This will allow DfES and other Government Departments to develop and evaluate locally targeted policies and interventions as well as helping to tackle Neighbourhood Renewal.

Progress Files

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of secondary schools have used Progress Files for pupils aged 13 and over in *(a)* 2001–02 and *(b)* 2002–03. [87960]

Mr. Miliband: The proportion of secondary schools which have ordered Progress File materials for pupils aged 13 and over is approximately 25 per cent. in 2001–02 and 40 per cent. in 2002–03 academic years to date.

School Funding

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what criteria will be used to allocate the new fund to assist schools applying for specialist status which have encountered difficulties in raising funds. [87195]

Mr. Miliband: My Department has not yet finalised the criteria for the allocation of the Partnership Fund. The criteria will be based around evidence that the school has made a real effort to raise sponsorship and that, although they have not been able to get the required level of private sector funding, the school has created other valuable links with businesses.

The full criteria for the allocation of the funds will be set out in due course.

School Transport

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will issue new guidelines to local education authorities on school transport contracts on overcrowding and use of seatbelts. [87402]

Mr. Charles Clarke: As my hon. Friend is aware, from 1 November 2001, seat-belts had to be fitted on all new minibuses, coaches and buses (apart from those specifically designed for urban use with standing passengers). There are no regulations governing the use of seat belts in buses. However, my Department's current guidance does refer to RoSPA's 1991 code of practice on school transport safety, and says that

> "LEAs should encourage contractors, drivers, parents, pupils and schools to observe the code, and especially its recommendation that seatbelts should be worn where fitted."

The Department has not issued guidelines to local education authorities on overcrowding. The regulations that govern seating and standing on all buses are the Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984, the Public Service Vehicles (Conditions of Fitness, Equipment, Use and Certification) Regulations 1981, as amended, and the Public Service Vehicles (Conduct of Drivers, Inspectors, Conductors and Passengers) Regulations 1990. Enforcement of regulations relating to carrying capacity and safety of buses rests with the Police and the Vehicle Inspectorate. I am not aware of any prosecutions for overcrowding on services involving school transport.

We have no immediate plans to issue further guidance to LEAs on school transport at this stage.

Visually Impaired Children

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what measures are in place to ensure that visually impaired children have access to adequate primary and secondary education; and what proposals he has to assist visually impaired children at school. [87362]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Responsibility for making suitable provision for children with special educational needs, including those with visual impairment, rests in the first instance with schools and local education authorities (LEAs). The nature and extent of provision is decided locally in the light of the circumstances and individual needs of each child. In making provision, schools and LEAs must have regard to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), Special Educational Needs Code of Practice, which provides practical guidance to schools and LEAs on their responsibilities and promotes consistency of approach.

Since September 2002, LEAs and schools have had a duty to ensure that disabled pupils are not treated less favourably, without justification, than non-disabled pupils; and to make reasonable adjustments so that disabled pupils are not put at a substantial disadvantage to their non-disabled pupils. In England and Wales there is also a duty on LEAs and schools to plan strategically and make progress in increasing physical accessibility to schools' premises and to the curriculum. The DfES has issued guidance on the new duty, Accessible Schools: Planning to increase access to schools for disabled pupils.

Substantial funding has been provided, and continues to be provided under the Schools Access initiative to improve access for disabled children—£70 million in 2002–03, increasing to £100 million for each of the next three years, 2003–06.

In addition, in 2002–03 a total of £91 million was made available to LEAs and schools to support the needs of pupils with SEN and disabilities and vulnerable children from the DfES Standards Fund. The same level of funding will be available in 2003–04. The fund can be used for training, including training leading to mandatory qualification for teachers of pupils with visual impairment.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Accreditation

Mr. Mark Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what his Department is doing to support the Government's policy on accreditation. [88092]

Mr. Denham: Under Sections 40 and 43 of the Police Reform Act 2002, it is now open to chief officers in all 43 police forces in England and Wales, and the British transport police, to set up a community safety accreditation scheme in their area. Individuals able to meet agreed high standards could then be accredited with certain low level police powers to enable them to tackle anti-social behaviour and environmental problems in the local communities where they work.

The setting up of such a scheme is entirely a matter for the chief officer concerned but a number are taking the necessary steps towards setting up a scheme in their area. In order to help them, and other interested parties, we shall shortly be putting some general accreditation guidance on the police reform website showing interested parties the kind of standards which will be necessary for accreditation.

We shall continue to show support for accreditation schemes by offering advice and guidance, as required. Towards the end of next year we plan to issue a code of practice based on the good practice that has developed.

Air Weapons

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will introduce a licensing scheme for the purchase of air weapons. [87283]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are considering a range of options for dealing with the problem of air weapon misuse. I hope shortly to be in a position to put forward proposals.

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will raise the age limit for the use of air weapons to 18 years. [87285]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We are considering a range of options for dealing with the problem of air weapon misuse including possible changes to existing age limits. I hope shortly to be in a position to put forward proposals.

Children's Rights

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the report on the UK by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. [86141]

Mr. Denham: We are currently considering the recommendations of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. The Committee's recommendations are extremely wide-ranging, and relate to many aspects of Government policy. Lead Departments across Whitehall, together with the devolved Administrations, are considering how to take the Committee's comments into account in future work, and we will consider the Committee's recommendations carefully in developing our overarching strategy for children and young people.

Community Support Officers

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to what extent each local authority has used powers under Section 33 of the Police Act 1966 to help fund new community support officers; and how many such officers are employed. [86915]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* There was no Police Act for England and Wales in 1966. Over £19 million was made available for the recruitment of more than 1,000 Community Support Officers (CSOs) in England and Wales during this financial year.

Twenty seven police forces and authorities made bids for a share of this fund and we were able to offer some funding to all of them.

We continue to work with police forces and authorities to develop their implementation plans and are encouraging them to discuss with potential funding partners, such as local authorities, how further CSOs might be funded in the future.

At present there are 215 CSOs patrolling the streets of Westminster, Newham and Tower Hamlets. Lancashire Constabulary introduced 20 CSOs to their force area on 16 December.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 31 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. S. Pickup. [87657]

Mr. Blunkett: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 18 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Nazia Butt. [87659]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, on 12 December 2002.

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 4 November from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Kahim Salam Mahmud. [87660]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend, on behalf of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, on 12 December 2002,

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 24 October from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. Nisar Ahmed. [87661]

Beverley Hughes: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 December 2002.

Crime and Antisocial Behaviour

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what funding the Government have made available for community support officers in Lancashire since the initiative began; [86944]

(2) what steps he is taking to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Morecambe. [86945]

Mr. Denham: The Government is committed to tackling crime and anti- social behaviour. Morecambe, as part of the Lancaster Crime and Disorder Partnership, will benefit from the schemes designed to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour throughout the area. Morecambe has received £16,000 from the Safer Communities Initiative to fund an alleygating scheme in a crime hotspot to reduce access to the rears of both residential and commercial properties. The Small Retailers Scheme has provided £7,541 to provide such items as locks, grills and to improve lighting for 30 shops in the Morecambe area.

In August 2002 a street warden scheme providing 10 wardens was introduced to help tackle environmental and physical problems in the area, vehicle crime, anti-social behaviour and juvenile nuisance.

Lancashire Constabulary has made a successful bid for £946,477 to employ 72 community support officers by 31 March 2003. The posting of Community Safety Officers within Lancashire will be an operational matter for the Chief Constable to decide.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many arrests have been made in Chorley in the last 12 months; and which custody suites have been used. [87055]

Mr. Denham: Information on the number of arrests for notifiable offences is collected centrally at police force area level only. Available information shows that in 2001–02 (latest available) there were 41,715 arrests for notifiable offences within the Lancashire police force area.

According to Lancashire constabulary records, 2,848 persons were arrested in the Chorley borough of South Ribble, Lancashire in the year ending July 2002. Of these 88 per cent. were lodged at Leyland custody suite and 12 per cent. were lodged at Skelmersdale custody suite.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what steps he is taking to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in Chorley; [87028]

(2) what Government funding has been made available for community support officers in Chorley; and how many officers it has provided. [87054]

Mr. Denham: The Government is taking a number of steps to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour in all areas of the country. Lancashire is one of the forces involved in the street crime initiative. Other initiatives such as safer communities and the crime reduction programme have also made an important contribution.

The Police Reform Act 2002 contains a number of measures to address crime and anti-social behaviour, including changes to improve the effectiveness of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders and the creation of Community Support Officers (CSOs).

Lancashire Constabulary have made a successful bid for £946,477 to employ 72 community support officers by 31 March 2003.

In relation to the number of these CSOs who may work within Chorley, the posting of CSOs within Lancashire is an operational matter for the Chief Constable.

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported crimes there were in the Chorley council area in the last three years, broken down by ward. [87053]

Mr. Denham: Numbers of crimes reported to the police are not collected centrally. Statistics of crimes recorded by the police in 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02 for six key offence groups have been collected for the Chorley Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), and have been published in the Home Office Statistical Bulletins (HOSBs) 'Recorded Crime England and Wales, 12 months to March 2001' (HOSB 12/01) and 'Crime in England and Wales, 2001–02' (HOSB 07/02). The figures are given in the following table. Numbers of offences by ward are not collected centrally.

Numbers of key offences in Chorley CDRP, years ending March 2000, 2001 and 2002

Offence	*Year end March 2000*	*Year end March 2001*	*Year end March 2002*
Violence against the person	551	581	646
Sexual offences	38	47	49
Robbery	27	32	64
Burglary in a dwelling	526	492	780
Theft of a motor vehicle	464	414	413
Theft from a vehicle	700	837	872

It should be noted that the Lancashire constabulary adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in August 2000, ahead of its national implementation in April 2002. The effect of the standard will be to increase the number of crimes counted, and so the figures given in the table will not be directly comparable between years.

Crime Figures (Lancaster)

Geraldine Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reported crimes there were in the Lancaster city council area in 2001, broken down by ward. [86981]

Mr. Denham: Numbers of crimes reported to the police are not collected centrally. Statistics of crimes recorded by the police in 2001–02 for six key offence groups have been collected for the Lancaster Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP), and have been published in 'Crime in England and Wales 2001/02' (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 7/02). The figures are given in the following table. Numbers of offences by ward are not collected centrally.

Numbers of key offences in Lancaster CDRP, year ending March 2002

	Number
Violence against the person	1,620
Sexual offences	91
Robbery	96
Burglary in a dwelling	853
Theft of a motor vehicle	368
Theft from a vehicle	1,212

It should be noted that the Lancashire Constabulary adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in August 2000, ahead of its national implementation in April 2002. The effect of the standard will be to increase the number of crimes counted.

Crime Reduction Fund

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list each initiative under the Crime Reduction Fund, indicating *(a)* the amount budgeted for each initiative and in total in 2001–02 and *(b)* the total expended for each initiative and in total in 2001–02; and if he will make a statement. [84297]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* The total provision for the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) in 2001–02 was £189 million (my previous answer to the hon. Member included also the amounts needed to complete the Crime Reduction Programme in 2002–03). Expenditure on the programme in 2001–02, totalled £149 million (with £37 million of the £40 million shortfall attributable to implementation of the Close Circuit Television initiative). In 2002–03, the total provision for the CRP is £111 million which includes the £40 million shortfall from 2001–02.

The information covering project grant evaluation and running costs on the CRP in 2001–02 is given in the table.

£000

	Delegated for provision for 2001–02[1]	*Actual expenditure for 2001–02*
Reduced Burglary	18,491	18,462
Locks for the over-60s	3,000	2,796
Summer Schemes	1,680	2,058
Prostitution—What Works	1,028	895
Targeted Policing	18,606	15,482
'On Track'[2]	0	2,205
Innovation Fund[3]	0	0
Vehicle Crime Publicity	0	0
Treatment of Offenders	8,175	6,134
Drug Arrest Referrals	10,521	9,930
Schools Intervention	5,405	4,483
Violence Against Women	7,092	5,916
Vehicle Crime	2,610	861
Youth Inclusion	2,750	2,750
Sentencing Practices	3,155	1,914
Neighbourhood Wardens	3,000	2,867
Design Against Crime	1,052	767
Toolkits	400	403
Arson Control Forum	0	0
Offenders Index	0	0
Suzy Lamplugh Trust	295	196
Rape Crisis Federation	406	296
CCTV Initiative[4]	101,308	70,523
Total[5, 6]	188,974	148,938

[1] Shows the amounts delegated to these initiatives in 2001–02. The figures for 2001–02 also take into account the effects of the Spending Review 2000 Settlement.
[2] Balance of funding transferred to the Department for Education and Skills for completion of programme.
[3] Funding reallocated to other projects
[4] Provision comes from the Capital Modernisation Fund. Includes £4.6 million for CCTV in police vehicles. Agreed end year flexibility of £37 million on the CCTV initiative in 2001–02 to be carried forward into 2002–03.
[5] The total figure excludes central and regional programme support costs, which are not allocated to particular initiatives.
[6] The provision for 2001–02 given in my previous reply to the hon. Member was £260 million, which also included the funding needed to roll out the rest of the CRP in 2002–03. The outturn for 2001–02 at £149 million and provision for 2002–03 at £111 million total £260 million.

Crime Statistics

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for each police force

in each year since 1997, *(a)* the number of offences recorded broken down by major category, *(b)* the number and proportion of those offences that were cleared up, *(c)* the number of persons prosecuted for offences and *(d)* the number and proportion of such persons convicted of such offence. [86853]

Mr. Denham: The figures requested on recorded crimes and detections for the years up to 2000–01 are available in Chapter 2 of successive editions of the publication 'Criminal Statistics England and Wales', which are available in the Library. The 2001–02 figures are available in tables 7.02 and 8.03 of 'Crime in England and Wales 2001–02' (Home Office Statistical Bulletin 7/02), which is also available in the Library.

It should be noted that there was a change in counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998, which increased the coverage of offences, and also placed a greater emphasis on counting crimes in terms of the number of victims. Recorded crime and detection data before and after this date are therefore not directly comparable.

There was a change in the counting rules for detections on 1 April 1999, in order to tighten up what could be counted as a detection. Figures for detections before and after this date will therefore not be directly comparable.

Some police forces adopted the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard in advance of its national implementation in April 2002, and this will also have an effect on the numbers of offences recorded and detection rates.

The requested information on the number of defendants proceeded against, and the number and proportion found guilty, by offence group for notifiable offences by police force area for the years 1997 to 2001, has been placed in the Library. The proportion of defendants is based on a comparison between the number prosecuted and the number convicted. Some convictions will be in a different year to the initial prosecution in the magistrates court, which account for the figures greater than 100 per cent. given in the relevant table.

It should be noted that as the recorded crime and detection data relate to offences, and that the court data relate to offenders, they are not directly comparable.

Recorded crime: number of detections by offence group and police force area and region 2001–02

Police force area and region	*Total*	*Violence against the person*	*Sexual offences*	*Robbery*	*Burglary*	*Theft and handling stolen goods*	*Fraud and forgery*	*Criminal damage*	*Drug offences*	*Other*
Cleveland	14,723	2,269	364	231	1,836	6,324	865	1,281	1,095	458
Durham	16,396	5,066	200	99	1,532	4,587	972	1,982	1,270	688
Northumbria	43,768	11,587	518	442	3,336	13,702	2,606	5,161	4,761	1,655
North East Region	74,887	18,922	1,082	772	6,704	24,613	4,443	8,424	7,126	2,801
Cheshire	18,157	4,684	308	152	1,700	5,687	1,128	1,989	1,570	939
Cumbria	12,115	4,092	152	61	723	3,506	687	1,641	910	343
Greater Manchester	79,552	27,801	1,415	1,557	5,595	21,136	4,611	9,703	4,556	3,178
Lancashire	35,948	9,887	508	388	3,616	10,585	2,214	4,151	3,117	1,482
Merseyside	35,947	10,198	560	585	3,029	11,171	1,485	3,298	4,179	1,442
North West Region	181,719	56,662	2,943	2,743	14,663	52,085	10,125	20,782	14,332	7,384
Humberside	23,306	6,224	301	201	2,109	8,335	1,868	2,464	1,292	512
North Yorkshire	15,344	4,373	233	84	1,065	4,773	1,334	1,586	1,372	524
South Yorkshire	31,597	6,698	412	463	3,328	10,559	2,426	2,920	3,359	1,432
West Yorkshire	57,694	14,294	968	1,152	8,099	18,041	3,124	5,753	4,218	2,045
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	127,941	31,589	1,914	1,900	14,601	41,708	8,752	12,723	10,241	4,513
Derbyshire	22,204	6,920	395	250	2,337	6,180	1,397	2,439	1,413	873
Leicestershire	25,099	6,941	321	241	1,831	7,798	2,465	2,745	1,569	1,188
Lincolnshire	13,588	3,549	260	81	1,242	4,323	907	1,674	1,067	485
Northamptonshire	18,878	4,955	232	280	1,418	6,706	1,543	2221	953	570
Nottinghamshire	28,048	8,110	454	446	2,684	9,062	1,376	2,794	1,889	1,233
East Midlands Region	107,817	30,475	1,662	1,298	9,512	34,069	7,688	11,873	6,891	4,349
Staffordshire	27,754	10,471	413	216	2,022	6,937	1,391	3,132	2,066	1,106
Warwickshire	10,585	3,093	111	110	1,180	3,367	696	1,102	628	298
West Mercia	30,011	10,662	408	183	1,908	8,018	2,292	3,424	2,114	1,002
West Midlands	107,456	37,092	1,586	2,766	9,330	27,482	7,639	9,380	7,419	4,762
West Midlands Region	175,806	61,318	2,518	3,275	14,440	45,804	12,018	17,038	12,227	7,168
Bedfordshire	12,890	3,556	140	161	879	4,607	821	1,359	954	413
Cambridgeshire	15,625	5,349	279	146	1,508	4,370	834	1,744	780	615
Essex	29,567	9,391	445	227	1,911	8,996	1,859	3,857	2,109	772
Hertfordshire	16,362	3,761	258	214	1,210	6,015	1,307	1,766	1,343	488
Norfolk	14,720	4,259	239	97	1,027	4,433	1,248	1,903	1,161	353
Suffolk	16,426	5,693	234	117	836	4,398	1,066	2,255	1,219	608
East of England Region	105,590	32,009	1,595	962	7,371	32,819	7,135	12,884	7,566	3,249
London, City of	3,414	357	18	8	141	1,294	891	114	444	147
Metropolitan Police	148,827	41,304	3,201	6,042	12,046	38,672	8,526	12,255	22,075	4,706
London Region	152,241	41,661	3,219	6,050	12,187	39,966	9,417	12,369	22,519	4,853
Hampshire	40,052	12,607	874	262	2,622	11,087	2,765	4,906	3,370	1,559
Kent	33,903	8,690	588	269	2,189	11,062	2,087	4,790	2,946	1,282
Surrey	15,455	4,677	229	167	935	3,824	1,496	1,863	1,804	460

Recorded crime: number of detections by offence group and police force area and region 2001–02

Police force area and region	Total	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Robbery	Burglary	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other
Sussex	34,428	12,577	482	338	1,864	9,127	2,064	4,047	2,500	1,429
Thames Valley	48,196	11,638	447	749	4,705	16,634	4,123	4,658	3,985	1,257
South East Region	172,034	50,189	2,620	1,785	12,315	51,734	12,535	20,264	14,605	5,987
Avon and Somerset	25,632	5,131	341	510	3,254	9,044	2,639	2,362	1,775	576
Devon and Cornwall	31,963	9,270	572	160	2,033	8,516	2,896	3,566	3,940	1,010
Dorset	14,567	3,545	214	64	1,185	3,958	2,239	1,655	1,323	384
Gloucestershire	15,110	3,668	166	130	1,509	4,848	1,456	1,590	1,209	534
Wiltshire	11,745	3,221	190	91	860	3,579	985	1,376	1,089	354
South West Region	99,017	24,835	1,483	955	8,841	29,945	10,215	10,549	9,336	2858
Dyfed Powys	15,393	5,276	268	21	771	2973	1,057	1,855	2,385	787
Gwent	26,011	8,355	398	124	2,168	7,834	1,594	3,054	1,730	754
North Wales	14,934	4,874	241	65	914	4,238	941	1,788	1,321	552
South Wales	38,006	11,910	436	249	2,587	10,720	2,497	4,440	3,869	1,298
Wales	94,344	30,415	1,343	459	6,440	25,765	6,089	11,137	9,305	3,391
England and Wales	1,291,396	378,075	20,379	20,199	107,074	378,508	88,417	138,043	114,148	46,553

Number of defendants proceeded against at the magistrates courts for notifiable offences by police force area England and Wales 1997[1]

Proceeded against	Violence against the person	Sexual offences	Burglary	Robbery	Theft and handling stolen goods	Fraud and forgery	Criminal damage	Drug offences	Other offences	Total
Avon and Somerset	3,517	250	1,134	195	4,336	630	1,311	811	1,075	13,259
Bedfordshire	1,427	65	439	130	1,708	280	537	456	433	5,475
Cambridgeshire	1,890	77	674	80	1,779	363	700	405	629	6,597
Cheshire	3,248	143	847	158	3,180	543	1,021	985	936	11,061
Cleveland	2,127	57	1,175	134	3,193	326	765	364	700	8,841
Cumbria	2,397	72	562	36	1,984	423	795	538	404	7,211
Derbyshire	3,353	209	888	80	2,604	538	1,101	506	1,158	10,437
Devon and Cornwall	4,346	170	1,091	101	4,026	787	1,427	1,454	1,135	14,537
Dorset	1,156	107-	438	69	1,770	521	558	347	422	5,388
Durham	2,457	61	795	72	2,013	330	749	366	659	7,502
Essex	3,996	226	995	137	4,307	842	1,396	1,134	1,392	14,425
Gloucestershire	1,347	47	472	73	1,581	265	510	323	582	5,200
Greater Manchester	9,302	522	2,939	876	11,799	1,530	2,991	2,193	3,203	35,355
Hampshire	5,044	240	1,290	181	5,543	1,176	1,877	1,309	1,951	18,611
Hertfordshire	1,883	103	403	110	1,843	376	655	549	560	6,482
Humberside	2,968	91	1,053	105	3,305	469	948	611	780	10,330
Kent	3,260	126	1,031	121	4,704	514	1,448	1,300	853	13,357
Lancashire	6,910	268	2,152	264	6,952	1,036	1,843	1,726	1,731	22,882
Leicestershire	3,387	168	945	264	2,914	631	1,036	650	984	10,979
Lincolnshire	2,194	97	672	39	2,115	412	729	693	579	7,530
London, City of	212	9	35	8	414	235	51	166	141	1,271
Merseyside	4,681	150	1,384	259	6,611	886	1,219	2,311	1,571	19,072
Metropolitan police	21,598	1,401	5,512	2,930	24,955	5,135	6,051	9,253	6,645	83,480
Norfolk	2,287	180	447	41	1,788	424	829	695	385	7,076
Northamptonshire	1,773	54	564	82	1,748	309	767	229	411	5,937
Northumbria	6,045	263	2,018	394	6,405	863	1,872	1,192	2,090	21,142
North Yorkshire	2,630	107	624	81	2,272	460	736	605	692	8,207
Nottinghamshire	4,788	254	1,374	225	4,332	699	1,425	797	1,179	15,073
South Yorkshire	3,970	156	1,318	241	4,973	592	1,578	1,339	1,065	15,232
Staffordshire	3,763	207	1,054	132	3,205	623	1,570	903	926	12,383
Suffolk	1,752	68	516	74	1,633	602	685	535	484	6,349
Surrey	1,493	51	318	84	1,398	279	544	419	469	5,055
Sussex	3,239	124	961	189	4,013	707	1,078	1,207	927	12,445
Thames Valley	3,934	180	1,181	278	4,387	751	1,498	1,353	1,339	14,901
Warwickshire	1,121	51	447	65	1,244	225	400	229	522	4,304
West Mercia	2,951	115	922	101	2,592	524	923	732	1,058	9,918
West Midlands	8,928	528	3,502	1,151	10,008	1,607	2,902	2,058	3,560	34,244
West Yorkshire	7,508	479	3,467	673	9,367	1,511	2,668	3,721	2,365	31,759
Wiltshire	1,222	80	308	66	1,121	260	467	333	261	4,118
Dyfed Powys	2,483	78	575	38	1,457	324	593	757	815	7,120
Gwent	3,413	92	769	94	2,121	406	1,135	645	777	9,452
North Wales	2,665	137	571	44	2,022	413	909	591	754	8,106
South Wales	6,622	201	1,668	306	5,776	890	2,444	1,431	1,777	21,115
England and Wales	165,287	8,064	49,530	10,781	175,498	30,717	54,741	48,221	50,379	593,218

[1] These data are on the principal offence basis.

Criminal Offences

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many offences were brought to justice in each of the Criminal Justice System areas in the last three years. [83676]

Mr. Blunkett: The requested information is available for all areas for 1999–2000, 2000–01 and 2001–02, although the figures for 2001–02 are, at this stage, provisional. The information is contained in the table.

Offences brought to justice1 by police force area: 2001–02, 2000–01 and 1999–2000—Absolute and percentage changes from 1999–2000

				Change 2000–01 to 2001–02		*Change 1999–2000 to 2001–02*	
	OBTJ 2001–022	*OBTJ 2000–01*	*OBTJ 1999–2000*	*Number*	*Percentage*	*Number*	*Percentage*
Avon and Somerset	28,083	27,463	28,487	620	2.3	-404	-1.4
Bedfordshire	11,297	10,897	10,244	400	3.7	1,053	10.3
Cambridgeshire	10,783	11,465	13,503	-682	-5.9	-2,720	-20.1
Cheshire	15,211	17,186	18,505	-1,975	-11.5	-3,294	-17.8
Cleveland	14,603	14,546	15,427	57	0.4	-824	-5.3
Cumbria	9,985	9,779	12,255	206	2.1	-2,270	-18.5
Derbyshire	17,574	16,425	17,226	1,149	7.0	348	2.0
Devon and Cornwall	25,640	25,585	26,966	55	0.2	-1,326	-4.9
Dorset	11,756	10,719	12,031	1,037	9.7	-275	-2.3
Durham	13,723	12,900	12,869	823	6.4	854	6.6
Dyfed Powys	11,010	10,682	13,064	328	3.1	-2,054	-15.7
Essex	21,912	20,281	22,459	1,631	8.0	-547	-2.4
Gloucestershire	12,920	13,033	13,461	-113	-0.9	-541	-4.0
Greater Manchester	57,501	68,546	72,821	-11,045	-16.1	-15,320	-21.0
Gwent	16,892	16,902	18,899	-10	-0.1	-2,007	-10.6
Hampshire	31,848	32,254	35,655	-406	-1.3	-3,807	-10.7
Hertfordshire	13,573	13,488	13,856	85	0.6	-283	-2.0
Humberside	17,859	18,847	20,120	-988	-5.2	-2,261	-11.2
Kent	24,466	27,833	28,600	-3,367	-12.1	-4,134	-14.5
Lancashire	30,650	29,666	32,366	984	3.3	-1,716	-5.3
Leicestershire	19,580	18,157	20,177	1,423	7.8	-597	-3.0
Lincolnshire	13,125	10,256	10,488	2,869	28.0	2,637	25.1
Merseyside	30,613	32,321	30,699	-1,708	-5.3	-86	-0.3
Met. Area of London[3]	123,665	121,765	141,276	1,900	1.6	-17,611	-12.5
Norfolk	12,621	12,897	16,340	-276	-2.1	-3,719	-22.8
North Wales	13,226	12,551	13,960	675	5.4	-734	-5.3
North Yorkshire	12,339	12,300	14,380	39	0.3	-2,041	-14.2
Northamptonshire	13,204	13,940	13,963	-736	-5.3	-759	-5.4
Northumbria	41,514	40,128	43,952	1,386	3.5	-2,438	-5.5
Nottinghamshire	24,569	25,971	26,723	-1,402	-5.4	-2,154	-8.1
South Wales	30,977	28,792	33,856	2,185	7.6	-2,879	-8.5
South Yorkshire	24,383	25,812	27,685	-1,429	-5.5	-3,302	-11.9
Staffordshire[4]	21,197	22,640	20,603	-1,443	-6.4	594	2.9
Suffolk	12,034	11,768	11,808	266	2.3	226	1.9
Surrey	12,267	11,004	12,020	1,263	11.5	247	2.1
Sussex	22,724	20,256	20,276	2,468	12.2	2,448	12.1
Thames Valley	31,309	32,137	29,694	-828	-2.6	1,615	5.4
Warwickshire	8,092	7,057	7,709	1,035	14.7	383	5.0
West Mercia	22,444	20,478	21,587	1,966	9.6	857	4.0
West Midlands	79,707	72,001	74,971	7,706	10.7	4,736	6.3
West Yorkshire	46,928	53,033	61,149	-6,105	-11.5	-14,221	-23.3
Wiltshire	10,851	9,987	11,625	864	8.6	-774	-6.7
England and Wales	1,024,654	1,023,748	1,103,755	906	0.1	-79,102	-7.2
Comprised of:							
TICs	91,084	88,657	97,640	2,427	2.7	-6,557	-6.7
Cautions	228,691	228,814	249,486	-123	-0.1	-20,795	-8.3
Convictions	704,879	706,277	756,629	-1,398	-0.2	-51,750	-6.8

[1] Offences brought to justice include TICs, cautions and convictions for notifiable offences

[2] 2002 Q1 figures are provisional (including estimates of shortfalls) and are subject to change. Hence 2001–02 figures are also provisional.

[3] Metropolitan area of London includes City of London.

[4] Staffordshire supplied only four weeks data from magistrates courts in 2000. Hence both 1999–2000 and 2000–01 figures include estimates of shortfalls.

Crown Court Juries

Gareth Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the effect of interference with juries on the outcome of prosecutions in the Crown court in the last five years. [82004]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The possibility of jury interference has always been a matter of concern, particularly but by no means exclusively, in the context of trials relating to organised crime. There are several important legal measures already in force, designed to deal with jury interference.

The Crown Prosecution Service does not maintain records of the number of cases in which jury interference takes place, but in the last five years there have been instances of actual or feared jury interference that have resulted both in pre-trial arrangements whereby jury protection is put in place and trials which have been terminated before a jury has been able to reach a verdict. There have also been instances when jury interference has come to light after the jury's verdict has been returned.

The Criminal Justice Bill now before Parliament makes provision for the trial to be conducted without a jury either, on the application of the prosecution where there is a danger of jury tampering or where the judge discharges the jury because of jury tampering. The Government take the view that these measures will be a further strong and effective disincentive to jury tampering.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the Government's policy is on funding research into the prevalence of *(a)* child abuse in the home and *(b)* domestic violence that breaks down results by (i) family configuration and/or (ii) marital status. [86541]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics Directorate (RDS) conducts a wide range of social research, development, statistical economics and modelling work, all of which build up the evidence base, produce national statistics and support practical delivery of the Home Office's targets in all seven Home Office aims.

Priorities for R&D are considered as part of a three year rolling business plan built into the overall Home Office planning process and are based on the resource allocations agreed as part of the spending review. The need for research into the prevalence of these two types of violence will continue to be assessed within the context of overall R&D priorities for the department but both will stay high on the agenda due to their seriousness.

Examining Officers' Powers

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to enable an examining officer to request from the owner of a ship or aircraft specified information even if that information has also been required by immigration officers; and if he will make a statement; [87501]

(2) what plans he has to improve accommodation for special branch officers at airports and ports, and to provide sufficient space to enable persons awaiting interview to sit and be interviewed in private; and if he will make a statement; [87500]

(3) what plans he has *(a)* to introduce induction and training for special advocates under the Terrorism Act 2000 and *(b)* to ensure special advocates receive properly prepared instructions; and if he will make a statement; [87495]

(4) what plans he has *(a)* to improve co-ordination between police forces providing special branch services at ports and airports and *(b)* to introduce a unified port and borders police force; and if he will make a statement; [87505]

(5) what plans he has to ensure that transport operators improve the accuracy of the manifesto of passengers they carry into the UK; and if he will make a statement; [87502]

(6) what plans he has to propose amendments to the Terrorism Act 2000 to make it a specific offence to be or to have been concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism; and if he will make a statement. [87499]

Mr. Denham: The issues raised by my hon. Friend are among the comments and recommendations made by the noble Lord Carlile of Berriew QC in his independent report on the operation of the Terrorism Act 2000, which was laid before both Houses of Parliament on 26 November.

I will be giving my full consideration to all of these proposals and I will be responding to Lord Carlile on the issues raised in the new year. I will of course report my response to the House.

Immigration

Mr. Malins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many calls were received by the immigration reporting line; how many prosecutions resulted; and what the cost was of the service during the last 12 months for which figures are available. [87996]

Beverley Hughes: The trial of the confidential hotline ran from May to July 2002. A full evaluation of this trial has now taken place and following consultation recommendations are about to be put to Home Office Ministers. I am therefore unable to give further details at this time.

Once Ministers have had the opportunity to review the findings I will write again to the hon. Member.

Local Authority Finance

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was granted from each source of support within his Department to *(a)* Westminster City Council and *(b)* the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, outside the revenue support grant settlement, in each year since 1997. [85827]

Beverley Hughes: The information is given in the table. The grants included are those paid solely to the councils except in the case of Drug Action Teams, the Crime Reduction Programme and the Partnership Development Fund. In those cases the council is a member of a partnership and funding is allocated to one ormore of the partners, for the benefit of the partnership as a whole.

£

Grant paid and year	Kensington and Chelsea	Westminster
1997–98		
Grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966	739,615	1,363,059
Make A Difference	55,000	0
1998–99		
Grant under section 11 of the Local Government Act 1966[1]	758,845	1,398,498
Make A Difference	30,000	0
Youth Justice Pilots	11,250	17,000
1999–2000		
Crime Reduction Programme and Partnership Development Fund	176,582	[2]384,149
Make A Difference	20,000	0
Youth Justice Pilots	38,930	53,500
Drug Action Teams:		
Development Grant	35,782	0
Adult and Family Asylum Seekers	7,790,560	10,192,480
2000–01		
Drug Action Teams:		
Development Grant	35,782	37,484
Communities Against Drugs	0	0
Crime Reduction Programme and Partnership Development Fund	177,000	[3*]384,144
Adult and Family Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	12,960,608	[4]15,629,840
Referral Order Pilots	62,000	62,000
2001–02		
Drug Action Teams:		
Development Grant	35,260	37,484
Communities Against Drugs	5,656	[5]0
Crime Reduction Programme and Partnership Development Fund	41,883	[3*]2,671,851
Adult and Family Asylum Seekers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children	10,025,493	[6]12,620,222
Referral Order Pilots	62,000	44,198
Communities Against Drugs	199,400	277,800
Small Retailers in Deprived Areas	[7]10,499	0

[1] The Ethnic Minorities and Travellers Achievement Grant, that replaced section 11grant at the end of 1998–99, is administered by the Department for Education and Employment.
[2] These figures had not been previously available.
[3*] This includes the total grant for the Targeted Police Initiative Operation Lilac that was paid to both Westminster and Camden
[4] The figures in the PQ of 10 January 2002 were pre-audit figures and these are post audit figures.
[5] Westminster did not take up their allocation in 2001–02 but have in 2002–03.
[6] These figures were not mentioned in the reply of 10 January 2002 because they were not available.
[7] This money was spent after the PQ of 10 January 2002.

Local Volunteer Development Organisations

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to provide funding for local volunteer development agencies to assist these organisations to register as an umbrella body to use the Criminal Records Bureau. [87249]

Hilary Benn: Since announcing, in February 2001, that higher level disclosure checks would be issued free of charge to volunteers, we have received representations from voluntary organisations requesting additional funding to meet their associated administrative costs. We have considered these representations very carefully but we are not persuaded that it would be appropriate for additional funding to be made available.

We are in discussions with the voluntary and community sectors to explore a range of access arrangements for using the disclosure service which might meet the needs of the organisations concerned in the most appropriate and cost effective manner.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of parliamentary written answers from his Department in the last session consisted of a promise to write to an hon. Member. [83784]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office was asked 6,714 parliamentary written questions last session. Of these, 203, or three per cent. were given an "I will write" reply.

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many parliamentary written questions last session were responded to within *(a)* a week, *(b)* two weeks and *(c)* three weeks. [83785]

Beverley Hughes: The Home Office was asked 6,714 parliamentary written questions last session. Of these, 2,613 were responded to within a week, 1,903 were answered within two weeks and 601 were answered within three weeks. We recognise that our performance in answering parliamentary questions is not as good as

it should be, and we are working closely with directorates and its business change and IT partners to improve the situation.

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many *(a)* parliamentary questions and *(b)* letters from hon. Members in Session 2001–02 remain unanswered, broken down by those which are (i) one month old, (ii) two months old, (iii) three months old, (iv) four months old and (v) over six months old. [84804]

Beverley Hughes: *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The total number of letters received from hon. Members in the last session (2001—2002) was 26,769. The number that remain unanswered as at 6 December is 2,704.

	Number
Total received	26,769
Total unanswered	2,704
Less than one month old	641
One month old	415
Two months old	222
Three months old	210
Four months old	229
Five months old	177
Six months old	810

The Home Office receives a large amount of correspondence from hon. Members. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary and his ministerial team attach the highest importance to the speed and quality of replies to ministerial correspondence, but we recognise that further work is needed to improve the current levels of performance. A number of important initiatives within the Department have helped drive up performance and we are committed to continuing and extending this work. A new computer-based correspondence tracking system will be introduced shortly which will radically change the way we handle letters and will help us produce more timely responses.

Most of the delays occur when responding to MPs' letters in relation to immigration cases, Whilst there is no doubt that the current performance is unacceptable, in many cases when a letter is received regarding an immigration case, it is necessary to locate the relevant file and get it to the person responding to the letter. The fact that cases are dealt with in various parts of the country adds to the difficulty. However, I have instigated further measures to resolve the backlog.

The Cabinet Office publishes annual reports to Parliament, setting out the volume of Members' correspondence received by departments. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library.

In accordance with the normal procedure, all outstanding parliamentary questions from the last session were answered before the session ended. Where a substantive answer was not available; honourable Members will receive a letter giving a full answer shortly, if they have not done so yet. A copy of all such letters will be placed in the Library.

Police

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many police officers there were within the City of London and Metropolitan Police force areas, broken down by London borough *(a)* at the most recent time for which figures are available, *(b)* in May 1997 based on the old boundaries and *(c)* in May 1997 based on the new boundaries. [87095]

Mr. Denham *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Information on the number of Metropolitan Police officers in each London Borough for May 1997 is not available. The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis has provided data, set out in the table, on divisional strength on 31 December 1997 and 31 March 2002. The current London borough divisional structure did not exist in 1997. The figures in the table are those for the previous smaller divisions aggregated into their new borough divisions.

The effects of the boundary changes on 1 April 2000 were incorporated into the police funding formula in 2000–01 and the overall transfer was in terms of financial resources, not of officers.

I am advised by the Commissioner that around 470 MPS officers were seconded to the three boundary change forces on 1 April 2000 to give them time to recruit their own officers to police the former MPS areas now in these counties. These officers returned to the MPS over the next two years. There are now no MPS officers on secondment to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey as a result of the boundary changes of 1 April 2000.

As it is for police authorities and chief officers of police to decide how resources are utilised, it is not possible to show what the strength for each London borough would have been in 1997 had the current territorial division structure been in place. Divisional strength in 1997 would have reflected operational priorities at the time. A sensible comparison between 1997 and 2002 cannot be made.

Information about police strength in the City of London Police's two territorial divisions has been provided by the Commissioner of the City of London Police (Mr. James Hart QPM). He is unable to provide information about divisional police strength in 1997. The City of London Police was unaffected by the boundary changes on 1 April 2000.

Police officers in the territorial divisions of both forces are, of course, supported by police officers in other operational roles, such as traffic, Serious Crime Group, Police Support Units and dogs and mounted sections. There are other officers in specialist squads such as fraud investigation and anti- terrorism duties.

City of London Police and Metropolitan Police

Metropolitan Police London Borough Divisions	*Number of police officers 31 December 1997*	*Number of police officers 31 March 2002*
City of Westminster	1,697	1,544
Kensington and Chelsea	609	541.2
Hammersmith and Fulham	542	515.1
Camden	697	701.0
Islington	549	564.1
Harrow	289	288.9
Brent	613	584.5
Barnet	706	515.5

City of London Police and Metropolitan Police

Metropolitan Police London Borough Divisions	*Number of police officers 31 December 1997*	*Number of police officers 31 March 2002*
Ealing	627	638.2
Hillingdon	398	410.2
Haringey	527	560.0
Hackney	677	674.4
Tower Hamlets	568	559.4
Waltham Forest	464	468.1
Redbridge	497	398.6
Havering	334	319.4
Newham	590	608.4
Barking and Dagenham	300	298.6
Enfield	550	491.0
Southwark	861	805.3
Lewisham	610	598.6
Bromley	464	431.7
Greenwich	612	574.2
Bexley	282	320.8
Croydon	601	591.0
Sutton	405	257.0
Lambeth	917	874.1
Richmond upon Thames	283	277.0
Hounslow	457	436.3
Kingston upon Thames	367	266.9
Merton	293	283.7
Wandsworth	596	562.2
Total	17,982	16,932.2
Heathrow Airport[1]	362	302.6
Divisional strength	18,344	17,234.8
Total force strength	[2]26,677	[2]26,223

[1] These police posts are paid for by Heathrow Airport Plc.
[2] Total force strength is taken from data collected from the forces by Home Office Research, Development and Statistical Group
Note:
Figures are full-time equivalents.

City of London Police Territorial Divisions	*Divisional Strength*	*Divisional Strength*
Snow Hill	Not available	207.3
Bishopsgate	Not available	194.9
Total force strength	[1]859	[1]764

[1] Total force strength is taken from data collected from the forces by Home Office Research, Development and Statistical Group.

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the change in police *(a)* pay and *(b)* pension costs to be met by police authorities between 2002–03 and 2003–04. [87360]

Mr. Denham: It is for each police authority to estimate its projected changes in pay and pensions costs each year.

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the whole-time equivalent police officer establishment was for *(a)* 1992, *(b)* 1997, *(c)* 2000 and *(d)* 2002, in each London borough, giving the percentage and actual variations in each case. [85829]

Mr. Denham: The information has been provided by the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis. The Metropolitan police is unable to provide establishments for each London borough in 1992, 1997 and 2000 as the current London borough divisional arrangement was only introduced after the boundary changes of 1 April 2000 with Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey. The figures shown are therefore the aggregate strength of the old divisions that now fall within the new London borough Divisions for 31 December in each of those years.

The effects of the Metropolitan police boundary changes on 1 April 2000 were incorporated into the police funding formula and the overall transfer between the forces was in terms of financial resources, not of officers. It is for police authorities and Chief Constables to decide how resources are utilised.

I am advised by the Commissioner that around 470 MPS officers were seconded to the three boundary change forces on 1 April 2000 to give them time to recruit their own officers to police the former MPS areas now in these counties. These officers returned to the MPS over the next two years. There are now no MPS officers on secondment to Essex, Hertfordshire and Surrey as a result of the boundary changes of 1 April 2000.

Since 2001 each London borough has been provided with a Budgeted Strength (establishment), which is set by the Commissioner at the start of the financial year, and which the division aims to achieve by the end of the financial year. These borough establishments can be subject to change in the light of changes in circumstances.

The total strength of the Metropolitan police at 31 March 2002 was 26,223 officers, 1,345 more than in March 2001. At the same date the Metropolitan police employed 10,459 civilian support staff, 419 more than in March 2001.

Metropolitan police: actual strength—31 December 1992, 31 December 1997 and 31 December 2000

	Number of police officers as at 31 December		
London borough division	*1992*	*1997*	*2000*
City of Westminster	1,906	1,697	1,580
Kensington and Chelsea	632	609	557
Hammersmith and Fulham	541	542	517
Camden	722	697	671
Islington	547	549	554
Harrow	272	289	295
Brent	624	613	606
Barnet	759	706	517
Ealing	620	627	611
Hillingdon	454	398	376
Haringey	562	527	533
Hackney	611	677	673
Tower Hamlets	669	568	548
Waltham Forest	462	464	453
Redbridge	520	497	390
Havering	366	334	320
Newham	570	590	583
Barking and Dagenham	286	300	278
Enfield	532	550	478
Southwark	817	861	801
Lewisham	594	610	584
Bromley	473	464	440
Greenwich	545	612	586
Bexley	277	282	310
Croydon	598	601	549
Sutton	374	405	254
Lambeth	980	917	875
Richmond upon Thames	298	283	260
Hounslow	641	457	411
Kingston upon Thames	375	367	256
Merton	291	293	290
Wandsworth	672	596	555
Total	18,589	17,982	16,712
Heathrow Airport[1]	442	362	304
Divisional total	19,031	18,344	17,016

[1] These police posts are paid for by Heathrow Airport Plc.
Note:
Figures are full-time equivalents.

Metropolitan police: budgeted work force total and actual strength—31 March 2002

London borough division	Police budgeted strength[1]	Actual police numbers at 31 March 2002[1]	Variation and percentage	
			Difference	Percentage
City of Westminster	1,642	1,544.0	-98.0	-5.97
Kensington and Chelsea	577	541.2	-35.8	-6.21
Hammersmith and Fulham	539	515.1	-23.9	-4.43
Camden	699	701.0	+2.0	+0.3
Islington	584	564.1	-19.9	-3.41
Harrow	311	288.9	-22.1	-7.12
Brent	637	584.5	-52.5	-8.24
Barnet	542	515.5	-26.5	-4.89
Ealing	656	638.2	-17.8	-2.71
Hillingdon	395	410.2	+15.2	+3.84
Haringey	562	560.0	-2.0	-0.35
Hackney	708	647.4	-60.6	-8.56
Tower Hamlets	578	559.4	-18.6	-3.22
Waltham Forest	474	468.1	-5.9	-1.24
Redbridge	414	398.6	-15.4	-3.73
Havering	334	319.4	-14.6	-4.37
Newham	616	608.4	-7.6	-1.24
Barking and Dagenham	294	298.6	+4.6	+1.57
Enfield	515	491.0	-24.0	-4.65
Southwark	839	805.3	-33.7	-4.02
Lewisham	612	598.6	-13.4	-2.19
Bromley	458	431.7	-26.3	-5.75
Greenwich	613	574.2	-38.8	-6.33
Bexley	328	320.8	-7.2	-2.18
Croydon	595	591.0	-4.0	-0.68
Sutton	270	257.0	-13	-4.82
Lambeth	923	874.1	-48.9	-5.29
Richmond upon Thames	274	277.0	+3	+1.09
Hounslow	435	436.3	+1.3	+0.29
Kingston upon Thames	272	266.9	-5.1	-1.87
Merton	303	283.7	-19.3	-6.38
Wandsworth	586	562.2	-23.8	-4.06
Total	17,585	16,932.2	-652.8	-3.71
Heathrow Airport[2]	301	302.6	+1.6	+0.53
Divisional total	17,886	17,234.8	-651.2	-3.64

[1] Figures are full-time equivalents.
[2] These police posts are paid for by Heathrow Airport Plc.

Prisons

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many persons have been recalled to custody following a breach of a prison licence in each month since March 2001. [84302]

Hilary Benn *[holding answer 2 December 2002]:* Information on the number of people being recalled to custody following a breach of licence is given in the table.

	Ordinary licence	Home detention curfew (HDC)
2001		
March	311	54
April	295	51
May	239	46
June	302	58
July	374	61
August	518	63
September	314	67
October	424	60
November	456	48
December	277	71

	Ordinary licence	Home detention curfew (HDC)
2002		
January	695	62
February	429	66
March	490	64
April	364	78
May	547	117
June	465	147
July	506	154
August	569	166
September	591	148
October	700	153

A breach may be a non-compliance of a licence condition. However, consideration must be given primarily, to the element of risk to the public, regardless of an actual breach, that the offender presents in terms of his behaviour. If his behaviour pattern suggests that there may be further offending, and therefore there may be a risk to the public, then that too would be considered a breach.

Replica Firearms

Mr. Pope: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will prohibit the sale of replica firearms. [87284]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I am considering how we might improve controls on the possession of replica firearms.

Secure Units

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans his Department has for expanding *(a)* local authority secure units, *(b)* young offenders institutions and *(c)* secure training centres; and if he will make a statement. [85198]

Hilary Benn: The number of places in Local Authority Secure Units (LASUs) available to the Youth Justice Board (YJB) was increased by 60 during 2002–03. The Board has no plans to increase the number of LASU places further.

The Prison Service has made available a further 164 places to the YJB for juveniles during 2002–03. No decisions have been made whether or not to seek to continue this requirement during 2003–04, but the YJB has no plans to expand further the number of juvenile Young Offender Institution places.

Work on providing an additional 64 beds at Rainsbrook and Medway Secure Training Centres (STCS) has recently been completed. The number of places in STCs has therefore increased during 2002–03 from 130 to 194. The YJB is preparing a contract for the development of a new 80-bed Secure Training Centre at Milton Keynes which it hopes may be available in 2004–05. The Board's current plans are that those additional 80 places will substitute for non-STC places. No firm decisions have been made about any further expansion of the STC estate.

Mrs. Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the forecast budget is for *(a)* local authority secure units, *(b)* young offenders institutions and *(c)* secure training centres in (i) 2002–03, (ii) 2003–04 and (iii) 2004–05. [85200]

Hilary Benn: The Home Office pays annual grant to the Youth Justice Board to meet the costs of the youth justice service in England and Wales, including the provision of juvenile secure accommodation. The Board's forecast expenditure in 2002–03 and its provisional budget for 2003–04, subject to final decisions on allocations following the Spending Review 2002 Settlement for secure accommodation, is as follows:

£ million

	2002–03	*2003–04*
Local authority secure units	56	53
Young offender institutions	155	161
Secure training centres[1]	38	59

[1] Includes capital

Details of provision for 2004–05 are not yet available following the Spending Review Settlement and are the subject of discussions between the Department and the board.

Spending Review

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will list for his Department *(a)* those Comprehensive Spending Review 1998 targets that were outstanding at the time of the statement on the Comprehensive Spending Review 2002, *(b)* progress on such targets since then and *(c)* the expected date when targets not yet achieved will be met. [87697]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The Home Office publishes progress against all its outstanding Public Service Agreement (PSA) targets in its Departmental Report. The Annual Report for 2001–02 (Cm 5406) was laid before Parliament in June, and is available on the Home Office website (www.homeoffice.gov.uk). The Home Office PSA targets for 2003–04 to 2005–06 are contained in the Spending Review White Paper published by the Treasury (Cm 5571).

Street Robberies

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many street robberies took place in the Greater London area during the last 12 months. [86826]

Mr. Denham: National statistics on recorded crime published in July showed that there were 53,547 robberies in the Metropolitan Police Force area between April 2001 and March 2002, which represented an increase of 31 per cent. compared to the previous year.

Figures published in October 2002, as part of the Street Crime Initiative, showed that there were 20,773 robberies between April and September 2002. This was 17 per cent. below the level recorded for the same period the previous year. There were 33 per cent. fewer robberies and snatch thefts in the Metropolitan Police in September 2002 when compared to January 2002, which was the month immediately preceding the onset of Operation Safer Streets.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Council Tax Benefit

Mr. Coleman: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households living in *(a)* Liverpool, *(b)* Birmingham, *(c)* Newcastle and *(d)* the London borough of Hammersmith and Fulham who are in receipt of council tax benefit have had their benefit capped as a consequence of the council tax benefit restrictions in (i) 2000–01 and *(b)* 2001–02. [85677]

Malcolm Wicks: Information is not available by local authority. The available information is in the table.

Council tax benefit claims restricted to Band E by Government Office Region at May 2000 and May 2001

Government Office Region	*May 2000*	*May 2001*
North East	[1]—	[1]—
North West	[2]1,000	[2]1,000
West Midlands	[2]1,000	[2]1,000
London	9,000	9,000

[1] Signifies nil or negligible.
[2] Figures under 2,400 are subject to a high degree of sampling variation and
should be used only as a guide.
Notes:
1. The data refer to households claiming Council Tax Benefit which may be a single
person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
2. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
3. Figures have been rounded to the nearest thousand and are subject to a degree
of sampling variation.
4. Figures exclude any Second Adult Rebate cases.
Source:
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System, Annual 1
per cent. sample, taken in May 2000 and May 2001.

Fairground Safety

Ms Atherton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many fatal accidents there have been at fairgrounds in each of the last 10 years; [85730]

(2) what changes in the regulation of fairground safety there have been since 2000; [85728]

(3) what plans he has for reforms of fairground safety. [86502]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The table sets out the numbers of fatal accidents over the last 10 years:

	Number of fatal accidents
1990–91	3
1991–92	[1]1
1992–93	0
1993–94	[1]1
1994–95	4
1995–96	0
1996–97	[1]1
1997–98	[1]1
1998–99	0
1999–2000	[1]1
2000–01	5
2001–02	[1]2

[1] Indicates a fatal accident to an employee.

Following a number of fatal accidents at fairground rides in 2000 the Health and Safety Commission (HSC)/ Executive (HSE) carried out a fundamental review of fairground safety, in consultation with the fairground industry.

The Review considered that the current regulatory regime is fit for purpose as a flexible framework for continuing to improve accident prevention. It is based on a sound framework of law and industry-specific guidance, receives high level of support from the leaders of industry, and has been shown to be enforceable by the Health and Safety Executive. If it is complied with fully, competently and diligently the risks of death and injury will be minimised.

However, the Review also recognised that reforms could be made to improve standards of safety in the fairground industry and made a number of recommendations to strengthen the existing regime including that inspectors should specialise more in relation to this industry. HSE has now established a National Fairground Inspection Team to improve consistency of approach and to use to the maximum the expertise and experience of the HSE Inspectors working in this area.

There are therefore are no immediate plans for further reforms of fairground safety. The Health and Safety Executive has acted upon recommendations contained in the fundamental review of fairground safety that reported to the Health and Safety Commission in September 2001. Additional legislative controls remain an option should there be deterioration in compliance with the existing regime or in accidents.

Access to Financial Services

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on his Department's response to the recommendations in the report of Policy Action Team 14 on Access to Financial Services on the scope of the Social Fund. [85180]

Malcolm Wicks: We are committed to reducing social and financial exclusion and have given careful consideration to the recommendation of Policy Action Team 14 on extending the scope of Social Fund loans to people in low-paid employment.

The discretionary Social Fund provides grants and loans to help some of the neediest people in our society manage a wide range of unexpected or occasional costs. Over 1.2 million budgeting loans were made last year to people with the lowest incomes, receiving income support or income-based jobseeker's allowance. We have no current plans to extend access to budgeting loans to people with higher incomes as such help would be poorly targeted and potentially very costly.

We continue to keep all aspects of the fund under review.

Ageism

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proposals he has to tackle age discrimination in the workplace; and what options are open to older people who have been discriminated against without going to the courts. [87366]

Mr. McCartney: We have made a pledge to tackle age discrimination and we are committed to introducing age legislation covering employment, vocational training and guidance by 2006. Until the legislation is introduced there is no recourse to the courts. In the meantime older people who feel they have suffered discrimination in employment because of their age can encourage the employer to look at our website www.agepositive.gov.uk. This provides details about the business benefits of non-ageist employment practices, employer case studies, information about the forthcoming legislation and offers useful links to other organisations such as the Employers Forum on Age.

We have been vigorously promoting the benefits of age diversity and the recruitment, training and retention of older workers to employers through our Age Positive campaign. The campaign focuses on raising employers' awareness of the business case for an age diverse workforce and encourages them to use the Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment to inform

their employment policies. The campaign features a range of initiatives including awards events, conferences, good practice publications and guidance to promote age diversity, as well as the Age Positive website.

The Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, published in 1999, sets out the standards for non-ageist approaches to recruitment, training, promotion, redundancy and retirement. An updated version of the Code of Practice was released during Age Positive week which ran from 2 to 6 December. The Code was developed with leading organisations including the CBI, TUC, the Employers Forum on Age and Age Concern. Evaluation shows that from 1999 to 2001 the number of companies using age in recruitment has already fallen from 27 per cent. to 13 per cent., and the number of companies having a policy against employing older workers has dropped from 14 per cent. to 7 per cent.

Appointments

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to which bodies his Department makes appointments; how many members there are *(a)* in total and *(b)* in each body; and how many of those appointed are (i) businessmen, (ii) businessmen in SMEs and (iii) businessmen in micro-businesses. [87401]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office, on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 606W.

Benefits

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people claimed *(a)* Jobseeker's Allowance, *(b)* child-related benefits, *(c)* winter fuel payments and *(d)* sickness-related benefits in (i) Somerset and (ii) South West England in each of the last five years. [82611]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the tables. Many benefit recipients fall within more than one category and there is therefore a degree of overlap between the figures.

Number of people claiming Jobseeker's Allowance

	Somerset	South West Region
May 1998	7,109	82,437
May 1999	6,401	75,624
May 2000	5,174	61,960
May 2001	4,633	52,725
May 2002	3,843	49,492

Notes:
1. Figures are unrounded.
2. Figures are not seasonally adjusted.

Source:
Jobseeker's Allowance Computer System, 100 per cent. claimant count.

Number of families receiving Child Benefit

	Somerset	South West Region
August 1999	57,295	567,910
August 2000	57,360	568,940
August 2001	57,360	568,440
August 2002	57,705	567,930

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 5.
2. Figures by county and region are not available prior to 1999.

Source:
Child Benefit Computer System, 100 per cent. claimant count.

Number of families on key benefits

	Somerset	South West Region
May 1998	8,400	92,100
May 1999	7,600	90,300
May 2000	7,500	85,000
May 2001	7,300	82,700
May 2002	7,000	78,200

Notes:
1. Key benefits are Income Support and Jobseekers Allowance with a child premium, and Incapacity Benefit Severe Disablement Allowance with a child dependency increase.
2. Child premia and child dependency increases are paid for children under 16 and young adult dependents aged 16–18 for whom Child Benefit is payable.

Source:
DWP Information Centre Client Group Analysis, 5 per cent. statistical samples.

Winter Fuel Payment recipients

Winter	Somerset	South West Region
1999–2000	103,600	1,003,100
2000–01	113,700	1,098,900
2001–02	116,200	1,112,200

Note:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:
Winter Fuel Payment Matching Intelligence Data Analysis Service, 100 per cent. data.

Number of people claiming sickness related benefits

	Somerset	South West Region
May 1998	15,300	166,900
May 1999	15,700	172,300
May 2000	15,700	174,700
May 2001	16,600	179,600
May 2002	17,200	182,600

Notes:
1. Sickness related benefits are Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance and Income Support with a disability premium.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.

Source:
DWP Information Centre Client Group Analysis, 5 per cent. statistical samples.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* income support claimants and *(b)* incapacity benefit claimants there were in each year since 1997. [86677]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the tables.

People claiming incapacity benefit

Date	Number
May 1997	2,370,500
May 1998	2,316,900
May 1999	2,277,500
May 2000	2,263,200
May 2001	2,327,000
May 2002	2,365,700

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures are subject to a degree of sampling variation.
3. Figures include a number of people claiming for national insurance credit purposes only.
4. Figures include a small number of people resident overseas.
Source:
5 per cent. samples of the incapacity benefit computer system, which exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

People receiving income support

Date	*Working age*	*Non working age*	*Total*
May 1997	2,425,500	1,532,600	3,958,100
May 1998	2,380,100	1,473,000	3,853,100
May 1999	2,377,700	1,436,700	3,814,400
May 2000	2,385,200	1,425,300	3,810,500
May 2001	2,401,800	1,526,100	3,927,900
May 2002	2,378,000	1,551,800	3,929,800

Notes:
1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred
2. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample and are therefore subject to a degree of sampling variation
3. Working age is defined as under 60 for women and under 65 for men
Source:
Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiries.

Child Support Payments

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress is being made to speed up the introduction of the proposed changes to the method of calculating child support payments for *(a)* new and *(b)* current cases. [88154]

Malcolm Wicks: I refer my hon. Friend to the written answer I gave the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) on 27 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 317W.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many departmental Christmas cards he and his Ministers intend to send in 2002; how much these cards will cost *(a)* to buy, *(b)* to post and *(c)* in staff time to sign, address and place in envelopes; and if he will place in the Library a sample copy of the official Christmas card he has sent this year. [88112]

Mr. McCartney: A total of 1,230 Christmas cards were purchased for our Ministers at a total cost of £1,619.34. All expenditure incurred in the purchase and despatch of official Christmas cards is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in Government Accounting. As it is Christmas, I have sent the hon. Member a Christmas card.

Civil Servants

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many civil servants are employed by his Department; and how much money was spent by his Department in the last 12 months, broken down by local authority area. [87179]

Mr. McCartney: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given by my hon. Friend, the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office on 17 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Community Care Grant

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what change in real terms spending power was provided by the cash rise in the community care grant budget from 1997–1998 to 2002–03; and if he will make a statement. [85157]

Malcolm Wicks: The community care grant budget, previously frozen since 1994, has been increased four times since 1997. In 1997–98 the community care grant budget was £97[2] million, which in 2002–03 prices is equivalent to £109.2[1] million. The 2002–03 community care grant budget is £108[2] million, a drop of £1.2 million, or 1.1 per cent.

At the same time there has been a drop in the number of people receiving income-related benefits which give access to community care grants (Income Support, the Minimum Income Guarantee and income-based Jobseeker's Allowance. Between 1997–98 and 2000–01 the reduction was 9.9 per cent.[3] and a further fall in the numbers is forecast with an expected drop of 10.8 per cent. between 1997–98 and 2002–03[3]. As a result, the per capita amount available to people eligible for community care grants has risen by 10.8 per cent. in real terms.

[1] 'Real terms' refers to 2002–03 prices, calculated using HM Treasury's GDP deflator series, published on 27 November 2002. The GDP deflator for 2002–03 is a working assumption.

Sources:

[2] Secretary of State's Annual Reports on the Social Fund 1997–98 and 2001–02.

[3] Benefit Forecasting and Model Development Division's latest expenditure and case load tables.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the standard of decision-making on community care grant applications. [85164]

Malcolm Wicks: We announced in the PBR that we will be working with the Treasury to improve Social Fund administration and delivery. We already have procedures in place which aim to drive though a continuous programme of improvement in all benefit decision making.

As part of the Department's national Decision Making and Appeals quality checking programme, a specialist Social Fund team monitors the quality of decision making on all elements of the Social Fund. The programme is complemented by local quality checks. The primary function of these procedures is to identify trends in decision making which require remedial action and inform staff training and guidance needs.

The Independent Review Service for the Social Fund (IRS) provides an impartial review for customers who are dissatisfied with the outcome of their application to the discretionary Social Fund, following an internal review by a DWP reviewing officer. Around 1 per cent. of decisions are referred to the IRS for review. In November 2001, the IRS published a report "Grants Budgets and Decision Making" which sought to explain the relatively high number of community care grant decisions which it was substituting. In response to the report, the Department has made further improvements to the Social Fund guidance for decision makers on

prioritisation and budgetary control. The IRS also provides valuable feedback to local offices on the standard of decision making in every case it sees.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will change the rules and guidance for community care grants and crisis loans to ensure that applicants without *(a)* a cooker and *(b)* a bed are given a grant or loan. [85167]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund provides people on low incomes with grants and loans to help them manage a wide range of unexpected or occasional costs, including the purchase of beds and cookers, depending on their individual circumstances.

On 27 November, we announced that from April 2003, £90 million will be added to the discretionary fund over the three years to 2005–06. This extra investment will enhance the fund's ability to help those on low incomes manage their finances.

We have already introduced a number of important changes to the Social Fund. We have simplified the budgeting loan scheme so that all applicants who satisfy the qualifying conditions, and have no outstanding Social Fund debt, will be offered a loan. We have also extended the qualifying conditions for community care grants to help people setting up home in the community who have been without a settled way of life.

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will extend the eligibility for community care grants and budgeting loans from the Social Fund to people *(a)* whose sole income is (i) incapacity benefit and (ii) contribution based jobseekers allowance and *(b)* who are receiving the maximum child tax credit. [85168]

Malcolm Wicks: The discretionary Social Fund provides grants and loans to help some of the neediest people in our society manage a wide range of unexpected or occasional costs. Around 1.5 million community care grants and budgeting loans were made last year to people with the lowest incomes, receiving Income Support or income-based Jobseekers Allowance. We have taken the view that access to the discretionary Fund should not be extended to people with higher incomes as such help would be poorly targeted and potentially very costly.

We continue to keep all aspects of the Fund under review.

Crisis Loans

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the arrangements are for customers to apply for and receive a crisis loan when they live a long way from the office that decides upon crisis loan applications. [85290]

Malcolm Wicks: We recognise that crisis loan applicants normally require a same day service. Individual managers understand local problems and geography and are responsible for making suitable arrangements for the delivery of, and access to, all locally-administered benefits including the Social Fund.

Exceptionally, where a customer is unable to visit their local office, for example an elderly or disabled person with restricted mobility, or a person who lives a long way from the office and who has no access to suitable transport, they may contact the office by telephone to request a home visit. If the information given by the applicant indicates that a crisis loan is likely to be awarded, a visit may be made for the application to be completed and, where appropriate, the loan to be paid.

We believe that the current arrangements are sufficiently flexible to support a good standard of delivery to customers, regardless of their location.

Departmental Training

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many of his Department's staff have been sent on *(a)* training days and *(b)* training weekends in the last 12 months; and what the total cost of this training has been. [88207]

Mr. McCartney: During the 12 month period ending March 2002, the most recent year for which these data are available, the Department spent £97.3 million on staff training and development. This equates to an average of just under £800 for each member of Staff in the Department.

The information on training undertaken at weekends is not available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Drug Addicts

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many former drug addicts are in paid employment. [86697]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is not available.

We are committed to helping unemployed people who are taking positive steps to overcome their drug problem to move into work. Earlier this year, we introduced the Progress2work initiative to give recovering drug misusers the extra help they need to get into employment.

Progress2work provides specialist support to help recovering drug misusers also to make the best use of our welfare to work initiatives and move into jobs. It equips Jobcentre Plus staff with the skills and knowledge they need to better identify people whose drug misuse puts them at a disadvantage in the labour market, and refer them to appropriate provision.

We launched the first Progress2work projects in the spring, in 27 pathfinder areas throughout the country, including one in my hon. Friend's constituency. We are now extending the initiative to a further 36 areas and plan to roll out the programme nationally from next year.

Economic Inactivity

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people aged between 50 and state pension age were economically inactive in each year since 1998. [86661]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the table:

Year/quarter	Number of economically inactive people aged 50-State pension age	Percentage of 50-State pension age population
1998		
Spring	2,569,000	31.3
Summer	2,568,000	31.0
Autumn	2,549,000	30.6
Winter	2,546,000	30.4
1999		
Spring	2,577,000	30.7
Summer	2,609,000	30.9
Autumn	2,600,000	30.6
Winter	2,616,000	30.7
2000		
Spring	2,594,000	30.3
Summer	2,592,000	30.1
Autumn	2,610,000	30.2
Winter	2,597,000	29.9
2001		
Spring	2,600,000	29.8
Summer	2,594,000	29.7
Autumn	2,613,000	29.8
Winter	2,621,000	29.8
2002		
Spring	2,614,000	29.6
Summer	2,587,000	29.2

Notes:
1. Figures have been seasonally adjusted.
2. The data in this table have been adjusted to reflect the 2001 Census population data, but may be subject to further adjustment.
3. Denominator of the rate is all people in the age group.

Source:
Labour Force Survey

Employment Zones

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many people have been helped into sustained employment via the Employment Zone scheme *(a)* in each year since its introduction and *(b)* broken down according to each employment zone; and what his definition of sustained employment is for this purpose; [85974]

(2) how much has been *(a)* budgeted and *(b)* spent on the Employment Zone scheme in each year since its introduction (i) in total and (ii) in each zone; and if he will make a statement. [85976]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* Between April 2000, when they were launched, and September 2002, Employment Zones have helped 29,144 people into work. Of these, 21,001 have been helped into sustained employment (i.e. jobs lasting more than 13 weeks).

Information on the number of people helped into sustained employment in each Employment Zone is in the following table. The majority of Contract 1 job outcomes have been notified to the Department. A large number of participants recruited onto Contract 2 remain on the programme. Their job outcomes will continue to be notified to, and validated by, the Department. The Contract 2 figures will, therefore, continue to increase.

Number of people helped into sustained employment

Employment zone	April 2000–July 2001 (Contract 1)	July 2001–June 2002 (Contract 2)
Birmingham	2,847	1,421
Brent	702	248
Brighton and Hove	872	330
Doncaster and Bassetlaw	457	324
Glasgow	1,790	598
Haringey	1,814	367
Liverpool and Sefton	1,691	658
Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland	593	233
Newham	876	304
North West Wales	300	47
Nottingham	297	248
Plymouth	469	187
Southwark	1,165	522
Tower Hamlets	592	356
Heads of the Valley, Caerphilly and Torfaen	432	261

Note:
Employment Zones vary in size and coverage.

Source:
Employment Zone Management Information

Information on the total budget and expenditure on the Employment Zone initiative is as follows:

£ million

	Total budget	Total expenditure
2000–01	56.4	72.0
2001–02	87.0	[1]95.5
2002–03	91.3	Not yet available

[1] Forecast

Source:
Jobcentre Plus

These increases reflect a rise in the number of Employment Zone clients, and the high level of performance achieved by the zones.

Information on budgets and expenditure for individual Employment Zones cannot be published because they are commercially confidential. Both budget and expenditure figures include benefit equivalent payments made to participants while on the Employment Zone.

Based on the April 2000—June 2001 cohort study, the average cost per job in Employment Zones is around £3,400. The cohort study covers those people who have completed their time on the Employment Zone.

Health and Safety

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many inspections per band 3 inspector are made on average in the North West Division of the Health and Safety Executive each working week; and what proposals there are to increase the frequency of inspections, excluding complaint and accident investigations; [84775]

(2) what action has been taken to increase the inspection rate of principal inspectors and band 3 inspectors at the North West Division Office of the Health and Safety Executive. [84776]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: In the 25 working weeks between 7 April 2002—the start of the Health and Safety Executive's Field Operations Directorate's working

year—and 28 September 2002—half-year stage—each band 3 operational inspector in HSE's North West Division made, on average, two inspection contacts per week. In addition, on average, each band 3 operational inspector made one investigation contact, one complaint follow-up contact and one enforcement contact per week.

These figures do not include any inspection or other contacts made by HSE's Construction Division or other operating directorates in the North West.

A number of actions have been taken to increase the contact time of band 3 inspectors in HSE's Field Operations Directorate and work continues to explore further steps. These actions will allow more work involving direct contact with duty-holders to take place; this includes investigation work as well as inspections. Actions being investigated or taken include: (i) enabling administrative staff to input data relating to inspection contacts; (ii) increasing direct administrative resource to support inspectors; (iii) providing better information on the work of inspectors to allow management support to be given to those who need it most and (iv) promulgating best practice by those inspectors who achieve the highest proportion of their time inspecting.

Principal Inspectors (band 2) are a management grade and are not set targets for inspection work. They carry out operational work according to need and for a number of reasons, including to remain familiar with work conditions and practices, to monitor the standards of their staff and to train new staff.

HSE does not measure, nor have a target for, the frequency of inspections to particular workplaces except for those where risks are highest. HSE targets most inspections according to hazard and risk. The Field Operations Directorate is currently investigating ways of increasing the proportion of time inspectors spend in contact with duty holders.

The role of an operational band 3 inspector is not limited to inspections: around 50 per cent. of their available time is spent dealing with reactive work, ie: incident and complaint investigation. In the first 25 weeks of 2002–03 operational band 3 inspectors in the North West Division made a total of 3,571 regulatory contacts, broken down as in the table:

	Inspection	*Enforcement*	*RIDDOR investigation*	*Complaint follow-up*	*Others*
Total contacts of type	1,539	517	875	402	238
Numbers per Band 3 Inspector per week	2	1	1	1	0.5

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what formal qualifications the *(a)* Director General and *(b)* Deputy Director General (Operations) of HSE have in health and safety management. [84779]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Following open competition, both appointments were made by the Health and Safety Commission and approved by the relevant Secretary of State. The principal requirements are the ability to direct and manage a large and complex organisation. Neither have specific health and safety management qualifications. However, they have access to advice on the management of health and safety issues from HSE's staff who collectively have comprehensive and authoritative expertise. I am advised that both are fully acquainted with health and safety legislation, to perform their official functions in HSE as well as management of the organization.

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many companies were *(a)* investigated by the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* convicted of health and safety offences in 2001–02 in (i) the North East and (ii) the UK; and what the average fine was for companies convicted of health and safety offences in each year from 1997–2002 in (A) the North East and (B) the UK. [86489]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The number of companies *(a)* investigated by the Health and Safety Executive and *(b)* convicted of health and safety offences in 2001–02 in (i) the North East and (ii) Great Britain is as follows.

	Companies investigated		*Companies convicted*	
Year	*North East*	*Great Britain*	*North East*	*Great Britain*
2001–02[1,2]	635	6,994	48	691

[1] From 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002
[2] Provisional

The second and third columns of the table give figures for investigations of reports made under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases, and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. In some of these companies more than one incident may have been investigated.

The average fine imposed on companies convicted of health and safety offences in each year from 1997–98 to 2001–02 in (A) the North East and (B) Great Britain is as follows:

£

	Average Fine	
Year	*North East*	*Great Britain*
2001–02[1]	3,464	11,722
2000–01	7,208	8,073
1999–2000	4,358	9,034
1998–99	3,908	4,303
1997–98	3,900	6,222

[1] Provisional

Housing Benefit

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions under what circumstances a person making a fresh claim for housing benefit in one of the proposed

pilot areas for housing benefit reform after the pilots have begun will receive less housing benefit than under the existing rules. [83955]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 28 November 2002]:* The standard local housing allowance will provide a better, quicker service based on simpler, clearer rules, and will for the first time give tenants real choice over their housing decisions.

The standard allowance will be calculated on the same basis as the existing local reference rent. The scheme is therefore designed so that tenants should not be worse off than if they had claimed under the existing rules. In fact, current estimates suggest that around half of affected tenants will gain from the reforms when compared to the existing rules. Details of the scheme will be contained in regulations, which will be subject to the usual parliamentary scrutiny.

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate *(a)* how many and *(b)* what percentage of housing benefit claimants' housing benefit entitlement meets less than 100 per cent. of their rent due, because of (i) income from employment, (ii) other income, (iii) rent restrictions, (iv) non-dependent deductions and (v) other reasons, broken down by (A) local authority (B) housing association, and (C) private sector tenu[illegible] [84360]

Malcolm Wicks: Information on the number of Housing Benefit recipients whose benefit is currently reduced because of rent restrictions is not collected. However, based on the number of referrals made to the Rent Service, we estimate that in around 67 per cent. of cases, tenants in the deregulated private rented sector would have their rent restricted under the reference rent schemes or other property-based criteria if their Housing Benefit claims were successful.

The table shows the total number of Housing Benefit recipients by tenure type and the number and proportions of these who receive an amount less than their eligible rent, at May 2001. The eligible rent is the amount of rent which may be met by Housing Benefit after ineligible charges have been deducted and, in the case of tenants in the deregulated private rented sector, after any restrictions have been applied by the rent officer.

		HB recipients receiving an amount less than their eligible rent:					
	All HB recipients	*With income from employment*		*With other income*		*With non-dependant deductions*	
Tenure type	*Number*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*	*Number*	*Per cent.*
Local Authority	2,133,000	113,000	5.3	469,000	22	100,000	4.7
Registered Social Landlord	998,000	74,000	7.4	222,000	22.3	32,000	3.2
Private Rented Sector	743,000	78,000	10.5	144,000	19.4	16,000	2.1
Total	3,874,000	264,000	6.8	836,000	21.6	147,000	3.8

Notes:
1. The data refer to households claiming Housing Benefit which may be a single person, a couple or a family. More than one benefit household can live in one property, for example two or more adults in a flat or house share arrangement.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest thousand.
3. Percentages refer to the percentage of all Housing Benefit recipients in each type of tenure and are rounded to one decimal place.
4. Figures exclude any Extended Payment cases.
5. Figures for any non-responding authorities have been estimated.
6. Figures are subject to a degree of sampling error.
7. The number of Housing Benefit recipients receiving less than their eligible rent for reasons other than those stated is negligible.
8. There may be some overlap in the figures, as recipients will be counted each time they fall into any of the three categories mentioned.

Source:
Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Management Information System
Annual 1 per cent. sample taken in May 2001.

Incapacity Benefit

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many claimants have been in receipt of incapacity benefit payment for *(a)* six months or less, *(b)* between six months and one year, *(c)* between one and two years and *(d)* between two and five years; what the average period of payment is for current claimants of incapacity benefit and what the comparable averages were in each year since 1997; how many people received incapacity benefit in each year since 1997; and how many of these represented new claims; [85978]

(2) how many new claimants of incapacity benefit in the last six months represented *(a)* transfers from other social security benefits, *(b)* people moving from employment onto benefit and *(c)* people moving onto benefit from unknown origins; [85979]

(3) how many people leaving incapacity benefit in the last six months represented *(a)* transfers to other social security benefits, *(b)* people moving from benefit into employment and *(c)* people moving off benefit to unknown destinations. [85980]

(4) what percentage of the working age population is in receipt of incapacity benefit; and what the comparable averages were in each year since 1997; [85981]

(5) how many claimants of incapacity benefit in the last six months had been in receipt of either *(a)* jobseeker's allowance and *(b)* income support at any time during the previous 12 months. [85982]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The Green Paper "Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment" (Cm 5690) sets out our strategy for enabling people with health problems and disabilities to move into work, and so become and remain independent. At the heart of this strategy is

tailored and intensive support delivered in a new Choices Package, giving help to those with the clear potential to get back into work. These measures will be piloted from October 2003.

The available information is set out in the tables.

Number of people in Great Britain receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) at 31 May 2002, by the duration of their IB claim

Duration of IB claim	*Number*
Under six months	132,400
Six months to one year	95,800
One to two years	168,100
Two to five years	352,900

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. The figures include a small number of cases where the customer is resident overseas.

Average claim duration for Incapacity Benefit (IB) recipients

Source:

Figures are taken from a 5 per cent sample of the benefit computer system and exclude a small number of cases held clerically.

	Average duration (weeks)
31 March 1997	292
31 March 1998	302
31 March 1999	315
31 March 2000	326
31 March 2001	328

Notes:

1. Average duration has been rounded to the nearest week.
2. Average durations include all Incapacity Benefit recipients at a point in time, including those who leave benefit within a year.

Source:

Figures are taken from 1 per cent samples of cases.

Number of people receiving Incapacity Benefit (IB) in Great Britain at some time within the dates shown, and how many of these were new awards within that year

Year	*Numbers receiving IB at some time in the previous year*	*Numbers receiving IB at the dates shown*	*Numbers of non-linking[1] awards within the periods shown*
01/04/96 to 31/03/97	2,362,000	1,798,000	488,000
01/04/97 to 31/03/98	2,287,000	1,729,000	456,000
1/04/98 to 31/03/99	2,125,000	1,615,000	379,000
01/04/99 to 31/03/00	1,995,000	1,514,000	364,000
01/04/00 to 31/03/01	1,979,000	1,573,000	388,000

Notes:

1. Unlike Invalidity Benefit which it replaced on 13 April 1995 long term rate Incapacity Benefit is not payable to people over state pension age. This change contributed to the reduction in the numbers receiving Incapacity Benefit between 1995 and 2000. People who had reached pension age before 13 April and were in receipt of Incapacity Benefit were able to get Incapacity Benefit for up to five years beyond pension age.
2. "Non-linking" awards refer to periods of IB which do not link with a previous claim to IB, although they may link with statutory sick pay.
3. The figures include a small number of cases where the customer is resident overseas.
4. Numbers are rounded to the nearest thousand.
5. Some people may be counted more than once if they have two awards within the year that do not link with each other.

Source:

Figures are taken from 1 per cent samples of cases.

New awards or claims of Incapacity Benefit (IB) by benefit status at a point in time up to six months before the start of the IB spell

	1/12/01 to 31/5/02
No benefit or tax credit	160,300
Social security benefits with or without tax credit	126,300
Tax credit only	13,000

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. It is not possible to determine exactly how many of those moving from no benefits/tax credits were in employment.

Source:

Figures taken from 5 per cent samples of the Incapacity Benefit, and Client Group Working Age data sets, for the periods shown above.

Destinations of people leaving Incapacity Benefit

	1/9/01 to 28/2/02
To basic State Pension / Are within 3 months of state pension age	21,500
To another benefit within three months[2]	81,900
To Working Families Tax Credit/Disabled Persons Tax Credit within three months[3]	6,200
Unknown, including employment	252,700
Total	362,300

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Based on cases moving to Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance, Severe Disablement Allowance within three months of the termination of their claim to Incapacity Benefit.
3. Figures are based on cases moving to Working Families Tax Credit, or Disabled Persons Tax Credit.

Source:

Figures are based on 5 per cent. samples of DWP Information Centre administrative data.

	IB recipients as a percentage of working age population
31 May 2001	4.3
31 May 2002	4.3

Notes:

1. Figures include a small number of cases where the customer is resident overseas.
2. Population data are from the Office for National Statistics mid-2001 population estimates.
3. Following the 2001 Census, revised population data for years prior to 2001 are not yet available but are due to be released in February 2003.

Source:

Figures are from 5 per cent samples of the benefit computer system, which excludes a small number of cases held clerically.

Number of Incapacity Benefit (IB) awards starting in the period 1 December 2001 to 31 May 2002 where the recipient had been in receipt of Jobseeker's Allowance

(JSA) or Income Support (IS) at some time in the previous year	
Both IS and JSA	26,100
IS only	37,400
JSA only	79,900

Notes:

1. Not all of these shown in the table will have moved directly from JSA or IS to IB, some will have worked in between claims.
2. Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Includes a small number of cases where the customer is resident overseas.
4. Excludes a small number of short duration Income Support claims.

Source:

Figures are taken from merges between 5 per cent. samples of the IS, JSA and IB benefit computer systems.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what his policy is on paying incapacity benefit for fixed terms; and if he will make a statement. [86662]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have no plans to introduce fixed term awards of Incapacity Benefit. Entitlement is based, in the first instance, on an individual's contribution record and is determined thereafter by the Personal Capability Assessment, which is a functional test carried out periodically to assess an individual's ability to perform a range of every-day work-related activities.

We believe that people moving onto Incapacity Benefits should be regarded not as people at the end of their working lives, but people with working futures. Our Green Paper, "Pathways to Work: Helping people into employment" (Cm5690) sets out our strategy for enabling people on Incapacity Benefits to move into work, and so become and remain independent. From late October 2003, we will offer in pilot areas: early, more frequent support from skilled personal advisers; direct access to a range of comprehensive specialist programmes; and clear financial incentives to work.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate has been made of the proportion of incapacity benefit claimants who are also eligible for income support; and how many people in this category receive income support. [86733]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The Department has made no estimate of the proportion of people claiming incapacity benefit who would be eligible for income support. However, in May 2002, there were 1,026,500 people claiming incapacity benefit and also receiving income support.

Notes:

1. Figure is rounded to the nearest hundred and is subject to a degree of sampling variation.

2. Figure includes cases where people are claiming incapacity benefit, but receiving national insurance credits only.

Source:

Figure is based on merged five per cent. samples of Incapacity Benefit and Severe Disablement Allowance Quarterly Summary Statistics, May 2002, and the Income Support Quarterly Statistical Enquiry, May 2002.

Individual Learning Account

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what alternative arrangements have been made by his Department in respect of those persons on the New Deal who would previously have received assistance via the individual learning account scheme; and if he will make a statement. [85992]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The individual learning account (ILA) programme was open to everyone aged 19 or over in England. The overall aim was to widen participation in learning and to help individuals overcome the financial barriers to learning they may have faced. ILA support could be used for non job specific career learning.

The New Deals offer people looking for work job-focused learning and training opportunities, specifically tailored to meet their individual needs. We are providing New Deal clients with the knowledge and skills they need to compete effectively in the labour market and move into work.

The New Deal 50 plus offers clients help with training through a training grant. In January 2002 we doubled the grant to £1,500. Of this, the amount that can be used for non job specific career training was also doubled to £300.

Intermediate Labour Programmes

Mr. Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many intermediate labour market programmes have received funding over the last five years; and how much they have received. [85702]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We have this year launched 20 StepUP pilots offering guaranteed jobs for up to 5,000 long-term unemployed people. We are investing £40 million in the first two years of the pilot programme. The StepUP pilots are testing the use of intermediate labour markets for those who have not found work through the New Deal. The evaluation of StepUP will provide reliable evidence about the cost effectiveness of this type of intervention, and will inform decisions on the wider use of transitional employment schemes in our welfare to work strategy.

Separately, some New Deal providers match New Deal monies with their own funds to create intermediate labour market opportunities for individual participants. Information on the number of such arrangements and the expenditure incurred is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Jobcentre Plus

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) which local authority areas have been selected to receive additional points in respect of the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target set by his Department; what criteria were applied when selecting the areas; whom he consulted in respect of the selection; and if he will make a statement; [82508]

(2) what the criteria are by which additional points are scored in relation to the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target scheme; and if he will make a statement; [82511]

(3) what criteria he applied when determining the Jobcentre Plus Job Entry Target points score to be given to each type of priority client; and what guidance has been given to Jobcentre Plus staff on the way in which such clients should be prioritised in relation to *(a)* other priority client groups and *(b)* other clients. [82513]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[pursuant to his answer, 27 November 2002, Official Report, column 319W]:* The Jobcentre Plus job entry targets help focus the agency's efforts and resources on helping those people on whom we want to target more support to move from welfare into work. They include lone parents, disabled people and those living in the most disadvantaged areas of the country.

The way in which Job Entry and additional point scores have been allocated sends clear signals about our priorities to all Jobcentre Plus managers and staff who have been informed about them in writing.

The 60 local authority areas attracting additional Job Entry point scores are in the table. These local authorities were chosen because they either have the highest unemployment rates or the highest minority ethnic populations. We consulted other Government Departments, the National Employment Panel and key stakeholders in deciding on these criteria.

Local authorities with lowest employment rates	*Local authorities with highest minority ethnic population*
Blaenau Gwent	Barnet
Caerphilly	Birmingham
Dundee City	Bradford
Easington	Brent
East Ayrshire	Camden
Glasgow City	Coventry
Hackney	Croydon
Halton	Ealing
Hartlepool	Enfield
Islington	Greenwich
Kingston-upon-Hull	Hammersmith and Fulham
Knowsley	Haringey
Liverpool	Harrow
Manchester	Hillingdon
Merthyr Tydfil	Hounslow
Middlesbrough	Kensington and Chelsea
Neath Port Talbot	Kirklees
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	Lambeth
Newham	Leeds
North Lanarkshire	Leicester City
Nottingham	Lewisham
Pembrokeshire	Luton
Redcar and Cleveland	Merton
Rhondda, Cynon, Taff	Redbridge
Salford	Sandwell
South Tyneside	Sheffield
Southwark	Waltham Forest
Sunderland	Wandsworth
Tower Hamlets	City of Westminster
West Dunbartonshire	Wolverhampton

Ministerial Engagements

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many engagements were undertaken outside London *(a)* by him or his predecessor and *(b)* by Ministers in his Department in January (i) 2000, (ii) 2001 and (iii) 2002. [87344]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my hon. Friend the Minister of State, Cabinet Office on 16 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

New Deal

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people *(a)* aged (i) over 50 and (ii) under 30, and *(b)* people with disabilities have signed up to the New Deal in the Taunton Constituency. [83342]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information requested is in the table.

Cumulative number of participants in the New Deal in Taunton constituency

New Deal	*Aged 50+*	*Aged under 30*
Young People (from January 1998 to September 2002)	—	859
25 plus (from June 1998 to September 2002)	158	94
50 plus (from April 2000 to September 2002)	160	—
Lone Parents (from October 1998 to June 2002)	20	110

Note:

The numbers of participants in the New Deal for Disabled People and the New Deal for Partners are not available at constituency level.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of persons leaving *(a)* the gateway period and *(b)* each of the options in the New Deal entered (i) unsubsidised jobs and (ii) sustained jobs in each year since the establishment of the New Deal. [85988]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The tables show the proportion of all leavers from the New Deal for Young People and re-engineered New Deal 25 plus who move into sustained, unsubsidised jobs from the gateway stage of the programme and from each of the options. In addition to these job outcomes we know from survey findings that around two-thirds of young people who leave options for unknown destinations do, in fact, find work.

For the Employment Option of the New Deal for Young People in particular, the figures prior to 2002 reflect follow-up work with employers to confirm job outcomes. This exercise will be repeated for 2002 leavers and we expect the figure of 33 per cent. to be revised in line with previous years' figures.

New Deal for Young People

	Proportion of leavers moving into jobs by year (percentage)				
Stage of leaving New Deal	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002 (to September)*
Gateway	49	46	44	42	40
Employment Option	56	51	51	51	[1]33
Full Time Education and Training	38	32	31	31	29
Voluntary Sector	37	33	33	32	31
Environment Task Force	33	30	31	30	32

[1] Initial figure.

Note:

By definition, all jobs gained by New Deal leavers are sustained, unsubsidised jobs (ie to have left the programme, they must not re-claim Jobseeker's Allowance within 13 weeks). All figures are immediate destinations on leaving New Deal.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Re-engineered New Deal 25 plus

Stage of leaving New Deal	*Proportion of leavers moving into jobs by year (percentage) 2001 (April to December)*	*2002 (January to September)*
Gateway	33	29
Employment Option	13	12
Basic Employability Training	26	18
Self employment	35	32
Education/Training Opportunity	17	19
Work experience	33	21
Intensive Activity Period Training	29	22
Other (includes Training for Work)	3	13

Notes:

1. By definition, all jobs gained by New Deal leavers are sustained, unsubsidised jobs, (ie to have left the programme, they must not re-claim Jobseeker's Allowance within13 weeks). All figures are immediate destinations on leaving New Deal.
2. In April 2001, New Deal 25 Plus was extended and enhanced. Annual figures for leavers moving into jobs by gateway and each option of the pre-April 2001 programme are not available. Summary figures for the programme are contained in the Statistical First Release, which is available in the Library.

Source:

New Deal Evaluation Database

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parliamentary questions to his Department were not answered during the last parliamentary Session. [88208]

Maria Eagle: Out of over 4,000 parliamentary questions tabled during 2001–02, just 13 remained unanswered at the end of the Session. Of these, nine were tabled in the final week.

Retirement Ages

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 27 November, *Official Report*, column 321W, on retirement ages, what the average age of retirement is for *(a)* women, and *(b)* men, for (i) his Department's employees, and (ii) people who work in each of the executive agencies within his department. [88213]

Mr. McCartney: The average age of staff, by gender, retiring from the Department and from each of the executive agencies is shown in the following table.

Years

	Average age male	*Average age female*
DWP	61.2	62.4
Jobcentre Plus	61.0	62.1
The Pension Service	60.9	60.2
Child Support Agency	61.7	62.8
Appeals Service	64.0	60.0

SchlumbergerSema

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will list *(a)* the key performance targets and *(b)* other performance measures, and the levels of performance against those measures, *(c)* the further quality improvement measures, *(d)* the contractual milestones agreed for each of the key improvement projects and *(e)* the other contractual improvements that have been secured in respect of SchlumbergerSema; and, for each of the last 12 months, on how many occasions a financial remedy has been applied to SchlumbergerSema, and how much on each of those occasions. [85382]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* A copy of the information requested has been placed in the Library.

Service credits for failure to meet contractual service level targets have been applied in each of the last 12 months. Precise details are commercial in confidence and not disclosed under part 2, paragraph 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

SERPS

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of recent trends in the number of people who are contracted out of SERPS and the State Second Pension; and if he will make a statement. [85567]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* The Department for Work and Pensions is in the process of preparing an analysis of NIRS2 data for the period 1996–97 to 2000–01 showing numbers of people contracting out of SERPS/S2P over this period. The results of this analysis will be contained in a report on "Second Tier Pension Provision" that is due to be published in the latter part of next year.

Social Fund

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the administrative costs of the Social Fund were in each of the last five financial years; and if he will make a statement. [82079]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available in the format requested. The Department now accounts for its administration and benefit expenditure by Strategic Objective, as set out in its Public Service Agreements (PSA), and by individual Requests for Resources (RfRs) as set out in the Departmental Estimates and Accounts.

Estimates of the cost of administering the Social Fund are available for 1997–98 and 1998–99 and these are shown in the table.

£

Financial year	*Estimated Social Fund expenditure*[1]
1997–98	1,047,000
1998–99	1,114,000

Note:

The estimated expenditure includes moneys spent on both administering the recovery of Social Fund loans as well as their payment.

Source:

Social Security Departmental Reports 1999–2000 (Figure 50) and 2000–01 to 2001–02 (Figure 42).

Social Fund Repayments

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will commission research into the impact of Social Fund repayments on the *(a)* standard of living and *(b)* indebtedness of recipients of budgeting loans. [85151]

Malcolm Wicks: The Department has already carried out qualitative research on the Social Fund which included the views of budgeting loan recipients on repayment rates. Findings from this research are published in the Department's Research Report Series, Report numbers 125 and 172, copies of which are available in the Library.

The Department's annual Families and Children Survey collects detailed information on families' and children's living standards and debt, including outstanding budgeting loans. Four reports are due to be published in the new year from the 2001 survey, one of which will focus on living standards and hardship issues. Copies of the reports will be placed in the Library as they are published.

War Pensions

Mr. Chaytor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the £10 earnings disregard for war disablements pensioners in receipt of income support was last uprated; and what has been the cumulative increase in the retail price index since that date. [86311]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* Income Support is intended to help people whose resources are insufficient to meet their day-to-day living expenses. Any income that is available to meet those expenses is normally taken fully into account. However there is a special disregard in the income-related benefits in respect of War Disablement Pension which was increased from £5 to £10 in April 1990. In addition, payments made to war disabled pensioners for their attendance or mobility needs are also disregarded in the calculation of Income Support entitlement.

We believe that the current disregard strikes the right balance between acknowledging the special reasons for these pensions and prudent use of public funds.

Between April 1990 and October 2002 the percentage increase in the all items retail price index has been 42.2 per cent. Income Support allowances are generally uprated using the Rossi Index which has increased by 42.8 per cent. over the same period.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Denis Murphy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* persons and *(b)* households in the Wansbeck constituency will receive the winter fuel payment for 2002–03. [88159]

Mr. McCartney: Figures for winter 2002–03 are not yet available. However, last winter 18,200 people received a winter fuel payment in the Wansbeck constituency, and we expect this year's figure to be similar.

The exact number of households these people lived in is not available. However, 9,500 people received a £100 payment because they shared a household with at least one other eligible person, and the remaining 8,700 people each received a £200 payment.

Source:

Figures from Information and Analysis Directorate, using 100 per cent. extract from Matching, Intelligence and Data Analysis Service.

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost of extending the winter fuel payments to those under 16 years is; and what percentage this represents of the total social security budget. [88018]

Mr. McCartney: We estimate that the extra cost of extending Winter Fuel Payments to households which contain at least one child under the age of 16 in Great Britain would be in the region of £1.3 billion in 2002–03. This cost is based on the assumption that no one else in the household is entitled to the payment. The cost represents around 1.2 per cent. of estimated benefit expenditure in Great Britain in 2002–03.

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people entitled to one or more backdated winter fuel payments as a result of the European Court decision have received one; and how many people are entitled to make a claim for a backdated payment, but have yet to do so. [88205]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates show that around 1.9 million people could have been eligible for backdated payments for the first three years of the scheme and about 1.2 million people have now been paid. There is no cut off dates for these retrospective payments.

It is not possible to provide a reliable estimate of the numbers who have not claimed because the estimate of those newly eligible was based on sample data. It is up to the individual, where a claim is necessary, to decide whether or not to make that claim.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Claimants

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many benefit claimants have been sanctioned because they have refused to take part in the pilot scheme to improve the literacy and numeracy skills of long-term unemployed people. [88216]

Malcolm Wicks *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* Between September 2001 and April 2002, we piloted a number of approaches aimed at encouraging greater take up of basic skills provision by people claiming jobseeker's allowance. These included testing different mechanisms to identify those with basic skills needs, and the use of financial incentives and/or benefit sanctions to encourage the take up of training.

In north Nottinghamshire we piloted the use of benefit sanctions if a client refused an offer of training or left training early without good cause. In Leeds we combined the use of sanctions with financial incentives of £20 per week on top of their benefit for clients taking up training, and £100 for those achieving a basic skills qualification. In the two pilots, 1,623 clients had a possible basic skills need identified. Of these, 18 had sanctions applied, three because they failed to attend a basic skills assessment and 15 because they failed to attend training or left early without good cause.

Child Care

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what plans he has to assist with child care arrangements to enable parents to take up employment; [87667]

(2) what plans his Department has to ease the transition from welfare to work for mothers with young children. [87668]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: We believe that work is the best route out of poverty, but recognise that parents can face difficulties moving into work due to the demands of balancing their work, life and family responsibilities. That is why we are providing extra help to reduce these problems and allow parents to successfully move into work.

Help with child care costs for people looking for work is available across Great Britain through our welfare to work initiatives, such as the New Deal. For example, the New Deal for Lone Parents can provide assistance when participants attend training or take up part-time work. We are also enhancing the child care support available through Jobcentre Plus. From April 2003, a Childcare Partnership Manager will be established in every Jobcentre Plus district to ensure that jobseekers with children and their advisers have access to the latest information about child care in their area.

For lone parents who are moving into work of over 16 hours per week, the Working Families Tax Credit (and from April 2003 the Working Tax Credit) includes the Childcare Tax Credit which can pay for up to 70 per cent. of their child care costs. New Deal Personal Advisers can also use the Adviser Discretion Fund to help pay for advance child care deposits if the lone parent is unable to do so.

We have also recently announced an improved package of financial measures to help people make the transition into work. From October 2004 we will be introducing a new Job Grant to help people moving into a job after at least six months on benefit. Single people and couples without children will receive £100. A higher rate Grant of £250 will be paid to lone parents and to couples with children. This improved Job Grant will make a real difference in helping tide families over until their first wages are received.

In 1998 we launched our National Childcare Strategy for England. This aims to ensure that good quality, affordable child care for children up to age 14 (and 16 for children with special educational needs and disabilities) is available in every neighbourhood.

Since 1997, there has been a major expansion in child care provision. In England over 553,000 new child care places have been created, benefiting more than a million children. A number of Government programmes, including the Neighbourhood Childcare Initiative, are helping to extend provision in the most disadvantaged areas of the country. We are now also encouraging schools to provide and host a range of services, including child care, for the local community through our new Extended Schools programme. The 2002 Spending Review saw a doubling of child care funding to create a further 250,000 places, in new Children's Centres in disadvantaged areas and elsewhere, by 2006. This is on top of the existing target of creating new provision for 1.6 million children by 2004.

Responsibility for policy relating to the development of child care in Scotland and Wales is a matter for the devolved administrations.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum, how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88137]

Mr. McCartney: Public funds have not been used for entertaining and Christmas decorations in private offices. Christmas cards for Ministers to issue in their official capacity have been purchased at a cost of £1,619.34. Gathering information to answer for the rest of this Department could be provided only at disproportionate cost. However, any expenditure incurred on decorations, entertainment and any other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with the departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting". The Department has no official residences.

Disabled People

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what plans he has to help disabled people back to work. [87669]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Disabled people can take part in the mainstream Jobcentre Plus employment and training programmes, and have full access to all its services. In addition, Jobcentre Plus has a range of specialist employment programmes to support disabled people who want to work. The Access to Work programme provides advice and practical help for disabled people with the additional employment costs, for example, in travelling to work, adapting the work place, obtaining special equipment and support workers, which result from disability. WORKSTEP provides job support to disabled people who face more complex barriers to finding and keeping work.

Our New Deal for Disabled People is the first national programme designed specifically to support people with health conditions and disabilities move into and keep jobs. Since the national extension of the programme began, it has helped over 6,000 people into jobs and nearly 28,000 have registered with job brokers to actively pursue employment. Disabled people can also take part in other Jobcentre Plus employment programmes, and have full access to all its services.

Our Green Paper, "Pathways to Work: Helping People into Employment' (Cm 5690), sets out our strategy for enabling people with health problems and disabilities to move into work, and so become and remain independent. From late October 2003, we will offer in pilot areas: early, more frequent support from skilled personal advisers; direct access to a range of comprehensive specialist programmes; and clear financial incentives to work.

Employment (Disability)

Mr. Boswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what financial assistance he makes available to specialist employment providers and agencies in the fields of *(a)* physical disability, *(b)* learning difficulties and *(c)* mental illness. [88331]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Jobcentre Plus has a range of specialist programmes for people with disabilities, providing support in finding, keeping and training for work. In order to deliver this provision, Jobcentre Plus contracts with a range of specialist providers through the access to work, work preparation, WORKSTEP and residential training programmes.

These programmes are available to people with all disabilities; however, in some parts of the country there are also programmes designed specifically for people with learning difficulties, brain injuries and muscular skeletal conditions.

Gas Pipes

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of the gas mains network operated by Transco is over *(a)* 30, *(b)* 50 and *(c)* 75 years old. [87485]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am informed by the Health and Safety Executive that detailed information is unavailable. However, it was estimated in September 2001, when HSE announced the accelerated iron mains replacement programme that most iron mains—about 60 per cent.—were over 40 years old; and some were over 100 years old.

Mr. Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment the Heath and Safety Executive has made of Transco's system of record keeping for the gas mains network; and if he will make a statement. [87487]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: I am informed by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) that they have met with Transco to discuss their arrangements for data handling, the last occasion being 21 November 2002. Their arrangements have been subject to an internal audit. HSE have asked for an independent review of compliance with and the quality of the arrangements themselves.

Habitual Residence Test

Mr. Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many *(a)* decisions were made and *(b)* appeals were submitted in relation to the habitual residence test in respect of the area covered by the Brighton Phoenix, Brighton Pavilion and Hove Jobcentre Plus offices in each year between 1997 and 2001–02; and how many of the people who lost benefit in relation to the habitual residents test were UK citizens. [86119]

Malcolm Wicks: The available information is in the table:

Habitual residency test (HRT) Brighton and Hove social security offices[1]

	1997–98	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*
Total number of HRT decisions made	1,509	1,398	1,272	876	613
Total number of appeals submitted against HRT decisions	67	32	43	12	15
Total number of UK citizens found to have no entitlement to benefit following an HRT decision[2]	74	116	57	44	60

[1] These offices make decisions on all HRT cases for claims made through Brighton Phoenix, Brighton Pavilion, Hove, Newhaven, Lewes and Brighton Regent Jobcentres. It is not possible to disaggregate the figures for individual Jobcentres.

[2] Figures include cases where the original decision has been upheld on appeal.

Source:

Management Information Statistics Program (MISP) and local office data.

Jobcentres (Advertisements)

Mr. Caton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions in what circumstances names and addresses of employers advertising in jobcentres are withheld; and why. [87456]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Names and addresses of employers advertising in jobcentres are withheld from members of the public responding to the advertised vacancies in two circumstances:

where a job is advertised to work in a private household and the householder has requested that their home address is not immediately disclosed for reasons of safety and privacy, and;

where a job is notified by an employment agency acting on behalf of, or contracted to supply workers to, a third party employer. This is to ensure that jobseekers do not go directly to the end employer who has specifically commissioned the agency to act on their behalf.

Jobseekers Allowance

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have been refused all Jobseekers Allowance payments after interview in the last year for which figures are available; and what proportion this represented of those interviewed. [86957]

Malcolm Wicks: The information is not available. All people claiming Jobseekers Allowance are required to attend an initial jobseeker's interview. However the data collected by the Department do not distinguish between decisions on entitlement made as a result of such an interview and those made at another stage, for example following the processing of the benefit application. Nor do the data distinguish between decisions on entitlement made at the start of a claim and those made during the course of a claim.

Lone Parents

Sir Archy Kirkwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of lone parents are in work in *(a)* the Scottish Borders, *(b)* Scotland and *(c)* the UK. [85697]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The available information is in the table:

Employment rate for lone parents

Area	*Percentage*
Scottish Borders	[1] Not available
Scotland	56.0
United Kingdom	53.3

[1] The sample size is too small to make a realistic estimate of the employment rate of lone parents in the Scottish Borders.

Notes:

1. Figures are based on a 5 per cent. sample of the population and estimates are subject to sampling error and to variability in non-response.
2. Families with unknown economic status are excluded.

Source:

Labour Force Survey—spring 2002

Maxwell Communications Pension Plan

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on the outcome of his Department's discussions with representatives of the Maxwell Communications Pension Plan. [88315]

Mr. McCartney: The Government are aware of the difficulties surrounding the Maxwell Communications Pension Plan and sympathise with those affected.

We have had discussions with the Independent Trustee of the Plan, The Law Debenture Trust Corporation plc. The difficulties faced by the Plan are not connected to Maxwell's original fraud but reflect the subsequent performance of the pension fund in relation to the scheme's liabilities. As we have made clear to Law Debenture, this is an issue for the trustees, not the Government.

Medical Assessments

David Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what procedures are in place to assess the performance of doctors employed by Schlumberger Sema to carry out medical assessment of benefit applicants on behalf of Jobcentre Plus. [87301]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Doctors must demonstrate they have achieved a satisfactory standard before being approved by the Chief Medical Adviser to carry out assessments on behalf of the Department. Ongoing approval is dependent upon the doctor maintaining a satisfactory standard. We therefore have stringent procedures in place to assess their performance.

A doctor's work can be audited if their work is reported to be deficient or if they are subject to significant levels of complaint and, in addition, cases are randomly selected for audit on an ongoing monthly basis.

All complaints made regarding the manner or conduct of a doctor are investigated to ensure that examining doctors have followed the professional standards laid down by Medical Services, and consideration is given to any complaints made and their nature when reviewing the performance of individual doctors.

The Department and Medical Services also undertake a number of validation exercises to ensure that these systems are sufficiently robust and that the performance of doctors acting on behalf of the Department is effectively assessed.

New Deal

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many New Deal participants have found *(a)* employment and *(b)* sustained employment in the Civil Service in each year of the New Deal to date; which Government departments and agencies have employed New Deal participants; what the (i) number of employees and (ii) duration of employment were in each case; and what customised gateways have been established for Government Departments and agencies; [85985]

(2) how many New Deal participants found work in his Department *(a)* in the year to April 2000, *(b)* in the year to April 2001, *(c)* in the year to April 2002 and *(d)* in the most recent period for which figures are available. [87003]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answers 9 December 2002 and 12 December 2002]:* The available information is in the table.

	New Deal for Young People and New Deal 25 plus starts in Government Departments (including agencies) by financial year				
	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2000–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Cabinet Office	9	4	13	6	0
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	—	—	—	—	2
Department for Transport, Local Government and the Regions	6	5	57	60	17
Privy Council Office	0	0	1	0	0
Charity Commission	5	13	13	11	1
Department for Culture, Media and Sport	1	1	2	0	0
Ministry of Defence	7	88	43	16	24
Department for Education and Skills	12	77	51	8	0
Office for Standards in Education	1	0	0	0	0
Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs	5	33	35	35	3
Intervention Board	2	1	1	0	—
Export Credits Guarantee Department	4	0	0	0	0
Foreign and Commonwealth Office	3	1	5	2	0
Government Communications Headquarters	0	0	2	0	0
Department of Health	8	19	30	18	2
Home Office	1	72	26	38	5
Department for International Development	0	1	6	0	0
Law Officers' Departments	0	10	11	2	0
Lord Chancellor's Department	0	21	34	33	3
National Assembly for Wales	5	28	3	5	0
Northern Ireland Office	0	11	3	0	0
Scottish Executive (includes Scottish Office)	12	19	33	40	6
Registers of Scotland	1	0	0	0	0
Department of Trade and Industry	22	21	26	12	1
Health and Safety Executive	0	6	12	17	5
Office of the Rail Regulator	0	0	0	1	0
Office of Water Services (OFWAT)	0	0	1	0	0
Ordnance Survey	0	1	0	0	0
Shadow Strategic Rail Authority (NDPB wef 1.2.01)	0	0	1	0	—
HM Treasury	2	0	2	3	4
Office of Government Commerce	1	0	0	0	0
HM Customs and Excise	1	34	77	32	1
Inland Revenue (includes NICO and Valuation Office Agency)	4	252	145	169	3
Office for National Statistics	0	10	1	0	0
Royal Mint	3	0	0	0	0
Department for Work and Pensions	356	1,758	1,177	929	120
Total	471	2,486	1,811	1,437	197

[1] 2002–03 figures are to 1 July 2002.

Notes:

Figures for the other New Deals are not available. Information on the duration of employment is not collected centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Customised New Deal gateways were piloted in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Trade and Industry and the former Benefits Agency.

Source:

Cabinet Office

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment he has made of the effect of the New Deal for Lone Parents. [87670]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The New Deal is delivering services tailored to meet the needs of individual lone parents and giving them the skills, support and confidence they need to move into work. By the end of September 2002, the New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP) had helped over 160,000 lone parents to find jobs. There has been on-going evaluation of the programme and a number of evaluation reports have been published and placed in the Library. A report of further evaluation concerning the quantitative impact of NDLP is due to be published in spring 2003.

NDLP is just one of many measures that we have introduced to help lone parents gain independence through moving into work. Together they have helped reduce the number of lone parents dependant on income support by over 15 per cent. since May 1997.

David Hamilton: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment his Department has made of the effect the new deal has had on youth unemployment. [87671]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Since 1997, youth unemployment has fallen by more than a third and long-term youth unemployment has been reduced by nearly three-quarters. The new deal for young people has played an important part in this success, helping almost 400,000 young people off benefit and into jobs, and improving the work prospects of many more.

Independent research by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research found that the number of young people unemployed for six months or more would be twice as high without the new deal. It also found that the new deal had increased youth employment and had had a positive knock-on effect on employment among other age groups.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column 377W, on the New Deal, what adjustment has been made to the Government's expenditure plans as a result of the difference between spending on the Environmental Task Force and the amount budgeted by the former Department for Education and Employment for the period 1998 to 2002; [88095]

(2) pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column 377W, on the New Deal, why details of expenditure on the Environment Task Force in 2001–02 are not yet available; when the figure will be made available; and if he will make a statement; [88096]

(3) pursuant to his answer of 11 December, *Official Report*, column 377W, if he will make a statement on the reasons for the difference in the number of young people participating in the Environment Task Force option and the target figure given by the former Department for Education and Employment in DfEE Press Release 009 of 1998. [88138]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Due to the strength of the economy and the success of the New Deal for Young People long-term youth unemployment has been virtually eradicated. The number of young people accessing New Deal opportunities has therefore been lower than was anticipated in 1998. This has also resulted in underspends against original planning assumptions for the programme. These underspends have been used to support other welfare to work initiatives. Environment Task Force opportunities and those on the other options continue to be available for New Deal clients who need this type of help to move into work.

The Department's accounts for 2001–02 are currently being finalised and are expected to be published early in 2003. The Environment Task Force expenditure figure will be available then.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to his answer of 11 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 377W, on the new deal, (1) how many of the 6,800 young people who secured subsidised employment starts in the construction industry subsequently secured *(a)* unsubsidised employment and *(b)* unsubsidised sustained employment; and if he will make a statement; [88097]

(2) if he will make a statement on the reasons for the difference in the number of subsidised employment starts in the construction industry under the new deal and that predicted by the former Department for Education and Employment in DFEE Press Release 70 of 1998. [88098]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: Due to the strength of the economy and the success of the new deal for young people long-term youth unemployment has been virtually eradicated. The number of young people accessing subsidised employment opportunities in the construction industry has therefore been lower than was anticipated in 1998. However, opportunities continue to be available for new deal clients who need help through subsidised employment to move into work.

We estimate that 6,800 people have started subsidised employment in the construction industry since 1998. Of these, around 3,000 subsequently moved into an unsubsidised job, some 2,800 of which were sustained. Information on the type of industry within which a subsidised job takes place is incomplete. It is likely, therefore, that these are underestimates of the number of people taking up work in the construction industry through the subsidised employment option of the new deal.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people on New Deal 25 Plus schemes *(a)* left after the initial advisory stage, *(b)* progressed to follow-through and *(c)* returned to claim jobseeker's allowance, in each year since 1997. [86678]

Mr. Nicholas Brown: The information is in the tables. In April 2001, New Deal 25 plus was extended and enhanced, to provide a flexible, more individually-tailored service to help more long-term unemployed people find jobs and remain in them.

	1998[1]	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002*[2]
Number of people leaving during the advisory process (including the Gateway)	13,320	110,870	112,870	64,830	2,940
Number of people who progressed to follow-through	700	8,130	10, 000	5,820	1,070
Number of people who left to return to jobseeker's allowance[3]	2,680	68,210	76,450	47,380	3,110

[1] New Deal 25 plus was introduced nationally in June 1998.
[2] To September.
[3] Among leavers from all stages of the New Deal.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

Re-engineered New Deal 25 plus

	2001[1]	*2002*[2]
Number of people leaving during the advisory process (including the Gateway)	33,400	54,700
Number of people who progressed to follow-through	2,850	20,240
Number of leavers returning to jobseeker's allowance[3]	6,000	23,900

[1] From April.
[2] From September
[3] Among leavers from all stages of the New Deal.
Source:
New Deal Evaluation Database

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when he expects to publish the evaluation of the New Deal for Lone Parents; and if he will make a statement. [85989]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The evaluation of the prototype of the New Deal for Lone Parents was published on 3 March 2000. Follow up reports and research on the national phase of the programme have been published since then, and new items of research are published as they are completed. We expect to publish a report, bringing together findings from all strands of the evaluation, in spring 2003.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of participants in the New Deal for Young People from Ethnic Minorities found *(a)* jobs and *(b)* sustained jobs in each year since 1997, broken down by ethnic group. [85984]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The information is in the tables.

1998

	All jobs		Sustained	
	Number	Per cent. of starts	Number	Per cent. of starts
Black—Caribbean	2,780	46	1,890	32
Black—African	1,410	39	950	26
Black—Other	1,240	46	840	31
Indian	1,920	52	1,530	41
Pakistani	2,980	45	2,280	35
Bangladeshi	1,030	47	810	37
Chinese	180	44	150	36
Mixed/Other	2,170	46	1,620	34
Total	13,720	46	10,060	34

1999

	All jobs		Sustained	
	Number	Per cent. of starts	Number	Per cent. of starts
Black—Caribbean	2,420	48	1,730	35
Black—African	1,090	40	760	28
Black—Other	1,030	48	730	34
Indian	1,800	52	1,440	42
Pakistani	2,880	46	2,220	36
Bangladeshi	940	49	790	41
Chinese	180	47	150	39
Mixed/Other	2,110	45	1,600	34
Total	12,440	47	9,420	36

2000

	All jobs		Sustained	
	Number	Per cent. of starts	Number	Per cent. of starts
Black—Caribbean	2,510	52	1,770	37
Black—African	1,270	44	900	31
Black—Other	1,140	52	820	38
Indian	1,680	55	1,370	45
Pakistani	2,990	49	2,380	39
Bangladeshi	980	49	800	40
Chinese	160	46	130	37
Mixed/Other	2,300	47	1,770	36
Total	13,020	50	9,940	38

2001

	All jobs		Sustained	
	Number	Per cent. of starts	Number	Per cent. of starts
Black—Caribbean	2,180	48	1,540	34
Black—African	1,330	41	930	28
Black—Other	960	45	710	33
Indian	1,520	54	1,250	44
Pakistani	2,660	46	2,070	35
Bangladeshi	870	45	700	37
Chinese	140	46	110	35
Mixed/Other	2,480	43	1,880	33
Total	12,150	46	9,200	35

2002 (to September 2002)

	All jobs		Sustained	
	Number	Per cent. of starts	Number	Per cent. of starts
Black—Caribbean	1,430	37	1,000	26
Black—African	860	25	650	19
Black—Other	540	34	400	25
Indian	950	42	760	34
Pakistani	1,590	34	1,220	26
Bangladeshi	520	32	420	26
Chinese	90	33	90	30
Mixed/Other	1,870	28	1,480	22
Total	7,850	32	6,010	25

Official Travel

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what the total expenditure of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies was on official travelling in 2001–02; [84789]

(2) what the total budget of *(a)* his Department and *(b)* its agencies is for official travel in 2002–03. [84941]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* Since 1999 the Government have published an annual list of all visits overseas undertaken by Cabinet Ministers costing £500 or more during each financial year. The Government have also published on an annual basis the cost of all Ministers' visits overseas. Details of travel undertaken during the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 75W. The cost of Ministers' visits overseas for 2002–03 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current financial year. Copies of the lists are available in the Library.

All travel is undertaken fully in accordance with the rules set out in the Ministerial Code and Travel by Ministers, copies of which are available in the Library.

In respect of travel by officials of the Department, the figures for expenditure in 2001–02 and budget for 2002–03 are set out in the following table.

	£ million
Expenditure 2001–02	
Total Department	61.4
Benefits Agency	19.0
Child Support Agency	3.8
The Appeals Service	0.6
Employment Service	23.6
Corporate Centre	14.4

	£ million
Budget 2002–03	
Total Department	69.0
Jobcentre Plus	42.4
Child Support Agency	3.5
The Appeals Service	0.6
The Pension Service	4.0
Corporate Centre	18.5

Notes:

1. Following the significant restructuring of DWP the Benefits Agency discontinued its operations. Its functions dispersed between the newly formed agencies Jobcentre Plus and Pension Service, and the corporate centre. It is not possible therefore to make direct, like for like comparisons between expenditure and budget figures.
2. The Child Benefit Centre and Disability and Carer Services formerly within BA are, with effect from 1 April 2002, accounted within the DWP Corporate Centre. Pensions and Overseas Directorate and all work in ex-DSS relating to pensions is now carried out by The Pension Service. The remainder of BA and the Employment Service integrated to form Jobcentre Plus.
3. The Health and Safety Executive and Health and Safety Laboratory has recently moved into DWP under a machinery of Government change. The budget figures for HSE/HSL are not included.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many parliamentary questions have been tabled to his Department for written answer on a named day since 1 October 2002; and what percentage received a substantive reply on the requested date. [86993]

Maria Eagle *[holding answer 12 December 2002]:* From 1 October, out of 675 questions tabled to my right hon. Friend for written answer, 246 questions were for answer on a named day up to and including 12 December. Of these, 154—63 per cent.—received a substantive reply on the named day. During the same period, the hon. Member tabled 74 questions to the Department, all of them for answer on a named day. Up to 12 December substantive replies had been issued in respect of 45 of them in an average time of 4.75 working days.

We are committed to providing hon. Members with timely and accurate answers to parliamentary questions, although where questions prompt further analysis it is not always possible to provide information to the named day deadlines.

Unemployment (Copeland)

Dr. Jack Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people were unemployed in Copeland in *(a)* May 1997 and *(b)* at the latest date for which figures are available; what proposals he has to reduce that number; and if he will make a statement. [87142]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* Economic stability and active labour market programmes have helped people move from welfare to work in all parts of the country. As a result of our policies the number of people in work is at record levels and unemployment has fallen to levels not seen since the 1970s.

In my right hon. Friend's constituency, between May 1997 and October 2002 the number of people unemployed and claiming benefit fell from 2,784 to 1,382 (a reduction of 50 per cent.) and long term unemployment has fallen by 75 per cent. Over the same period the New Deal has helped over 1,800 people in Copeland into jobs.

We know that even within areas of prosperity there are pockets of persistent unemployment. That is why we have introduced additional measures—such as Action Teams for Jobs and Employment Zones—targeted on the most employment-deprived wards in the country.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what *(a)* discussions his Department has held with the Treasury and *(b)* sanctions have been imposed on his Department in respect of his Department's performance in meeting targets set for its predecessor departments in public service agreements dating from (i) 1998 and (ii) 2000; and if he will make a statement. [88054]

Mr. McCartney *[holding answer 19 December 2002]:* The Department has regular and ongoing discussions with the Treasury on its public service agreement targets and continues to make good progress towards meeting them, as reported in its Departmental Report for 2002 (Cm 5424), and in its Autumn Performance Report (Cm 5660). Therefore no sanctions have been imposed in respect of performance against any of my Department's or its predecessor's departmental targets.

State Pension

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people have opted to defer receiving their state pension, and how many pensioners in total have received increments in each year since 1992. [88204]

Mr. McCartney: The information is not available in the format requested.

We estimate that around 3 per cent. of people who reached state pension age five years ago deferred claiming their basic state pension. On average, these individuals deferred their basic state pension for almost two years.

The table shows the number of pensioners receiving increments in each year.

	Thousands
March 2002	1,163.1
March 2001	1,193.6
March 2000	1,221.2

Notes:

1. Figures are taken from a 5 per cent. sample.
2. Figures are in thousands and rounded to the nearest hundred.
3. Figures include own and inherited increments and all components.
4. Comparative figures are not available prior to September 1999.

Source:

Pension Strategy and Computer System at 31 March of each year.

Notes:

1. Estimates are based on the latest March 2002 RP admin data and the Government Actuary's Department mid-year population estimates.
2. Figures are for Great Britain.

Tax Credits

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if the figures for tax credit expenditure in the benefits expenditure table at http://www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd4/Table1 are gross and include all tax credit expenditure. [81950]

Malcolm Wicks: The figures for tax credits include all personal tax credits (Working Families Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit, Children's Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit) classified by the Office for National Statistics as public expenditure in the National Accounts. Further details on the classification of personal tax credits can be found in Box C2 of the 2002 Financial Statement and Budget Report (HC592).

Unemployment

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will make a statement on progress on the target to halve unemployment among 18 to 24 year olds by 2010 throughout the European Union, set at the European Council's meeting in Lisbon. [88218]

Malcolm Wicks: There is no target for EU unemployment among 18 to 24 year olds. The Presidency Conclusions from the European Council held in Lisbon in March 2000 set a target that the number of 18 to 24 year olds with only lower secondary level education who are not in further education and training should be halved by 2010.

Three employment rate targets were agreed at Lisbon and Stockholm on total employment (70 per cent.), female employment (60 per cent.) and older worker employment (50 per cent.). The UK is one of the best performing member states in the EU, with one of the highest employment rates in the EU 15 (71.7 per cent. in the UK in 2001 compared with an EU average of 63.9 per cent.). The UK is one of only three member states to currently exceed all three of the 2010 employment targets.

The UK performs well in terms of young people as well, with the second highest youth employment rate at 56.9 per cent. in 2001, well above the EU 15 average of 40.7 per cent. This reflects the effectiveness of policies such as New Deal in helping young people in the UK to move from welfare to work. Current Eurostat figures show that between October 2000 and October 2001, unemployment in the EU for 15 to 24 year olds fell from 14.9 per cent. to a low of 14.7 per cent., before rising again to 15.1 per cent. in October 2002.

Winter Fuel Payment

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many men aged 60 to 64 received a winter fuel payment in each of the last two winters; and how many men in this age group have applied for a payment for this year. [88200]

Mr. McCartney: Around 1.1 million men aged 60 to 64 received winter fuel payments in each of the last two winters (2000–01 and 2001–02). This winter, men aged 60 to 64 will have received a winter fuel payment automatically if they were receiving a social security benefit (excluding child benefit, housing benefit and council tax benefit) in the qualifying week, or they had received a winter fuel payment last year and their circumstances had not changed. People who are not entitled to an automatic payment need to make a claim. We are currently unable to identify the number of men in this age group who have claimed so far this year, but we may be able to do so by May 2003 once the final administrative data is available.

Work Opportunities (Older People)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what progress he has made in supporting work opportunities for older women. [83642]

Mr. Nicholas Brown *[holding answer 5 December 2002]:* New Deal 50 plus offers personal advice, jobsearch help, and back to work financial support through an Employment Credit for clients on taking up either full-time or part- time work. We are ensuring that New Deal 50 plus offers effective back to work help for women over 50 by making partners, as well as the main benefit recipient, eligible for help through the programme. By October 2002, New Deal 50 plus had helped 26,780 women back into work—a third of all clients moving into work through the programme.

We are encouraging employers to realise the benefits of employing older workers through our Age Positive campaign. The campaign raises employer awareness through events, awards, initiatives, guidance and publications such as 'Good Practice in Recruiting and Retaining Older Workers' (DWP December 2001). We are also encouraging employers to adopt more flexible approaches to retirement to give individuals more choice and opportunity to stay in work longer. This can be important for those women who want to stay in work longer and also move from full-time to part-time work. The Green Paper on pensions, which we published on 17 December, includes proposals to support the development of flexible retirement. We will also reinforce our commitment to tackle age discrimination in employment by implementing age legislation covering employment and vocational training by 2006.

Earlier this month we had Age Positive Week which included a range of events to further raise awareness of the benefits of employing older men and women as part of an age diverse workforce. On 3 December we also launched an updated Code of Practice on Age Diversity in Employment, which includes a range of new good practice case studies for employers.

Our policies have contributed to a rise of 4.6 percentage points in the employment rate of women aged 50 to state pension age since 1997, to 65.6 per cent. This increase is greater than the increase in the overall employment rate of women, which stood at 69.7 per cent in spring 2002.

HEALTH

Abattoirs

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which abattoirs in the South-West have a licence to remove and test the spinal columns of animals slaughtered under the Beef Assurance Scheme. [85371]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 9 December 2002]*: All licensed abattoirs are permitted to slaughter Beef Assurance Scheme over 30 month cattle, provided they are willing to facilitate their testing for BSE. On receipt of a negative test result, the carcase must be sent to a licensed cutting plant that is separately licensed to remove the vertebral column and dorsal root ganglia before the meat is released for human consumption. All licensed cutting plants are free to apply to the Food Standards Agency for an additional licence to remove vertebral column. It is a simple process, no fee is charged, and all have been encouraged to apply. None has done so in the south-west peninsular.

Accident and Emergency Units

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what instructions his Department issued to acute trusts on planning bed allocations to reduce the length of waiting times in accident and emergency units. [87530]

Mr. Lammy: Creating more capacity in hospitals is key to reducing long waits to be admitted to a bed from accident and emergency. Over the last two years, the number of beds have increased, reversing a 40 year decline.

The Department has not issued any specific instructions to acute trusts regarding bed allocations to reduce the length of waiting times in accident and emergency departments.

As part of routine capacity planning each national health service trust needs to establish the levels of occupancy required for different specialties and types of care, depending on their own particular circumstances. Appropriate levels of occupancy will depend on a number of factors including specialty, the balance between emergency and planned admissions and the size of the hospital.

Acute Hospitals (Nurse Training)

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of NHS nurses are trained to deliver minor injury and assessment services in acute hospitals. [87537]

Mr. Hutton: Information on the number of nurses trained to deliver minor injury and assessment services is not collected centrally.

Acute Trusts (Nurses)

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the level is of nurse understaffing in England's acute trusts. [87767]

Mr. Hutton: Levels of staffing are a matter for individual trusts. The three month vacancy rate is an indicator of the number of posts in their establishment which trusts are finding difficult to fill.

Information on the level of three month vacancies in acute trusts in England will be placed in the Library.

Between March 2001 and 2002 the three month vacancy rate for qualified nurses fell from 3.4 per cent., to 3.1 per cent. This is the second successive fall for nurse vacancies and shows that our recruitment and retention policies are bearing fruit.

Adult Placement Schemes

Mr. Cameron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent representations he has received about the regulation of adult placement schemes; and if he will make a statement. [82049]

Jacqui Smith: We have recently received representations from the national association of adult placement services and others about the regulation of adult placement schemes. We have carried out a thorough review of these issues and intend to propose changes to the way in which both adult placement carers and the schemes that manage them are regulated. We will be consulting on this shortly.

Agency Nurses

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the figures for spending on agency nurses by the NHS in 2001–02 will be available. [85415]

Mr. Hutton: Fully validated information for spending on agency nurses by the national health service in 2001–02 will be available in February 2003. Information for 2000–01 is available and I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 538W.

Alcohol Reduction Strategy

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many responses he has received to the national alcohol reduction strategy consultation paper. [87578]

Ms Blears: 37 formal responses to the national alcohol harm reduction strategy had been received by the end of Tuesday 17 December 2002. The consultation began on 15 October 2002 and will run until 15 January 2003.

The Department of Health and the Cabinet Office strategy unit (COSU) have also held four regional consultation events in London, Newcastle, Manchester and Bristol to allow key stakeholders to discuss the issues and to put their views forward. Additionally, the COSU holds informal, on-going meetings with key stakeholders to ensure that their views can be fed into the work on the strategy at all stages of its development.

Antipsychotic Drugs

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the age-standardised prescription ratio was of *(a)* atypical and *(b)* typical antipsychotic drugs in each primary care trust area in each month during the period from 1 April to 31 October; and what the national averages were. [86370]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 9 December 2002]:* The information requested is not collected centrally. However, information on the estimated number of prescription items dispensed in the community in England for antipsychotics by broad age group for the 28 strategic health authorities for April to September 2002 has been placed in the Library.

Assisted Dying

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment his Department has made of the frequency of assisted dying in the UK in the last 10 years. [87034]

Mr. Lammy: We have no information about the frequency of assisted dying because it is an illegal act, if this means a deliberate intervention to end life. It is not for the Department to undertake any investigation into this matter, as this is a matter for the Criminal Justice Service.

Bed Availability (Worcestershire)

Mr. Luff: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available within the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust on *(a)* 2 December, *(b)* 11 December and *(c)* the most recent date for which he has information; and if he will make a statement. [88010]

Mr. Lammy: The daily situation reports by trusts do not list the total number of beds available within each hospital. The following answer therefore gives the number of beds that were not available on the days in question.

On 2 December, one ward at the Worcester Royal Hospital, with five unoccupied beds, was closed to admissions because of an outbreak of diarrhoea and vomiting (D&V), but it reopened during the day.

On 11 December, two wards were closed at the Alexandra Hospital, with five unoccupied beds, due to an outbreak of D&V.

On 17 December, the latest available date, six beds were closed due to staffing shortages at Worcester.

The bed closures should be seen in the overall context of some 900 beds (for all purposes) in the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust. The West Midlands South Strategic Health Authority is working closely with and monitoring the performance of the trust under the normal processes of winter planning and situation reporting.

Blood Donations

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many years in retrospect the Government will ban recipients of blood from donating blood in the future; and when he will publish his findings on this issue. [86268]

Ms Blears: The Government's advisory committee on the microbiological safety of blood and tissues for transplantation asked the Department's economics and operational research division to assess the impact of excluding transfusion recipients from donating blood on possible secondary infections of variant CJD, assuming blood to be infective. This risk assessment is still in progress and consequently no decision has been taken into the possible exclusion of transfusion recipients giving blood.

Body Part Imports

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will extend the licensing regime for the importation of human body tissue to corpses and other body parts; and if he will make a statement. [87314]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* There are currently no formal controls on the import of human tissue to the United Kingdom for teaching, education, research or other non-therapeutic purposes. The Government are considering this matter as part of their current review of the law on human tissue and organs. As an interim measure, we published a draft code of practice on the import and export of human body parts, in July. Consultation on this ended in October and we shall publish a slightly revised code shortly.

Cancer Screening

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to extend screening programmes to forms of common cancers other than breast and cervical. [86573]

Ms Blears: The NHS Cancer Plan stated that the government would extend and roll out new screening programmes, where it is clear that screening reduces mortality.

The National Health Service breast screening programmes is being expanded to invite all women aged 65 to 70 by 2004.

On 5 November, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health reaffirmed his commitment to introduce a national screening programme for colorectal cancer. The national cancer director will be working with all the relevant experts to determine the best way forward, taking account of experience from the current pilots.

We are committed to introducing a screening programme for prostate cancer if an when screening and treatment techniques are sufficiently well developed. There is no evidence from any country that screening for prostate cancer saves lives, but his is kept constantly under review by the national screening committee.

Care Costs

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average cost per week is of *(a)* keeping a person in hospital and *(b)* keeping a person in a nursing home. [84807]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 3 December 2002]:* The average cost per week in 2000–01 of keeping a person in hospital is calculated as £1,000 and of keeping that person in a nursing home is calculated as £384.

Care Homes (Insurance Cover)

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will provide assistance to care homes whose *(a)* premiums for public and employer's liability insurance cover have risen significantly and *(b)* cover has been withdrawn; and if he will make a statement. [88040]

Jacqui Smith: Care home places are commissioned by local councils. The Department is aware that some providers have had difficulty in negotiating public and private employers liability insurance premiums, and has contributed evidence to a cross-Whitehall group which is looking into this issue. This has led to a review of the current employers' liabilities compulsory insurance announced in the Pre-Budget report.

Children in Care

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who is reviewing public service agreements relating to the educational achievements of children in care. [84028]

Jacqui Smith: The social exclusion unit is currently reviewing the Government's public service agreement targets in consultation with the Department of Health, the Department for Education and Skills and other Departments with an interest. This review of current targets is part of the social exclusion unit's wider study into raising the educational attainment of young people in public care.

Children in Temporary Accommodation

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what regular health checks are carried out on children living in temporary accommodation. [87186]

Jacqui Smith: Local primary care trusts are responsible for the timing, frequency and content of health checks in childhood. These will vary according to the needs of the individual child. There is, however, a recommended core programme contained in the publication "Health for all Children", which includes the number and content of health checks for children. This programme has been developed to maximise the capability of every child to have the opportunity to realise their full potential in terms of good health, well being and development and to assist primary health care teams to determine their approach. The core programme is currently under review.

Chiropody

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people received NHS chiropody services in each year from 1997 to 2002. [87678]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The number of people who received chiropody services was as follows:

Year	*First contacts (thousands)*
1996–97	2,420
1997–98	2,383
1998–99	2,381
1999–2000	2,321
2000–01	2,247
2001–02	2,278

Source:
Department of Health annual return KT23.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the National Institute for Clinical Excellence has issued guidance on chiropody services; and what plans the NICE has to issue guidance on NHS chiropody services in the future. [87679]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has not issued guidance specifically on chiropody services and has no plans to issue such guidance in the near future.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what framework governs standards of provision of chiropody services in the NHS. [87682]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 17 December 2002]:* Primary care trusts are responsible for planning and securing the provision of the totality of care and services that their population needs. The Health Professions Council is responsible for setting and maintaining standards of professional training, performance and conduct of the 12 health care professions that it regulates, including chiropody. National service frameworks may include standards relevant to the provision of chiropody services.

Community Initiatives

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many community five-a-day initiatives have been established since the five pilot sites reported. [84014]

Ms Blears: The five-a-day local community initiatives aim to increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables by improving access and availability. Following the five pilot initiatives, there will be 66 new five-a-day local community initiatives, based in the most deprived areas of England, supported by the new opportunities fund. Grants for the first four initiatives have been awarded and grants for the other initiatives are currently under consideration. The majority of these programmes should be starting up from spring 2003.

In addition, initiatives to increase fruit and vegetable consumption may be funded through health action zones, sure start, healthy living centres and through general funding allocations to primary care trusts.

Continuing NHS Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps he is taking to ensure that health authorities comply with guidance issued in booklet 252535 that a written care plan is to be given to patients or the family before they move out of an NHS hospital to a nursing home; [87543]

(2) what steps he is taking to ensure, that strategic health authorities should determine whether there were patients who were wrongly refused funding for continuing care and make the necessary arrangements for reimbursing the costs they incurred unnecessarily and that health trusts reimburse self-funders and social services for costs incurred unnecessarily by social services clients and self-funding care home residents; [87546]

(3) if he will revise the paragraph, continuing NHS Health Care, in booklet 25253 to take account of R (Coughlan) *v.* N & E Devon HA CA July, 1999 and the Health Ombudsman's report E.208/99–00; [87541]

(4) what steps he is taking to ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts comply with guidance issued in the circular of 25 September HSC 2001/17: LAC (2001)26, page 31; [87542]

(5) what steps he is taking to ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts follow the Health Ombudsman's recommendations in her report E.208/99–00, that the new authority should review the eligibility criteria for funding continuing care to ensure that they are in line with the Coughlan judgment and other relevant guidance; [87544]

(6) what steps he is taking to ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts follow the Health Ombudsman's recommendations in her report E.208/99–00 that the strategic health authorities should determine whether there were any patients who were wrongly refused funding for continuing care and make the necessary arrangements for reimbursing the costs they incurred unnecessarily; [87545]

(7) what steps he is taking to ensure that health authorities and primary care trusts follow the health ombudsman's recommendations in her report E.208/99–00, that assessments of eligibility should include why the patient is considered to meet, or not to meet, all the criteria. [87540]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answers 17 December 2002]:* The Ombudsman's report referred to has not been published. It is therefore not possible to comment on the contents.

However, health authorities and subsequently strategic health authorities (StHAs) have reviewed their local criteria in line with the judgement in North and East Devon Health Authority ex parte Coughlan. The chief executive wrote to national health service chief executives about NHS continuing care over the summer. In the light of an earlier Ombudsman's case where an individual had been denied funding, he reminded them of the need to ensure that previous eligibility criteria did not deny patients NHS funded care to which they were entitled. In that case, the Ombudsman recommended that the eligibility criteria that had been in operation by the authority since April 1996 should be reviewed and that reimbursement of costs should be made to any patients found to have been refused funding incorrectly. StHAs have been asked to consider whether criteria in their area were at similar fault and whether other patients were also denied NHS funding of their care. The Department will be monitoring this as part of the process of reviewing StHA's criteria.

The Department does not consider there is any need to amend the wording of Appendix 6 of HSC 2001/17: LAC (2001) 26.

The leaflet, "NHS Funded Nursing Care—What it Means for You", is a guide to people living in or going into a care home providing nursing care, their families and carers. It is not statutory guidance. Separate guidance on the single assessment process asked the NHS and councils to carry out a joint, comprehensive old age assessment when individuals enter care homes or receive other intensive packages of care as part of continuing care, intermediate care or NHS funded nursing care. Local implementation teams for the national service framework for older people, covering all primary care trusts and councils, are required to oversee implementation of this guidance by April 2004.

Correspondence

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he intends to reply to the letter to him dated 31 October 2002 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Andrew Evans. [86658]

Mr. Milburn: A reply was sent to the right hon. Member on 19 December 2002.

Denturism

Richard Ottaway: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the legislative process for the legalisation of denturism will be completed; when he last met the General Dental Council to discuss this; and if he will make a statement. [87158]

Mr. Lammy: The Government plan to publish draft legislation reforming the regulation of dentistry in 2003. It is now discussing with interested groups in what form this legislation should provide for clinical dental technicians, or denturists, to undertake the practice of dentistry. I last met the president and registrar of the General Dental Council on 31 July when our discussions included the modernisation of the regulation of dentistry.

Christmas Expenses

Mr. Djanogly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much will be spent on *(a)* entertaining, *(b)* Christmas decorations and *(c)* other festive activities this Christmas season by his Department and Government agencies answerable to his Department; and of this sum, how much will be spent in Ministers' (i) private offices and (ii) official residences. [88135]

Mr. Lammy: This information cannot be provided without disproportionate cost. Any expenditure incurred on entertaining, decorations and other festive activities is strictly for official purposes only, and is made in accordance with departmental guidance on financial procedures and propriety, based on the principles set out in "Government Accounting".

Electronic Patient Records

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS Trusts in the south west have introduced electronic patient records. [88006]

Ms Blears: There are no trusts in the south west which have fully introduced electronic patient records although most are in the process of implementation.

EU Food Supplements Directive

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what powers the Government has to modify the implementation plans for the EU Food Supplements Directive. [88183]

Ms Blears: The EU Food Supplements Directive came into force on 12 July 2002. The Government is not in a position to modify the timing of implementation, which is set out in Article 15 of the Directive. The Food Standards Agency, on behalf of the Government, is currently consulting on draft implementing Regulations, which are required to be in place by 31 July 2003.

Article 4(6) of the Directive enables member states to allow extended transitional arrangements in some circumstances; the draft Regulations would take advantage of this provision. Article 10 enables member states to require notification of products; the draft Regulations would not introduce a notification system.

Food Imports (Banned Substances)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on food imports which contain substances banned by the EU. [87119]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 December 2002]:* I am advised by the Food Standards Agency that checks are carried out by local authorities and port health authorities on imported food from non-European Union countries to ensure compliance with the EU veterinary checks regime for food products of animal origin and under United Kingdom national legislation for food products of non-animal origin. In particular checks are made to ensure that where substances are specifically banned by EU legislation, appropriate action is taken to prevent them entering the human food chain.

Food Supplements

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the food supplements accepted as safe by the Food Standards Agency that will become illegal under EU law during 2003. [88176]

Ms Blears: There is no requirement under current United Kingdom legislation for food supplements to be assessed for safety before being placed on the market. As for other foods, the onus is on manufacturers to comply with food safety legislation, which is enforced by local authorities.

Directive 2002/46/EC on Food Supplements, which came into force on 12 July 2002, will, after a transitional period, require prior assessment of vitamin and mineral sources used in these products. Member states are obliged to transpose it into national legislation by 31 July 2003. The Food Standards Agency is currently consulting on draft implementing Regulations.

Implementation of the Directive will not immediately outlaw any products already on the UK market. The impact of the Directive on the future availability of products currently on the market will depend upon future developments on lists of permitted nutrients and on maximum levels of nutrients in food supplements.

Foster Care

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the success of the foster carer recruitment campaign launched in July 2000; and if he will make a statement. [83712]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the response I gave him on 25 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 136W.

GP Registers (Patient Removal)

Llew Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what rules govern the right of doctors to remove patients from their registers. [83258]

Mr. Hutton: These are set out at paragraphs 9 and 9A of Schedule 2 to the NHS (General Medical Services) Regulations 1992 and direction 4 of the Directions to Health Authorities Concerning Patient Lists (Personal Medical Services) 1998.

Health Statistics

Mrs. Calton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are affected by *(a)* obesity, *(b)* depression, *(c)* coronary heart disease, *(d)* stroke and *(e)* poor nutrition, in each health authority; and if he will make a statement. [84184]

Ms Blears: According to the latest survey figures available, 21 per cent. of men and women in England are classified as obese; 3 per cent. of women and 2 per cent. of men reported a depressive episode in a selected one week period; 7.1 per cent. of men and 4.6 per cent. of women are classified as having ischaemic heart disease (angina or heart attack) and 8.5 per cent. of men and 6.2 per cent. of women as having ischaemic heart disease or stroke. The above figures are not available at health authority level. There is no recognised definition of "poor nutrition".

Homeless People

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what percentage of homeless people suffered from tuberculosis in each year since 1997. [87187]

Ms Blears: In the year 2001–02, there were 10 admissions for tuberculosis with a home address of no fixed abode. This totals 0.1 per cent. of admissions for all diseases with a home address of no fixed abode.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment his Department has carried out on the longevity of homeless people. [87188]

Ms Blears: No recent assessment has been made of the longevity of homeless people, although research by Crisis (1996) found that the life expectancy of someone who sleeps rough is 42 years.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of homeless people used accident and emergency units at hospitals in the last 12 months. [87190]

Ms Blears: The homeless people interviewed as part of the recent research carried out by Crisis (December 2002) found that homeless people were over four times more likely than the general public to turn to accident and emergency when they could not access a general practitioner, 43 per cent., compared to 10 per cent.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of homeless people suffered from *(a)* chest infections *(b)* leg sores and *(c)* asthma in the last 12 months. [87191]

Ms Blears: In the year 2001–02, there were 46 admissions for asthma and 75 admissions for chest infections with a home address of no fixed abode. Data are not available for leg sores. This totals 0.6 per cent. and 1 per cent. of admissions for all diseases with a home address of no fixed abode for asthma and chest infections respectively.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients in NHS hospitals are homeless, broken down by health authority. [87202]

Ms Blears: In the year 2001–02 there were 7,620 admissions with a home address of 'No Fixed Abode'. A breakdown by health authority is shown in the table.

Admissions (2001–02) for those with a home address 'No Fixed Abode' broken down by health authority

Name	*Count of admissions*
Hillingdon HA	22
Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster	133
Redbridge and Waltham Forest HA	106
Bedfordshire HA	55
Berkshire HA	78
Buckinghamshire HA	50
Croydon HA	16
East Kent HA	38
West Kent HA	55
Kingston and Richmond HA	16
Lambeth, Southwark and Lewisham	962
Merton, Sutton and Wandsworth HA	60
East Surrey HA	5
West Surrey HA	104
East Sussex, Brighton and Hove HA	61
West Sussex HA	32
Barking and Havering HA	20
Brent and Harrow HA	30
Camden and Islington HA	753
Ealing, Hammersmith and Hounslow	402
East London and The City HA	152
North Essex HA	92
South Essex HA	61
South Lancashire HA	9
Liverpool HA	163
Manchester HA	92
Morecambe Bay HA	43
St, Helens and Knowsley HA	51
Salford and Trafford HA	7
Sefton HA	57
Stockport HA	17
West Pennine HA	14
Northamptonshire HA	74
Oxfordshire HA	77
Suffolk HA	84
Barnsley HA	50
North Derbyshire HA	13
South Derbyshire HA	63
Doncaster HA	66
Leicestershire HA	93
Lincolnshire HA	161
North Nottinghamshire HA	71
Nottingham HA	135
Rotherham HA	51
Sheffield HA	88
Bury and Rochdale HA	17
South Cheshire HA	35
East Lancashire HA	73
North West Lancashire HA	248
North and Mid Hampshire HA	32
Southampton and South West Hampshire HA	237
Somerset HA	36
South and West Devon HA	83
Wiltshire HA	20
Avon HA	212
Birmingham HA	126
Wigan and Bolton HA	40
Wirral HA	49
Bradford HA	58
County Durham HA	16
East Riding HA	83
Gateshead and South Tyneside HA	43
Leeds HA	170
Newcastle and North Tyneside HA	8
North Cumbria HA	29
South Humber HA	26
Northumberland HA	65
Tees HA	37
Wakefield HA	36
North Yorkshire HA	70
Calderdale and Kirklees HA	94
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly HA	1
Dorset HA	51
North and East Devon HA	40
Gloucestershire HA	51
Coventry HA	53
Dudley HA	10
Herefordshire HA	20
Sandwell HA	4
Shropshire HA	10
South Staffordshire HA	38
Walsall HA	19
Warwickshire HA	10
Worcestershire HA	5
Cambridge HA	213
Norfolk HA	107
Isle of White, Portsmouth and Southampton HA	126
Barnet, Enfield and Haringey HA	59
Hertfordshire HA	54
Bexley, Bromley and Greenwich HA	24
Total	7,620

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what steps his Department is taking to ensure that homeless people are able to register with a general practitioner; [87205]

(2) if it is his Department's policy to encourage homeless people to register permanently with a general practitioner. [87189]

Mr. Hutton: National Health Service medical primary care services are available free to all persons who are ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, including those who are homeless. To that end patients do not need a permanent address to register with a general practitioner.

Primary care trusts can also provide targeted primary care services for homeless people through a tailored personal medical services contract, or general medical services local development scheme or through provision of a walk-in service.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of homeless people suffered from diabetes in the last 12 months. [87208]

Ms Blears: In the year 2001–02, there were 46 admissions for diabetes with a home address of no fixed abode. This totals 0.6 per cent. of admissions for all diseases with a home address of no fixed abode.

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients whose address was listed as no fixed abode were admitted to NHS hospitals between *(a)* December 1998 and January 1999, *(b)* December 1997 and January 1998, and *(c)* December 1996 and January 1997. [87209]

Ms Blears: Information on the number of patients admitted to national health service hospitals between December 1996 and January 1999 with an address listed as no fixed abode is shown in the table.

Year	*Number of patients*
December 1996-January 1997	557
December 1997-January 1998	758
December 1998-January 1999	895

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the dates since 1997 when he and his officials have met representatives of homeless charities and voluntary organisations to discuss the health needs of homeless people. [87446]

Ms Blears: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and officials have had numerous meetings with charitable and voluntary organisations since his appointment in October 1999. These meetings have discussed a range of topics including health issues which affect homeless people.

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to encourage a greater take-up of GP services by homeless people. [87473]

Mr. Hutton: National health service medical primary care services are available free to everyone who is ordinarily resident in the United Kingdom, including anyone who is homeless. We have in place a range of initiatives to improve access to general practitioner services for homeless people. These include the development of a model general medical service local development scheme for primary care trusts to use to develop such and the promotion of locally agreed personal medical services (PMS) contracts with a similar focus. There are now more than 80 PMS pilot schemes, which include the homeless as a priority objective.

Medical Personnel

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* administrative, *(b)* managerial, *(c)* clerical and *(d)* other non-practicing medical personnel are employed in (i) the Department of Health, (ii) national health NDPBs, (iii) health trusts, (iv) PCTs and (v) hospitals. [81260]

Mr. Hutton: Information available is shown in the tables.

The national health service, the Department of Health and non-departmental public bodies have different definitions for management, administrative and clerical staff, they have been combined for comparison in the table 1 and are shown separately in table 2 for the NHS.

Non-practising medical personnel are not separately identifiable within the non-medical workforce census.

Table 1: NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS), Department of Health and health non-departmental public bodies: management, administrative and clerical staff employed in England

	Headcount
All managerial, administrative and clerical staff	219,220
NHS Trusts	171,050
Primary care trusts	14,750
Health authorities	17,320
Special health authorities and others	8,540
Department of Health	4,820
Health NDPBs	2,740

Notes:
Figures rounded to nearest 10.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts

Table 2: NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) management and administrative and clerical staff by organisation type—England as at September 2001

Headcount

	All management and administrative staff	*Administrative managers*	*All clerical and administrative staff*[1]
All NHS	211,650	27,420	184,230
HAs	17,320	5,140	12,180
Trusts	171,050	18,840	152,210
PCTs	14,750	2,580	12,170
SHAs and others	8,540	870	7,670

[1] Administration and clerical staff include: Ambulance service support, blood transfusion service, catering, community admin, community care, computing, domestic services, estates management and support, family planning, farms and gardens, finance, fire prevention/safety, general management/support services, health education, home wardens, hotel services, interpreters, laundry services, legal services, library services, linen services, management services, medical and dental support, medical records, medical secretaries, NHS research, nursing support, occupational health, operational research, P&T (other) support, AHP support, patient services, personnel, planning/contracting, public relations, S&P support, secretarial and typing, social work, statistics and information, stores, supplies, transport (inc. portering), voluntary help organiser.
Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Source:
Department of Health 2001 non-medical workforce census.

Merseyside Regional Ambulance Service

Helen Southworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Health why the remuneration package of the previous chief executive of Merseyside regional ambulance service, Mr. Todhunter, was not published in the MRAS 2001–02 annual report; and what his remuneration package was, including payments related to his termination of employment. [82995]

Jacqui Smith *[holding answer 27 November 2002]:* The information pertaining to the former chief executive was not published because he refused his consent to publication. The following information was published in the trust's 2000–01 annual report:

£ thousand

Chief Executive's Remuneration	*2000–01*	*1999–00*
Basic remuneration	76	74
Benefits	8	6
Performance related bonuses	0	5
Pension contributions	4	3
Total	88	88

The Mersey regional ambulance service NHS trust chief executive, Mr. David Todhunter, resigned in May 2001. The trust has discharged its contractual responsibilities to Mr. Todhunter amounting to £42,684. This payment relates to the financial year 2001–02.

Mixed-sex Wards

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he measures the number of mixed-sex wards in NHS trusts; and how many mixed-sex wards there are in *(a)* each region and *(b)* England. [86875]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 12 December 2002]*: The information requested is not available in this format, as the provision of single-sex accommodation is measured on a trust by trust basis and not at individual ward level.

Most hospital wards generally care for both men and women. To provide the required levels of privacy and dignity for patients, wards are split into single sex bays or single rooms, or otherwise configured to provide gender segregation. It is the responsibility of each national health service trust to determine the most appropriate configuration to meet their specific requirements.

NHS Dentistry (Shropshire)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists are accepting NHS patients in *(a)* Shrewsbury and Atcham and *(b)* Shropshire. [87420]

Mr. Lammy: There is currently one general dental services practice in Shrewsbury and Atcham willing to accept children and some charge-exempt adults as new National Health Service patients. In Shropshire, including Telford and Wrekin, there are five practices willing to accept charge-exempt adults and children and four practices accepting children only.

NHS Direct

Mr. Paterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much training is provided to those manning the call centre of NHS Direct. [86066]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 10 December 2002]*: There has and continues to be a significant investment in staff development at NHS Direct.

NHS Direct nurses must have a minimum of three years post registered qualifications before starting with NHS Direct. In addition, this will involve a period of four to six weeks' induction training followed by a period of on-line preceptorship.

NHS Direct also is committed to on-going training and professional development. This involves an allocation for training each year of 21 days for nurses, 16 days for health information advisers and 11 days for call handlers.

NHS Professionals

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will estimate the cost to date of NHS Professionals. [85299]

Mr. Hutton: The cost to date of NHS Professionals has been £4 million to support the start up in 2000–01, £3 million in 2001–02 and a further £2 million in 2002–03 to support roll out.

It is expected that NHS Professionals will be self-funding in the longer term, but central funding has been provided to support start up and initial implementation of NHS Professionals as the primary provider of temporary healthcare professionals within the national health service.

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, pursuant to his answer of 10 December 2002, *Official Report*, column 303W, on NHS Professionals, whether the findings of the assessment team will be *(a)* published and *(b)* placed in the Library. [87934]

Mr. Hutton: The assessment is part of the internal and on-going project management process for implementing NHS Professionals. The outcomes will be shared with those involved in implementing NHS Professionals, including strategic health authorities, work force development confederations and national health service employers.

NHS Staff

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses there were in each year since 1992. [87418]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is shown in the table.

Between 1997 and 2001 the number of doctors, excluding general practitioner retainers, employed in the national health service increased by 9,550, or 10.7 per cent., from 89,620 to 99,170.

Between September 1997 and 2001 the number of nurses employed in the NHS increased by 31,520, or 10 per cent., from 318,860 to 350,380. This compares to the decrease of nearly 5,000, or 1.5 per cent., between 1992 and 1997.

NHS HCHS and general practice doctors and nurses in England, 1992–2001

Numbers (headcount)

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
All doctors excluding retainers[1]	79,230	80,740	81,320	84,460	86,580
Consultants	17,140	17,490	18,050	19,420	20,300
of which: Hospital medical consultants	16,260	16,600	17,100	18,400	19,220
Registrar group	10,730	11,050	11,210	11,470	11,380
of which: Hospital medical registrar group	10,080	10,370	10,570	10,820	10,840

NHS HCHS and general practice doctors and nurses in England, 1992–2001

Numbers (headcount)

	1992	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*
Other doctors in training	16,270	16,720	16,800	17,790	18,640
of which:					
Hospital medical doctors in training	14,610	15,050	15,210	16,160	16,990
Hospital practitioners and clinical assistants[2]	7,770	7,440	6,900	7,130	6,740
Other hospital medical staff	1,660	2,090	2,260	2,840	3,330
Other medical and dental staff	5,250	4,940	4,270	4,080	3,820
GMPs excluding retainers	28,180	28,460	28,740	28,870	29,120
Unrestricted principals and equivalents	25,970	26,290	26,570	26,700	26,860
Other practitioners[3]	600	640	720	760	960
GP registrars	1,610	1,530	1,440	1,400	1,310
GP retainers	—	—	—	—	—
Qualified Nurses	323,800	319,320	313,240	316,890	319,150
HCHS qualified nurses	307,160	301,810	296,740	298,650	301,250
Practice nurses[4]	16,640	17,520	16,500	18,240	17,900

	1997	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
All doctors excluding retainers[1]	89,620	91,840	93,980	96,320	99,170
Consultants	21,370	22,220	23,220	24,310	25,690
of which:					
Hospital medical consultants	20,200	21,040	22,020	23,040	24,400
Registrar group	11,910	12,130	12,680	12,730	13,220
of which:					
Hospital medical registrar group	11,360	11,590	12,100	12,160	12,650
Other doctors in training	19,550	19,840	19,950	20,270	20,690
of which:					
Hospital medical doctors in training	17,920	18,200	18,320	18,690	19,070
Hospital practitioners and clinical assistants[2]	6,610	6,320	6,010	5,620	5,360
Other hospital medical staff	3,780	4,500	5,100	5,860	6,360
Other medical and dental staff	3,620	3,440	3,040	2,900	2,530
GMPs excluding retainers	29,390	29,700	29,990	30,250	30,680
Unrestricted principals and equivalents	27,100	27,390	27,590	27,700	27,840
Other practitioners[3]	950	860	880	890	960
GP registrars	1,340	1,450	1,520	1,660	1,880
GP retainers	—	—	970	1,120	1,150
Qualified Nurses	318,860	323,460	329,640	335,950	350,380
HCHS qualified nurses	300,470	304,560	310,140	316,750	330,540
Practice nurses[4]	18,390	18,890	19,500	19,200	19,850

[1] GP Retainers were first counted in 1999.
[2] Most of these doctors also work as GPs. To avoid double counting, medical hospital practitioners and medical clinical assistants are not included in the All Doctors total.
[3] Other Practitioners include Assistants, Restricted Principals, Salaried Doctors (para. 52 SFA) and PMS Other GPs.
[4] Practice nurse headcount information was estimated in 1992, 1993, 1998 and 1999. Underlying figures for 2000 suggest the practice nurse figure may be an overestimate.
Sources:
Department of Health medical and dental workforce census. Data as at 30 September each year.
Department of Health general and personal medical services statistics. Data as at 1 October 1990–99 and 30 September 2000–01.
Department of Health non-medical workforce census. Data as at 30 September each year.

Nurse Training

Mr. Letwin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people left early from courses leading to a nursing qualification in *(a)* 2000 and *(b)* 2001. [82575]

Mr. Hutton *[holding answer 25 November 2002]:* 1,503 students left early from courses leading to a nursing qualification between January and December 2000, the last complete year for which information is available. A further 400 students left early from courses between January and March 2001.

Overseas Nurse Advice Line

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department *(a)* has spent and *(b)* plans to spend next year in advertising the NHS overseas nurses advice line; and what form this advertising will take. [87469]

Mr. Hutton: The national health service overseas nurses advice line has been advertised through various means, including a press launch in September which channelled information about the line to the NHS and

the independent sector. Articles on the NHS overseas nurses advice line have also appeared in the nursing press and the Chief Nursing Officer has highlighted the advice line in bulletins and through quarterly briefing meetings with nursing directors and primary care trust lead nurses.

A total of £2,273.62 has been spent this year on the production of cards publishing the advice line and these cards have been distributed by national organisations, including the Royal College of Nursing and Unison. In addition, the Philippine overseas employment administration also distributes the cards free of charge to their nurses and in the new year the Nursing and Midwifery Council will be issue cards to overseas representatives.

A decision on the advertising budget has yet to be decided and this will be in light of the likely future demand.

Patient Deregistration

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if his Department will ensure that GPs give written reasons why a patient is deregistered; and if he will make a statement. [86164]

Mr. Hutton: Although there is currently no legal requirement for a general practitioner (GP) to give a written reason why a patient is deregistered, the General Medical Council's guidance, Good Medical Practice, says that GPs should as far as possible give reasons for the removal. The Department fully supports this advice and the rules and procedures which allow GPs to remove patients from their lists are being reviewed as part of the process for negotiating a new general medical services contract.

Personal Medical Services

Andy Burnham: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library the contact details and objectives of the personal medical services pilot schemes in each primary care trust that were established from *(a)* April 2001, *(b)* October 2001, *(c)* April 2002 and *(d)* October 2002. [83913]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested will be placed in the Library.

Port Medical Units

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people in the last 12 months who came to the UK and resided for more than six months *(a)* received and *(b)* did not receive a medical screening on arrival at port of entry. [86742]

Ms Blears: Home Office statistics show that in 2001, the most recent year for which figures are available, 483,000 people subject to immigration control were granted leave at ports of entry in England to enter the United Kingdom for more than six months.

Long-standing policy is that any person subject to immigration control who:

(i) mentions health or medical treatment as a reason for coming to the United Kingdom, or appears unwell; or

(ii) is seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom for six months or more and is at high risk of having been exposed to tuberculosis

should be referred by the immigration officer to a medical inspector.

Figures are not available on the number of people who meet one or both of the two criteria above, and statistics on the number of referrals to medical inspectors are not routinely collected from all ports of entry. However, four ports handled over 94 per cent. of entrants arriving in England in 2001 and seeking leave to enter the UK for six months or more. The health control units at those ports have provided the figures for referrals given in the table. In addition, for some visa nationals, medical referrals are made at the overseas post rather than the port of entry.

Port	*Entrants granted leave to enter for six months or more*[1]	*Referrals to medical inspectors*[2]
Heathrow	343,000	141,072
Gatwick	57,500	6,101
Manchester	21,500	2,774
Dover (including Channel Tunnel)	32,700	265
Total for four ports	455,000	150,212

Note:
[1] Data rounded to three significant figures.
Sources:
[1] Home Office.
[2] Health Control Units (includes a small number of referrals where entry was refused).

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many medical staff were employed in each port medical unit in each of the last 10 years; and how many were *(a)* doctors and *(b)* nurses. [86744]

Ms Blears: We do not routinely collect data on staff in medical units at all ports of entry in England. However, four ports handled over 94 per cent. of entrants arriving in England in 2001 and seeking leave to enter the United Kingdom for six months or more. The health control units at those ports have provided the figures in the table. These do not include figures for other support staff.

Year	*Heathrow*		*Gatwick*		*Manchester*		*Dover*	
	Doctors	*Nurses*	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Doctors*	*Nurses*	*Doctors*	*Nurses*
2002	7.5 FTE	0	3.25 FTE	0	0.05 FTE and 3 GPs on call	0.2 FTE	2 FTE	2 FTE
2001	7.5 FTE	0	3.25 FTE	0	0.05 FTE	0	2 FTE	0
2000	7.5 FTE	0	3.75 FTE	0	0.05 FTE	0	2 FTE	0
1999	7.5 FTE	0	3.75 FTE	0	0.05 FTE	2 FTE	2 FTE	0
1998	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	2 FTE	2 FTE	0
1997	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	2 FTE	2 FTE	0

Year	Heathrow		Gatwick		Manchester		Dover	
	Doctors	Nurses	Doctors	Nurses	Doctors	Nurses	Doctors	Nurses
1996	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	3 FTE	2 FTE	0
1995	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	3 FTE	2 FTE	0
1994	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	4 FTE	2 FTE	0
1993	7.5 FTE	0	2.75 FTE	0	0.01 FTE	4 FTE	2 FTE	0

Note:
FTE—full time equivalents

Poultry Imports

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Health who carries out tests for furazolidone in turkeys impounded at border inspection posts in the EU; whether such tests are conducted on all poultry imported from Brazil; how much such tests cost; how many birds for food were imported into this country from Brazil in each year since 1997; and how many tested positive for furazolidone. [87118]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 16 December 2002]*: The Food Standards Agency set up a testing system for nitrofurans in poultry meat from Brazil. Staff at the border inspection posts are responsible for operation of the system. All consignments of poultry meat from Brazil must be analysed. The cost of the tests varies among the laboratories which carry out the testing. The cost per sample varies from £220 to £600. We have no information on how many birds have been imported each year from Brazil since 1997. Since the testing regime was introduced in October 2002, 192 consignments have been analysed and none have tested positive for furazolidone.

Prisons (Health Needs Assessment)

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will list the prisons that have not completed a health needs assessment. [87445]

Jacqui Smith: All prisons have completed a health needs assessment, working with their local National Health Service partners.

Prosecutions (Contaminated Blood)

Mr. Havard: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures he is taking to protect doctors in the UK from being prosecuted for prescribing contaminated blood. [86266]

Ms Blears: The Consumer Protection Act 1987 was enacted by Parliament in compliance with the United Kingdom's obligations under the EU Product Liability Directive 85/374/EEC. The Act imposes strict liability on manufacturers. All blood and blood products issued to hospitals by the National Blood Service (NBS), are classed as falling within this Act. The NBS is therefore liable, not the doctor, should a patient develop a proven transfusion transmitted infection or any other adverse outcome that can be related to the quality of the blood or component transfused. Neither is the doctor liable if he prescribes any other licensed blood product not supplied by the NBS provided it is licensed for use in the UK.

School-age Workers

Mr. Pond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place in the Library a copy of each of the current LEA byelaws on the employment of school age children. [82425]

Jacqui Smith: Local authority byelaws are a matter of public record and anyone wishing to obtain a copy may do so from the authority concerned. It is not normal practice to include individual byelaws in the Library.

Secure Beds

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many *(a)* high secure beds, *(b)* medium secure beds, *(c)* low secure beds and *(d)* long-term secure beds there were in each year since 1997. [87439]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is shown in the tables. The long-term secure bed numbers are included in these figures, but not separately identified in routine data collection.

High secure beds

Year	Number
1997	1,374
1998	1,366
1999	1,320
2000	1,290
2001	1,263
2002	1,244

Estimated number of medium and other secure beds[1]

Year	Medium	Other
1997–98	1,493	986
1998–99	1,642	1,032
1999–2000	1,994	1,191
2000–01	2,231	1,353
2001–02	[2]	[2]

[1] Bed numbers are calculated from health authority returns of occupied bed days and assuming a 95 per cent. occupancy rate.
[2] Figures currently not available.

Specialist Register (Overseas Applicants)

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what level of scrutiny of training will apply to overseas applicants to join the UK specialist register. [87754]

Mr. Hutton: All doctors applying to join the specialist register must meet certain standards. For doctors possessing a specialist qualification awarded overseas, the qualification must be equivalent to the United Kingdom qualification, in specialties for which the UK itself awards a qualification, or, for all other specialties, give the doctor the knowledge and skill consistent with

practice as a consultant in that specialty in the national health service. These requirements are set by the European Specialist Medical Qualifications Order 1995.

It is the job of the specialist training authority of the Medical Royal Colleges (STA) to assess whether these standards are met in individual cases. We are proposing to replace the STA with a new body, the postgraduate medical education and training board, under legislation we hope to bring before the House in the new year.

Surgical Specialties

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what plans he has to increase the number of additional funded Higher Surgical Training next year; [87753]

(2) what plans he has to increase the number of consultants in surgical specialities. [87892]

Mr. Hutton: As at March 2002, there were 4,969 consultants within the surgical group, which represents an increase of 21 per cent. since September 1997. Current work force projections suggest that by March 2004, there may be sufficient trained specialists to increase numbers in the specialties by around 1,000 over a 2,000 baseline.

In 2002–03, the surgical specialties were allocated 34 of the total number of centrally funded national training numbers. The combined ceiling posts were 316. This gives trusts considerable opportunity to fund extra posts themselves. The first round of bidding for ceiling posts suggests that locally funded surgical posts will be popular and that the ceiling is likely to be reached.

We have agreed that 316 additional higher specialist surgical training opportunities, with central and local funding, should be made available to be taken up by March 2004. Additionally, we are identifying and encouraging suitable doctors on the specialist register, but not working as consultants to compete for posts, establishing more part-time and job share posts and improving retention through a flexible careers scheme and flexible retirement.

Thrombolysis

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of heart attack victims in *(a)* Wiltshire, *(b)* the south west and *(c)* England received thrombolysis within 30 minutes in the most recent period for which records are available. [88005]

Ms Blears: According to data from the myocardial infarction national audit project for June to September 2002, the following percentage of eligible heart attack patients received thrombolysis within 30 minutes of hospital arrival:

57 per cent. of patients in Avon Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic Health Authority;

61 per cent. of patients in the south west (Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire, Somerset and Dorset and South West Peninsula Strategic Health Authorities);

63 per cent. of patients in England.

This represents significant and steady progress since the publication of the national service framework for coronary heart disease in March 2000.

Woodside Adolescent Unit

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the estimated total annual cost is of the new adolescent unit at Springfield hospital combined with the estimated annual cost of maintaining the replacement services under consultation for Surrey following the proposed closure of the Woodside Adolescent Unit; and what the current annual cost was of the Woodside unit in the last 12 months; [87523]

(2) what discussions Surrey Oaklands initiated with the NHS in London about the closure of the Woodside Adolescent Unit; [87525]

(3) what the clinical reason was for the decision to transfer adolescent services from the Woodside Adolescent Unit to a new unit at Springfield hospital. [87524]

Ms Blears: In order to meet the needs of the local population, clinicians and commissioners in South West London felt that a local unit was needed with outreach provision, intensive care facilities, treatment available seven days a week and an ability to take emergency admissions where clinically indicated. This would better provide accessible specialist services to adolescents with mental health problems.

The new adolescent unit at Springfield hospital is estimated to cost £1.7 million, and will include the development of an outreach service to offer intensive pre and post-admission support to adolescents. Precise costs of proposed replacement services for Surrey will be available after the public consultation, depending on the outcome. However, East Surrey Primary Care Trust (PCT) is committed to maintaining the same level of funding as currently exists at £462,000. The annual cost of the Woodside unit is approximately £1.06 million, but other placements are made in both the national health service and the private sector, and costs vary according to the particular needs of the adolescent and the particular placement.

There have been regular quarterly meetings over the past three years, chaired by East Surrey Health Authority (HA) initially, and involving Merton Sutton and Wandsworth HA, South West London region. Surrey Oaklands formally declared its intention in March 2002 to close the unit in September 2002, but in July 2002, notified the South West Strategic HA that the closure had been deferred to allow more time for the service to be reconfigured.

All parties are fully aware of the impact that the withdrawal of South West London's funds would have on Woodside. Meetings are still held and are now chaired by East Surrey PCT, with the involvement of Wandsworth PCT and other stakeholders.

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- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

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SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

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Choice of headings

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- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
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  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
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